

Susan M. Frey

# The War of 1812 bicentennial

## A guide to online information resources

**A**s a disremembered conflict, the War of 1812 (sometimes called the Anglo-American War of 1812) is as elusive as it is complex. Common and persistent misconceptions about the War of 1812 are that it was the subject of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture and that it was fought in Europe. If asked about the conflict, some Americans may know a few disjointed facts. This war witnessed the destruction of the White House on August 24, 1812, during the burning of Washington D.C. The drafting of a poem in 1814 called "The Star Spangled Banner," is product of this war, as it was inspired by the Battle of Fort McHenry on September 3, 1812. The poem was set to music and later became the official national anthem in 1931.

But most Americans know little more. The conflict's obscurity is shared outside the United States, and it is easy to see why this is so. While this war was being fought in the New World, Europe was preoccupied with concerns that were closer to home namely, Napoleon's invasion of Russia (also known as the Patriotic War of 1812). But current awareness of the conflict is strong in Canada, where today it is viewed as a pivotal event in emphatically disengaging Canada from the United States, thus helping to establish a unique national identity. For the aboriginal peoples in Canada and the United States, the War of 1812 provides a backdrop to one of the most charismatic leaders of the Northwest Territory, Tecumseh of the Shawnee.

What can be said about this forgotten conflict is that it began when America declared war on Britain in 1812 over trade restrictions, impressment of American sailors into the British Royal Navy, and interference in the

American expansion into Native American territory. The war was fought on both sea and land in Canada and America, and ended at the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1814. This was a war in which no territory between the opponents was lost or gained. This treaty established relations between the two nations as status quo ante bellum. Both Canada and America emerged from the conflict with a strong sense of national identity separate from Britain. Canada blocked any further expansion of America into Canadian territory. However, the conflict also hastened continued westward expansion of white settlement into aboriginal lands, which caused the displacement of native populations.

Heightened awareness of the conflict has blossomed in the United States as 2012 marks the bicentennial of this war. The national remembrance of the War of 1812 in the United States is guided by the National Park Service and comprises commemorative events beginning as early as 2010 and scheduled to occur up to 2015. Many committees, councils, and commissions have formed at the local level with widely varying degrees of responsibility, funding, and autonomy to provide oversight of educational, research, and commemorative activities.

In Canada, the planning of commemorative bicentennial events is well organized and is funded at the national level. Museums, archives, and other cultural institutions from both sides of the border have created exhibits and planned events, and many offer a Web

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presence highlighting their educational activities and collections. This is a guide to select recommended online resources on the War of 1812, with emphasis on education and commemorative programming of this rich and complex period in history.

## Guides and Educational Materials

- **1812 History.** The 1812 History Project makes documents and artifacts from the War of 1812-era accessible via the Internet and is funded by Department of Canadian Heritage through the Canadian Culture Online Strategy. A searchable database of heavily illustrated records allows users to view and learn about a great variety of everyday objects, such as clothing, household and military items, and decorative arts. Records pertaining to newspaper articles, personal letters, and business documentation are included. Records come from the collections of the Brock University Archives, Grimsby Museum, Jordan Historical Museum, Niagara Falls History Museum, Niagara Historical Society & Museum, Port Colborne Historical Museum, RiverBrink Art Museum, and the St. Catharines Museum. *Access:* <http://www.1812history.com>.

- **From Colony to Country: A Reader's Guide to Canadian Military History.** The Library and Archives of Canada has developed a rich series of pathfinders on military history. The From Colony to Country Web site outlines key events in Canadian history and features a pathfinder on the War of 1812. This guide is prefaced by a general overview of the War. English and French documents from the collection are cited. Items cited that are not held by this national institution are clearly noted. The 1812 guide offers an extensive bibliography of resources written from the Canadian viewpoint, including general references and overviews, military operations, the aboriginal peoples, and personal narratives, art, music, literature, and Web resources. *Access:* <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/military/025002-2000-e.html>.

- **General Society of the War of 1812.** The General Society is a confederation of state societies in which membership requires

proof of decadency of a War of 1812 veteran. The society preserves documents relating to the War of 1812, encourages research and the preservation of historical data, including memorials and graves. The Web site includes contact information for all affiliated state societies, a list of state officers, and links to military and genealogical resources. *Access:* <http://www.societyofthewarof1812.org/>.

- **Guide to the War of 1812.** The Library of Congress houses a great amount of material germane to the War of 1812. This online compilation offers convenient access to the library's vast digital repository of manuscripts, broadsides, and government documents from the period. It features annotated links from such units as the American Memory Historical Collection, which includes the papers of Thomas Jefferson and a searchable database of the papers of James Madison; Prints and Photographs Division, with lithographs and engravings of famous battles; and online exhibits, including an exposition on the burning of Washington, D.C. Of note is a digital image of the proclamation by President Madison announcing the U.S. declaration of war on Great Britain, dated 1812. *Access:* <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/1812/>.

- **Military Resources: War of 1812.** This guide provides links to and advice on accessing War of 1812 and related information from the National Archives and Records Administration, including War of 1812 discharge certificates, records of impressed seamen, and genealogical records. Also included are links to other resources. *Access:* <http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/military/war-of-1812.html>.

- **TeachingAmericanHistory.org.** TeachingAmericanHistory.org is a project of the Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs at Ashland University, which sponsors seminars, lectures, and other professional development opportunities for those teachers. Included on the Web site are transcriptions of original primary documents such as letters written by key political figures about the war and articles appearing in contemporary broadsheets. *Access:* [www.teachingamericanhistory.org](http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org).

- **War of 1812 (Archives of Ontario).**

The Archives of Ontario have developed an extensive online exhibit on the War of 1812 citing battles fought in Canadian and the U.S. territories, but with special emphasis on the Canadian experience. A helpful table of contents breaks the information down into several categories dealing with the battles, personalities, and political issues of the war. Following the storyline of this well-planned exhibit provides a rich introduction to the conflict. An extensive bibliography links to resources used and a glossary of terms helps to orient the user to the period. *Access:* <http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/on-line-exhibits/1812/index.aspx>.

- **War of 1812 (Open Directory Project).** Commemorations on the bicentennial of the conflict will blossom in 2012, but will continue into 2014–15. As the largest human-edited Web directory, the Open Directory's list of links on the War of 1812 offers a great place to keep current on any new online resource created in the advancing months. Currently the list includes links to living history and tourism sites, historical personalities, battles, commemoration and research groups, and genealogical societies. *Access:* [http://www.dmoz.org/Society/History/By\\_Time\\_Period/Nineteenth\\_Century/Wars\\_and\\_Conflicts/War\\_of\\_1812/](http://www.dmoz.org/Society/History/By_Time_Period/Nineteenth_Century/Wars_and_Conflicts/War_of_1812/).

- **War of 1812 (PBS).** This Web site accompanies the television program, the War of 1812, which premiered on PBS in October 2011. The two-hour documentary explores the war from the United States, Canadian, Native American, and British perspectives. On the Web site, information on the making of the film, Web-only bonus videos, and background on the scholars and re-enactors who appeared in the film is provided. The Web site is broken down into sections devoted to the making of the film, historic sites, educators' guide with classroom lesson plans, and supplementary essays written by leading experts on the war and the period. The site is rich in content, provides links to many additional

resources, and is heavily illustrated. Also available is a free mobile app on 115 historic sites in the United States and Canada, featuring 120 color illustrations. *Access:* <http://www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812>.

- **War of 1812 in the Western District.**

Funded by the Canadian Culture Online program of Canadian Heritage, this resource is created by the Windsor Public Library, partnering with local cultural and community institutions and concerns. Available in English and French the Web site offers an information-rich and visually sophisticated overview of the war as it was fought in the Northwest Theater, and is part narrative and part online exhibit. There are nine main sections: Introduction, Invasion of Canada, Surrender of Detroit, Proctor's Battles in Michigan, Battle of Lake Erie, Retreat, Raids and Skirmishes, Afterwards, and a Timeline. Links take users to text and media from a variety of sources, such as personal letters and diaries, archival material, private collections, and present day reenactments. The site is easily to browse but is supplemented by a keyword search box linked to texts and images. *Access:* <http://www.windsorpubliclibrary.com/digi/war1812/indexflash.htm>.

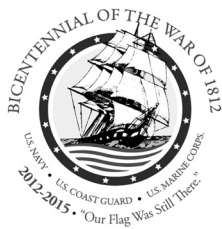


- **War of 1812 (Smithsonian).** The Smithsonian's Webguide on the war features one of its most famous specimens, the Star-Spangled Banner, which flew during the Battle of Fort McHenry September 3, 1812. This heavily illustrated site focuses on the war as it was fought in the Chesapeake Theater, which includes the burning of Washington, D.C. The guide is divided into five main sections: War of 1812, Flag, Song, Legacy, and Interact. These sections link to media, such as an MP3 of the 19th century version of the Star-Spangled Banner performed on period instruments. The Interactive section features an interactive quiz, a singing contest, point and zoom interactive images of the Star-Spangled Banner, and an opportunity

for users to share photos and stories that can become a part of the Web site. *Access:* <http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/the-war-of-1812.aspx>.

## Commemoration organizations and initiatives

• **Bicentennial of the War of 1812: America's Navy...Keeping the sea free since 1812.** Starting in 2012 and continuing to 2015 the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps,



and U.S. Coast Guard will commemorate the Bicentennial of the War of 1812. The Navy has partnered with the International Council of Air Shows, the Navy League, the

Naval Historical Foundation, and Operation Sail (OpSail) to create commemorative events throughout the United States, including New York, Baltimore, Norfolk, New Orleans, Boston, Chicago, and Cleveland. A schedule of events and historical information is provided. *Access:* <http://www.ourflagwasstillthere.org>.

• **Eastern Shore 1812 Consortium.** Consortium stakeholders are the Maryland-based Queen Anne's County Historical Society, Talbot County Historical Society, Kent County Historical Society, Caroline County Historical Society, and Dorchester County Historical Society. This group is dedicated to the commemoration of the conflict on the Eastern Shore and in providing tourism access and educational information for students and teachers. *Access:* <http://www.easternshore1812.org>.

• **Historic Amherstburg's War of 1812 Bicentennial Commemoration.** This Web site provides tourism information for traveling to historic sites in Amherstburg, Ontario. Information on commemorative events, an interactive map of historic Amherstburg, and links to the Ontario Genealogical Society are provided. *Access:* <http://www.1812amherstburg.com>.



• **Illinois War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission.** The commission's mission is to create programming commemorating events that occurred in the Illinois Territory during the conflict. As part of this mission, the group is also open to working with any organization in the United States and Canada in planning events related to the war. This Web site includes information for students, teachers, and historical enthusiasts. Illinois area commemorative events are listed with the contact information of event organizers provided. *Access:* <http://www.illinoiswarof-1812bicentennial.org/>.

• **Kentucky War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission.** This site lists background on the commission, an honor roll of Kentucky veterans, a timeline of dates related to the conflict in Kentucky, and a listing of Kentucky sites as identified by the National Parks Service. *Access:* <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kycampbe/kentuckywar1812.htm>.

• **Michigan Commission on the Commemoration of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812.** As part of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the commission is charged with promoting and planning activities, events, and programs to commemorate the conflict. This Web site offers links to an events calendar, historical and cultural sites and organizations, bibliographies, and timelines. *Access:* [http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463\\_54465\\_54125---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463_54465_54125---,00.html).

• **North Carolina War of 1812 Bicentennial.** Created by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, this Web site provides information on the conflict in Carolina. The site is divided into seven sections: Home, News and History, Events, Research and Genealogy, Learning Corner, Who We Are, and a contact page. *Access:* <http://nc1812.ncdcr.gov/>.

• **Official War of 1812 Website.** The Niagara 1812 Bicentennial Legacy Council was created to increase public awareness and participation in the bicentennial. Planned commemorative events are listed. A resource links page features sites from Canada, the United

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directed the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library at the University of Virginia, served at the Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center Library, and the National Li-

brary of Medicine. Watson has also served in various leadership roles at the Medical Library Association and the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries. ♪

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States and the United Kingdom, and a history section narrates the conflict with emphasis on the Niagara Theater. Access: <http://www.visit1812.com/>.

• **Ohio War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission.** This Web site provides access to the Commission’s activities and documents. It provides a list of links to educational resources on the conflict and a calendar of events. Access: <http://www.warof1812.ohio.gov/>.

• **Star Spangled 200 Maryland Bicentennial Commission.** Maryland’s 1812 Commission has created a Web site with extensive links and information on places to visit related to the conflict. Also provided are links to other 1812 resources, Commission reports and documents, genealogical resources in Maryland, and informative bibliographies. Access: <http://starspangled200.org/Pages/Home.aspx>.

• **Vigo County War of 1812 Website.** This Web site highlights the work of the Committee, which is made up of local educational and cultural organizations. The site provides a list of events in occurring in and out of Indiana, detailed pathfinders to educational resources, and links to other 1812 groups. Access: <http://libguides.indstate.edu/warof1812>.



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• **Virginia Bicentennial of the War of 1812 Commission.** The Virginia Bicentennial of the War of 1812 Commission offers a Web site rich in information on the commemoration of the conflict in the state. An interactive map marks out places of interest. Links to resources for researchers, students, and teachers is provided. Access: <http://va1812bicentennial.dls.virginia.gov/>.

• **Washington D.C. War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission.** The Washington D.C. Commission is very active, hosting workshops and events to advance public awareness of the conflict. This Web site highlights the work of the commission and provides information for those wishing to visit the area and learn more about the war generally, as it was fought in the Chesapeake Theater. Of note are the links to the many museums and cultural institutions in the D.C. area. Access: <http://www.washingtondcwarof1812bicentennialcommission.org/>.

• **War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission, Vincennes, Indiana.** This group’s mission is to commemorate and explore the conflict as it was fought in and around the historic city of Vincennes. This Web site offers information on the commission’s commemorative events, and links to informational resources about the war. Access: <http://www.spiritofvincennes.org/1812/commission.html>. ♪



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