

The War of 1812 Bicentennial Feature Story, with Music

The War of 1812 is often neglected in classroom studies of American history, because of its place on the timeline, halfway between the War for American Independence and the Civil War between the States.

Nearing the bicentennial of some of the historic battles, which occurred on the Great Lakes, we offer this idea for a feature story, with music by and interview with Lee Murdock. (Lee Murdock is generally acknowledged as the premier interpreter-in-song of Great Lakes maritime history).

The War of 1812: The Struggle That Forged Two Nations **The War of 1812: America's Second War for Independence**

Causes of the War of 1812:

- On the high seas, US Merchant ships were subject to pressure from the British Navy, perceived as British attempts to control American shipping; stopping ships to prevent certain cargo (United States exports) and shipments going to France, Spain and other non-British-empire ports
- On the high seas, British also boarded US Merchant ships and impressed American sailors to duty on British Navy Vessels.
- The British were still engaged in war with Napoleonic France, until it ended in 1813.
- United States had an ideal of North American continent as one country; while other colonists, who fled to the north after the War for Independence, wished to continue having the benefits of living as members of the British empire (sometimes a hard concept for Americans today to grasp).

Significance and outcomes of the War of 1812 (contemporary relevance)

- Solidified the Independence from Great Britain for the United States
- Resulted in the formation of two separate nations on the Atlantic coast (territory which was later to become Canada)
- For Native Americans/First Nations (in Canada) caught in the balance, proved devastating to the way of life for those living east of the Mississippi River. (While this is important outcome, it's not one that we can speak to in this proposed story)
- Remarkable outcome: The bicentennial celebration of peace between two countries, The United States and Canada, with the longest unguarded border between two sovereign nations, in the world.

Battle of Lake Erie Bicentennial: September 10, 1813

EVENT: Monday, September 2, 2013 -- Labor Day

Re-enactment of the Battle of Lake Erie, to take place in the waters off of Put-In-Bay, Ohio, by ASTA Tall Ships Challenge ships, including a replica of the US Brig Niagara, which was one of the American frigates in the original engagement.

Significance of the Battle of Lake Erie:

- This is the only time in British Naval history where an entire British fleet was captured by the enemy (in this case, the upstart American Navy)

- For the United States, this solidified our access to the expansion of the western frontier, by opening up the waterways, with the removal of the challenges that had been presented by the British patrolling on the Great Lakes.

- Two of our most famous historical quotes:

- "Don't Give Up the Ship" (was on a banner made for Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's flagship in this battle, in memory of Capt Lawrence's last words whom he served under, in an earlier May 1813 battle)

- "We Have Met the Enemy and He is Ours" (Perry's note to his superior officers after the battle)

The Burlington Races: Battle on Lake Ontario on September 28, 1813

Following the Battle of Lake Erie, the War's front moved to Lake Ontario

While the Outcome of this Battle was indecisive, the historical significance can be felt to this day.

May 1813: Americans attacked and burned the city of York (now Toronto), an important trading and naval port

(Aside: the British retaliated in 1814 with the burning of Washington DC)

August 7, 1813: While both forces regathered their naval resources in preparation for the next engagement, the American Navy lost two important sailing vessels in a storm (not in battle), USS Hamilton and the USS Scourge. (These two ships remain in historic underwater diving preserve in Canadian waters near Toronto).

September 28, 1813: The American and British sailing fleets engaged in battle, or maybe we should say maneuvers, on Lake Ontario. While both fleets sustained some damage after exchanging fire, this was more a matter of sailing prowess and seamanship as the fleets jockeyed in gale force winds. Eventually Admiral Chauncey disengaged because of an explosion on his flagship (The USS General Pike). It is said that he regretted that decision in later life. His American fleet returned to Sackets Harbor, to fight another day.

However they never did. And that proved to be the last naval engagement on the Great Lakes.

Outcomes of the Burlington Races:

- The United States and Canada were forged as two separate nations.

Songs For this feature available on Lee Murdock's CD:

"Here We'll Stand: The War of 1812: The Struggle That Forged Two Nations"

<http://artistsofnote.sociallifehosting.com/lee-murdock/>

Suggested songs to Accompany this story:

#1 -- Jefferson & Liberty -- (trad) a period political broadside, describing the two sides for/against going to War.

#2 -- Loyal She Remains -- (By Alex Sinclair) giving the viewpoint of those who wished to remain British Subjects.

#6 - The Ballad of Ned Myers -- (By Lee Murdock) A song about the loss of the USS Hamilton and the USS Scourge, by one of the survivors on the Scourge

#7 - Perry's Victory on Lake Erie -- (trad) a braggadocious period song from one of the soldiers of the battle

#9 - The Burlington Races --(By Lee Murdock) - a song describing the Burlington Races (see above)

(Also of interest #10 -- Here We'll Stand -- about the Defense of Baltimore, in 1814)
and #13 -- Why Do they Have to Burn -- a song for peace, and asking citizens to use less fire and "burn" in civil disagreements.