



## The Star-Spangled Banner and You

I've been thinking a lot lately about the War of 1812. "Why?" you may well wonder. (What, you don't think contemplate the War of 1812 yourself from time to time?!) Well, a few weeks ago Local History volunteer Laureen Bostedt passed away, and the War of 1812 had been a particular interest of hers. Then last weekend, I visited Baltimore's Fort McHenry, which was the site of a crucial battle in this war. It was also the origin of our national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Possibly, some of you are also wondering what in the heck the War of 1812 was. It's a conflict that most Americans are not aware of, which I feel is a crying shame. Historians often refer to it as "the second American Revolution," and I don't think that's an overstatement. The war lasted from 1812 to 1815. (Which reminds me of one of my historian father's favorite trick questions: "When was the War of 1812?") Its origins actually go back even further than 1812 -- right to the end of the War for Independence.

The American colonies had banded together, declared independence, defeated the British army and navy, created a new country, and transitioned to a new and stable democracy. However, many in British government still viewed our new country as a band of upstart colonists, and believed that the United States would rejoin Great Britain eventually. Our third president, Thomas Jefferson, had purchased the Louisiana territory from France, but the British still claimed the land west of what had been New France. They encouraged the Native Americans in those areas in any disputes with European American settlers, promising them independence when England took back their old territory. By the early 1800s, the British were also harassing the United States along the East Coast. Britain was in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars with France and desperately needed men and ships, so its frigates forced American vessels and sailors to serve in the British Navy. Goaded beyond endurance by these attacks on both "edges" of the United States, the U.S. declared war on Britain on June 18, 1812.

Over the next two and a half years, American troops fought the British Army and Navy and English-allied American Indians, up and down the Atlantic Coast, on the northern border with the British colonies that are now Canada, down the Western frontier, and even in the Gulf of Mexico and New Orleans.

(continued on next page)

## A Random Sampling of Some of our New Books

*Acadian-Cajun Genealogy: Tracing Your Ancestry Back to Acadia & the Old World*, by Timothy Hebert

*Deep Ancestry: Inside the Genographic Project. the Landmark DNA Quest to Decipher Our Distant Past*, by Spencer Wells

*Finding and Using African American Newspapers*, by Timothy N. Pinnick (Tim Pinnick was our May 1 speaker on African American history and genealogy)

*Hiking Indiana: A Guide to the State's Greatest Hiking Adventures*, by Phil Bloom

*Historic Photos of Lake Michigan*, by Lynda Twardowski

*Hoosier Poet* (Riley High School Yearbook), 2010

*Making Haste From Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims and Their World*, by Nick Bunker

*Murder and Mayhem on Chicago's South Side*, by Troy Taylor

*Murder and Mayhem in Chicago's Vice Districts*, by Troy Taylor

*Notre Dame Inspirations: The University's Most Successful Alumni Talk About Life, Spirituality, Football...and Everything Else Under the Dome*, by Hannah Storm

*Researching Canada's Home Children*, by John D. Reid



St. Joseph County Public Library

## Special Memorial Day / Flag Day Edition, continued

### The Star-Spangled Banner and You, continued

The War of 1812 had many conflicts that are better known than the war itself. General William Henry Harrison defeated the famous American Indian leader Tecumseh, and British army troops, in the May 1813 Battle of Tippecanoe. Later, Harrison and his running mate John Tyler used this victory to win the 1840 presidential election with the successful campaign slogan, "Tippecanoe and Tyler too!" In August 1814, the British captured Washington, DC, and set fire to the Presidential Mansion -- an event now remembered largely for the heroism of Dolley Madison and her slaves, who rescued many treasures from the Mansion before fleeing. (It was after this that the current presidential residence, the White House, was built.) The last battle of the war was in January 1815 in New Orleans, which actually occurred after the Christmas Eve 1814 Treaty of Ghent that ended the war. The Battle of New Orleans was an overwhelming victory for the U.S. troops under the command of Andrew Jackson, who parlayed this triumph into the Presidency in 1828.

Perhaps most famously, the British attacked Fort McHenry in September 1814, in an attempt to secure the Baltimore harbor and thus this important port and city. The British Navy ships fired on the fort, which retaliated with cannon fire of its own. The British ships retreated a short distance, until they were out of range of the fort's guns, and began a 25-hour bombardment of the fort. American lawyer and hostage negotiator Francis Scott Key was forced by British troops to remain in the harbor, and so witnessed the battle from the British position. About 1,500 cannonballs hit the fort during the attack, and the smoke and fire was so thick that no one in the harbor could be sure how the fort was faring. Then, as the British ships stopped firing at "dawn's early light," Key was able to see that the fort's commander had hoisted a new, huge 30' x 42' American flag over the fort -- showing that the battlements had held and Fort McHenry remained in American hands. Disheartened, the British withdrew. Key wrote a poem about the fight, later set to music, which became "The Star-Spangled Banner"; thus, an anthem was born!

The War of 1812 ended in a stalemate, basically, with neither side able to trumpet a convincing victory. The American borders remained as they had been before the war. However, the still young United States did accomplish one major achievement; as Winston Churchill later said, "The lessons of the war were taken to heart. ... [T]he United States was never again refused proper treatment as an independent power."

The length of the war, and the vast geographic distances it encompassed, ensured that many American men served the military during the conflict. In fact, some of the same men who had fought in the Revolutionary War entered into service again, even though they were older by that time. Whether old or young, all able-bodied men were needed to secure the independence of the United States. Thus, you may be able to find War of 1812 military records for some of your ancestors to help with your genealogical search.

Ancestry, for instance, has several 1812-related databases. You must come into SJCP to use these databases, unless you have a personal subscription at home, but it's worth it! You'll find records of Kentucky, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania militiamen, for instance, as well as War of 1812 service records and the official pension application files index. In the pension application files index, I found a card for my Great(great, great, etc.)uncle Oratio that gave his service dates, military unit, place of residence, bounty land information, AND his wife's name, their marriage date, and his death date!

We also have many books related to the War of 1812. Just do a quick search of our catalog, and you will find such items as *Index to Veterans and Spouses with Civil War and War of 1812 Pensions, St. Joseph County, Indiana, 1883*, *Virginia Militia in the War of 1812, from Rolls in the Auditor's Office in Richmond*, *War of 1812 Bounty Lands in Illinois*; and dozens more.

So stop by Local History after Memorial Day, and pay tribute to your ancestors who helped preserve the nation's independence!