

PHILLIP CRYMBLE

OLD LOYALIST BURIAL GROUND IN WINTER

“this is a country
where a man can die
 simply from being
caught outside.”

—Alden Nowlan, “Canadian January Night” (1971)

In autumn the Provincials came up river—brought provisions, wives and children—settled down near Salamanca—claimed the land—began a second life.

Privation’s such a formal way to talk of how a man might die. That winter’s early snowfalls prefaced unimagined cold—their improvised log shelters

like the insides of an ice house—the ones in tents were first to go. The men set out with Yankee spades and axes—sought a clearing—dug—laid

rough-hewn stones to mark what they had done. Today I’ve come to trample through the cockleburs and brambles—to break the windblown surface

of the snowpack with my son. The bones of grenadiers and children rest like thirteen-year cicadas trapped in earth as hard as any stone. My boy’s blue toque

stands out against the trees—makes for a lively show. The river dreams of sunlight—of finding its way home.