The British/Canadian Perspective

In November 1813, the British government proposed the negotiations that would eventually lead to peace. Britain had snubbed an earlier attempt by the Russian emperor to act as mediator because it wanted to meet with the Americans face to face.

The British negotiating team included the bumbling Admiral James Gambier, an admiralty lawyer by the name of William Adams, and Henry Goulburn, a low level diplomat and the real chairman of the mission. They met with their American counterparts in Ghent, Belgium, a city chosen in part for its proximity to England. After all, the three "negotiators" were mere messenger boys for the Whitehall triumvirate: the British Prime Minister, the Colonial Secretary and the Foreign Secretary.

A top item on the British agenda was the creation of a native territory between Canada and the U.S. The British were determined to honour pledges to First Nations that had been made on behalf of their "white father." At the end of the Revolutionary War, the British had ceded all the lands south of the Great Lakes to the Americans with total disregard for the native peoples who lived there. Now, Britain was determined to respect its native allies. But British insistence on negotiating such a territory served less altruistic purposes as well; such a territory would act as a permanent buffer between Britain's Canadian colonies and the incendiary United States.

Other British demands included: the exclusive right to keep vessels on the Great Lakes, the right to build forts on those shores, and the right to continue navigation on the Mississippi.

After the Americans rebuffed the proposed native territory, the British Prime Minister began to doubt its necessity. The British war chest being empty after years of fighting Napoleon, they simply could not afford to let the negotiations unhinge on this point. He urged the negotiating team to water down the clause, suggesting that the natives "shall enjoy all the rights and privileges they enjoyed before the war."

The British prime minister then focused on his desire to retain Michilimackinac and Fort Niagara which the British had conquered during the war. He also hoped to get Sacket's Harbour in the bargain as well. The British had a long tradition of stretching out negotiations in order to achieve more military successes, and therefore, more bargaining power.

Ultimately, the British did not get much of what they hoped for. But the government consoled itself with the small victory of not having lost any territory. On Christmas Eve of 1814, the negotiating team signed a treaty agreeing to a return to the *status quo ante bellum* - the exact same state of affairs as before the war.

http://www.galafilm.com/1812/e/background/brit_peace.html

The American Perspective

The U.S. government attempted several peace negotiations throughout the course of the war. After several aborted efforts, American and British negotiators finally met in Ghent, Belgium to hammer out a peace agreement.

The five American peace commissioners included representatives from different political parties of different parts of the U.S. They were: Henry Clay, the eloquent firebrand who had helped trigger the war; Jonathan Russell, ambassador to Sweden; John Quincy Adams, a brilliant but somber diplomat; Albert Gallatin, a sophisticated Swiss-born former Secretary of the U.S. Treasury; and James Ashton Bayard, a Delaware senator.

The team was initially asked to focus on the question of impressment (Britain boarding American ships). Ironically, by the time the negotiations got underway, this issue was irrelevant since Napoleon had been defeated, and the British navy suddenly found itself with a surplus of sailors.

Early in the talks, the British party insisted on the creation of a native territory between Canada and the U.S. The Americans were not open to this idea since there were hundreds of American settlers living on the proposed territory, and also because so many Americans had been victim to native attacks.

The British and the Americans were so entrenched in their positions regarding the issue of a native territory that both sides expected the other would break off negotiations. Henry Clay decided to bluff the British and say that he was leaving. Shortly thereafter, the British Prime Minister seemed to forget all about any obligations to the First Nations people.

In November of 1814, James Monroe, the Secretary of State, informed the commission that the peace talks could be wrapped up if both sides agreed to return to a prewar situation. Subsequently, U.S. negotiators spent the next month writing up a peace treaty. A few minor outstanding points remained, such as fishing rights, but the American negotiators were weary after months of negotiation. They knew that their near-bankrupt government would not allow the war to continue over such trifling issues.

On Christmas Eve of 1814, the peace treaty was signed and sealed. The eleven articles stated that the U.S. and Britain would return to the *status quo ante bellum*, or the exact same state of affairs as before the war. There was no mention of impressment or the Orders in Council; the issues which had spurred the U.S. into declaring war. On paper, it was as if the war had never been fought.

http://www.galafilm.com/1812/e/background/amer_peace.html

A First Nations Perspective

No country can claim to have won the War of 1812, but the First Nations people definitely lost it. There was no First Nations representation at the 1814 peace talks despite the fact that native warriors had played a major role in the war.

Furthermore, although the British had pledged to secure a territory for the First Nations people before signing any peace deal, the British quickly reneged on their promise in the face of American resistance. Instead, the Natives were given "all the rights and privileges they enjoyed before the war." This wording was so vague that it could have been interpreted in almost any way. In essence, it meant that First Nations had made no gains by involving themselves so deeply in this conflict. When Black Hawk of the Sauk Nation heard the details of the Peace Treaty he wept openly.

Many white soldiers had gone to war reluctantly - they had taken up arms because their government obliged them to. But many First Nations felt they must participate in what seemed like a last-ditch effort to preserve their homeland and their cultural heritage. After the War of 1812 ended, the surviving American, Canadian and British soldiers all went home, but many native warriors and their families could not since they no longer had any to return to.

http://www.galafilm.com/1812/e/background/nat_peace.html

A First Nations Perspective (background)

The First Nations first became involved in Canada's wars in 1609 when a group of Algonquins, Hurons and Montagnais joined forces with Samuel de Champlain. Throughout the 18th century, First Nations people fought alongside European soldiers on numerous occasions. For instance, Britain called on its native allies to help suppress the rebellious colonists during the American Revolution.

After America achieved independence, the British government provided regular assistance to native tribes such as the Shawnee, Wyandot, Delaware, Miami and Potawatomis, all of whom lived on territories that were coveted by the United States. When America declared war on Britain in 1812, the native people were invited to Fort Amherstburg and other British posts to receive presents of food, clothing, guns, and ammunition.

Although the British never incited native people to attack American settlements, they did encourage native people to resist American expansionism. After all, the American expansion policy threatened not only the First Nations way of life, but the British fur trade and Canadian territory as well.

Yet Britain's attitude towards her native allies was often fickle. Following the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, many native warriors retreating from U.S. General Anthony Wayne's forces were killed when the British denied them entry into Fort Miami. The First Nations were outraged by this betrayal because British agents had given them supplies and had encouraged them to stand firm in the face of American resistance.

In 1807, the American public was up in arms about the *Chesapeake* affair - an incident in which the British Navy openly flouted American sovereignty and maritime rights. When the British recognized that this conflict could escalate into military action, they immediately looked to their native allies for assistance.

Likewise, when tensions escalated again in 1812, Major General Isaac Brock recognized that native warriors were essential to the defense of Canada. After only lukewarm reaction to his appeals for help, Brock was determined to achieve some early victories in order to convince First Nations that the British really were "earnestly engaged in the war."