

ISCHUA VALLEY

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

EVENTS LEADING TO THE WAR OF 1812

War was being waged in Europe from 1803 to 1815. America had no interest in becoming involved. England and France did not want America to trade with the other. Napoleon passed a law declaring any ship trading with England would be confiscated by France. Britain retaliated by passing a law that said all ships trading in Europe must stop first in England. As a result, American shippers were unable to trade in Europe.

The British Navy had problems keeping sailors because of the harsh treatment and whippings the men received from the officers. Many British sailors deserted at American ports. The British reaction was to stop American ships and forcibly remove sailors, the term was impressment. Approximately 9,000 men were taken by the British. The British government ignored the complaints of the American government.

In June 1807 an American warship named Chesapeake was stopped by the Leopard, a British gunboat. The American Captain refused the demands of the British Captain to board his ship. The British fired on the Americans, killing 3 and wounding 18. They also removed 4 sailors and sailed away.



Americans were angered and demanded war with Britain. President Jefferson disagreed and issued an embargo, which meant that American ships could no longer trade with any country and were to stay in port. This left thousands of American sailors unemployed and ship owners financially strapped.

In 1808 James Madison was elected President. A group of congressmen known as the War Hawks claimed that the British were arming Indians who then attacked settlers in the northwest. Many Americans agreed with the Hawks and clamored for war. Farmers wanted to expand into the fertile farmland in British Canada and hoped to drive the British out. Fur traders wanted the British expelled so that they could take over the fur trade. Southern farmers wanted the land owned by Spain in Florida and since Spain was an ally of Britain, they also demanded war. Ship owners and sailors were the only ones opposed to the war.

On November 4th, 1811 the United States War Congress was convened. In June of 1812 riots broke out in Baltimore against the anti-war Federalists. On June 1st, the President recommended war to Congress. June 4th the House passed the war bill and the Senate passed it on June 18th. On June 19th, 1812 the President declared war on Great Britain.

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This year we commemorate the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. In future newsletters we will feature articles on this war often called the Second War of American Independence. Men from Cattaraugus County fought in this war on the Niagara Frontier. Other veterans came to settle in this area after peace was declared. Many are buried in our cemeteries. Learning about this war pays tribute to these men who fought to preserve their new country - the United States of America.