

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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Tel: 845-575-3052

Fax: 845-575-3176

E-mail: hrvi@marist.edu

Web: www.hudsonrivervalley.org

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c/o Hudson River Valley Institute

Marist College, 3399 North Road,

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From the Editors

Virtually every public sporting event begins with a tribute to the War of 1812. “The Star Spangled Banner,” whose words were inspired by the “red glare” of the rockets fired upon Fort McHenry by the British in 1814, is the only leftover from the conflict that remains in the public consciousness. That is a shame. Insight into this war is essential for understanding a pivotal moment in our history, when America endured the growing pains of a free, newly united nation and literally fought for acceptance on the world stage. Rediscovering the war also means reconnecting with a fascinating cast of heroes—from Dolley Madison and Tecumseh to “Old Tippecanoe” William Henry Harrison.

In this bicentennial year of the War of 1812’s commencement, we present two articles that we hope will entice readers to revisit the conflict. One offers an excellent background on the causes of the war and provides a wealth of resources to pursue additional study. The other focuses on two pivotal naval battles that occurred relatively close to the Hudson Valley—on Lake Erie and Lake Champlain.

Interestingly, another article in this issue recounts an important but oft-ignored naval battle during the American Revolution that laid the groundwork for the Continental Army’s victory at Saratoga. (It also took place on Lake Champlain.) Two authors spotlight works by nineteenth-century painters of widely divergent renown—an iconic depiction of John Brown by the unjustly forgotten Louis Ransom and two portraits by Ammi Phillips, regarded as one of his generation’s preeminent folk artists. Finally, we offer a look at how New England migrants helped their Dutch predecessors turn Albany into an all-American city.

Contributors

Warren F. Broderick is emeritus archivist at the New York State Archives. He received his B.A. and M.A. degrees in American Studies from Union College. He has authored five books, edited or contributed to ten others, and written a number of journal articles on natural history, the history of American ceramics, and literary and local historical subjects. His most recent works include an introduction to a new edition of *Small Town* by Granville Hicks (2004) and *Grafton, Berlin, and Petersburg* in the Images of America Series (2006). Mr. Broderick is archivist/curator of the Lansingburgh Historical Society.

Author of *The Sea Was Always There* (Fireship Press, 2012), **Rear Admiral (Ret.) Joseph F. Callo** also wrote the award-winning *John Paul Jones: America's First Sea Warrior* (Naval Institute Press, 2006), was U.S. author/editor for *Who's Who in Naval History* (Routledge, 2004), and has written three books about Admiral Lord Nelson. Prior to writing full time, he was an award-winning television producer and writer. A *Naval History* "Author of the Year," Admiral Callo is a graduate of Yale University's former Naval Reserve Officers Training Program and served in the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Amphibious Force. For ten years, he was an adjunct associate professor at St. John's University in New York City, where he taught courses on writing for mass media.

Elizabeth M. Covart completed her doctorate at the University of California, Davis, in 2011. Her dissertation, *Collision on the Hudson: Identity, Migration, and the Improvement of Albany, New York, 1750-1830*, examines identity creation and adaptation in early America. In addition to revising her dissertation for book publication, Liz also serves as a contributing editor for the *Journal of the Early Americas*.

Walter G. Ritchie, Jr. is an independent museum consultant, decorative arts specialist, and architectural historian with an expertise in nineteenth-century American architecture, interiors, and decorative arts. He writes, lectures, and teaches courses on a variety of decorative arts subjects in addition to organizing exhibitions for museums and researching and developing furnishings plans for the restoration of period rooms in historic house museums. He has worked with both Stair Galleries, in Hudson, and South Bay Auctions, in East Moriches, New York. Prior to that, he served as Executive Director and Curator of the Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; of the Lee-Fendall House, Alexandria, Virginia; of the Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and of Raynham Hall, Oyster Bay, New York.

Major Gregory M. Tomlin is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the U.S. Military Academy, where he teaches courses in American and Cold War history. A doctoral candidate at George Washington University, he is completing his dissertation, *The Fishbowl World: Edward R. Murrow, John F. Kennedy, and the Cold War*. He is coauthor (with Caleb Cage) of *The Gods of Diyala: Transfer of Command in Iraq*, published by Texas A&M University Press (2008).

Colonel (Ret.) Harold W. Youmans is editor of the *Journal of the War of 1812*. He has lectured at symposia and conventions in more than fifteen states and the District of Columbia. In 2011 the DeVane Chapter, Daughters of the War of 1812, honored him with its Spirit of 1812 Award, presented to individuals with a “distinguished record of study, promotion and dedication to the preservation of the history or people, places, and events of the War of 1812.” Col. Youmans served in the U.S. Army as an infantryman for more than twenty-eight years. He earned a B.S. degree from the University of Tampa, an M.S. degree from the University of South Florida, and a J.D. degree from the University of Florida.

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The Hudson River Valley Review will consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson River Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

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THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

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On the Cover: *View of State Street from St. Peter's downhill to Dutch Church*, James Eights (1798-1882). c.1850, Watercolor on paper, ht. 11" x 12 ¾", Albany Institute of History & Art, 1954.59.70

Scholarly Forum: The War of 1812 in the Upper Hudson Region

In recognition of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, often considered America's forgotten war, HRVR is looking at where the conflict manifested in the upper Hudson region. Although the most famous aspects of the war are probably the burning of Washington and Andrew Jackson's victory in New Orleans, the following forum reveals that New York State's upper Hudson witnessed considerable action as well.

The Origins of The War of 1812:

Causes, Reinterpretations, and Ruminations

Harold W. Youmans

Mr. Madison's War

In its broadest sense, the origins of the War of 1812 can be said to date from September 3, 1783. It was on that day the negotiators representing the thirteen colonies on the eastern slope of North America and His Britannic Majesty, King George III (1738-1820), meeting in Paris, agreed to end the war that had raged between those two entities since 1775. Yes, the thirteen united colonies, now the United States, were to be free, independent, and sovereign: a state among states in the international community. A nation!

Almost from the start, those brave founding brothers discovered that keeping the peace and growing a nation was to be as challenging as winning the Revolutionary War. Almost from the very beginning, the nations of Europe with whom we quickly found we must have peaceful relations in order to prosper were at times uninterested or even hostile to American interests. The Founders were not unintelligent men. They recognized that statecraft, economic influences, the ability to wage war, and grow were all within their power. One after the other, Britain and France treated the young nation in a manner suited to their national interests. In the 1790s, more and more Americans realized that they, too, had to assert their own self-interest, or fail as a nation.

For the past 200 years, challenged diplomatic and economic historians have debated the causes of the war. Some of these writers came to the debate with a predisposition, others employed the logic of their academic discipline, and still others were writing for the audiences of their time. What we may find is that war between nations almost never has a single cause. One cause will bring the political "right" on board, another the "left." One or two causes will combine to produce a majority in the Legislature or among the advisors of the Executive. Some decisions in a deliberative, political setting may be inexplicable. While the causes of the War of 1812 are well-known, the ques-

tions for today are which, if any, causes predominated the others; which combination produced the “coalition of the willing” in 1812, and which, viewed today, withstand the judgment of history laid bare?

Professor George Rogers Taylor (1895-1983) provided in his short *The War of 1812: Past Justifications and Present Interpretations* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1963), a convenient list of the causes of the war. These were: British violation of American rights of uninterrupted commerce on the high seas, impressment of seamen, arming and incitement of Indians on the frontier, the desire of Americans to annex Canada and Florida, the belief that British measures were responsible for depressing prices, and insults to national honor and self-respect.

This essay will explore but not fully answer the questions bedeviling historians these many years. As we examine their explanations of the causes, ask yourself: Is the commentator's reasoning logical and consistent? Are their arguments plausible? Are they still pertinent? Are the declared motives of the contemporary participants the real ones or are they presented merely to sway public opinion?

The Challenges to American Sovereignty

As the first decade of the new nineteenth century opened, the main challenges to American sovereignty were primarily economic. Along the Atlantic coast, trade with customers and suppliers in Europe and the West Indies dominated economic thought. The export trade had soared. Shipbuilding rose in importance. With Britain occupied in the French Revolutionary War after 1793 and her merchant fleet busy with supporting British interests on the Continent, America was spreading her influence. China had been reached and was becoming a regular port of call. The South Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans were open to American shipping. The new nation had proven that she would assert her rights when she took on the French in 1797 and the Barbary Pirates in 1801. With France and Britain at war, the Americans expanded into the carrying trade, serving the interests of both belligerents. Napoleon's Continental System, seeking to drive the British from European ports, was countered by Britain's economic warfare policy, the Orders in Council. The Americans were being drawn in. Each move by France or reaction by Britain put additional limitations on who Americans could trade with, what goods her ships could carry, and where they could dock. America's economy was being controlled by the belligerents. American independence, at least her economic sovereignty, was being frittered away.

As the Napoleonic War continued with the collapse of the Peace of Amiens in 1803, Britain suffered more and more manpower problems, not the least of which was the need to man the vast navy she had to maintain. Shipboard life in those days was a “floating hell” and desertion was high. Many men assiduously avoided naval service: some by immigration (mainly to the United States), some by “self-mutilation,” and some by active enlistment in the American merchant marine. The British were having none of that; throughout the prewar period they exercised the right to stop vessels on the



Action between USS Chesapeake and HMS Leopard, 22 June 1807. Sketch by Fred S. Cozzens, copied from his 1897 book “Our Navy—Its Growth and Achievements.” It depicts *Leopard*, at right, firing on the *Chesapeake* to enforce a demand that she submit to a search of her crew for British Navy deserters. Photo #: NH 74526

high seas and “impress” known or suspected British citizens into their Navy. There is some question as to the total number of seamen impressed during those times, but there was no question when the captain of the HMS *Leopard* hailed, fired on, and took seamen from the USS *Chesapeake* in 1807. As the fortunes of war shifted, the rate of searches and impressment spiked in 1811.

In the West, friction was developing along three lines. To the old Northwest, Americans immediately came into conflict with British interests in Canada, as both nations rushed to supply the seemingly insatiable appetite for furs and fur products. On the Kentucky and Tennessee farmsteads and in the old Southwest, access to markets down the Mississippi River brought the U.S. into renewed conflict with a decaying Spain, a reemerging France, and the ever-hovering British. While Americans west of the Appalachians sought markets for their goods, foreign influences at New Orleans—above all, Spain and England, which supported the Native Americans—created obstacles to their growth. Suspicions of British support for the Native Americans did no small harm to the fragile peace between the former colonial master and its independent offspring.

National Interests at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

As the first decade of the nineteenth century came to a close, it appeared to many in the American government that Great Britain was the greater threat to America; by 1810, the Madison Administration was clearly focused on that threat. What was unclear at the time to most Americans engaged in this diplomatic effort was the depth of British commitment to its perceived national interests. Nearly all of Britain’s actions between 1793 and 1815 can be attributed to either one of two overriding national interests—first the defeat of Napoleon (1769-1821) and his allies on the Continent, and second, Britain’s need to maintain access to markets to feed not only its armies, but its people at home. This meant a strong and positive assertion of political, military, and economic power

over the transatlantic and worldwide trade routes. These interests brought them into direct and continuing conflict with the United States.

By 1810, American national interests were no less compelling. It sought to protect and grow its “carrying trade,” assert influence among its border areas (by annexation, if necessary), eliminate any threats caused by contact with the Native Americans, and ultimately gain and maintain respect among the nations of the world.

Diplomatic Postures and Policies

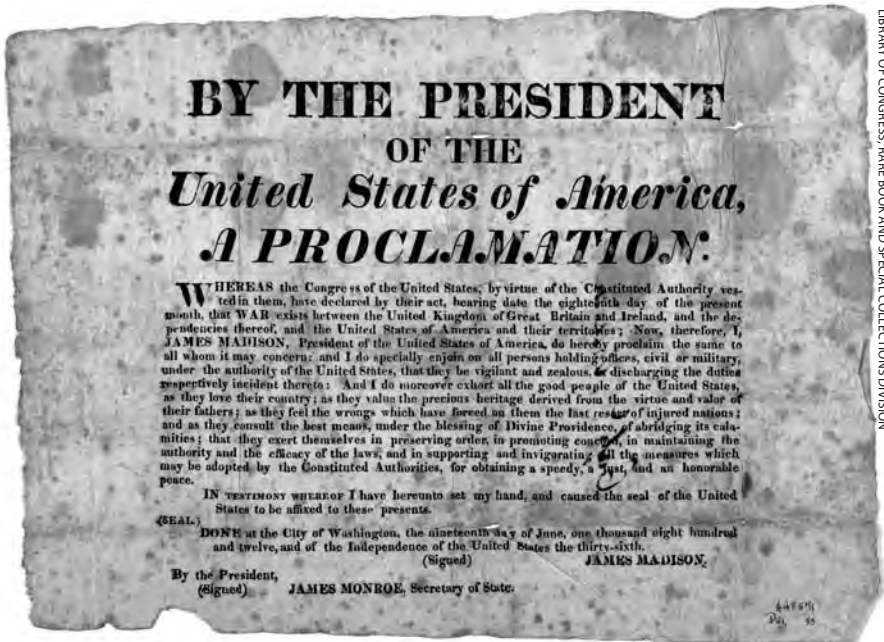
The British government, controlled most often by the Tories, had no real need to treat with the Americans so long as Britain was at war with Napoleon. They did make some early concessions when agreeing to withdraw from the Northwest Territories and submit to arbitration as conditions of the Jay Treaty (1795-96), but after 1807 the Orders in Council were stridently and strictly enforced by the Royal Navy, instigating a growing resentment among a wide swath of Americans. Further, both Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and James Madison (1751-1836), with their Republican allies—at heart pacifists—tried “peaceful” economic coercion to bring around the English policy. Both of their diplomatic attempts, the Embargo (1807) and the Non-Intercourse Acts (1809-11), each with their political variants, failed to prevent tensions from rising. What these policies really did was to play into Napoleon’s hands without extracting any meaningful concessions from England.

Although certainly not insignificant, these diplomatic postures and policies of both Britain and the United States were unavailing. They failed to address the perceived needs of both; then as now, without recognition of the needs and objectives of opposing political entities, there is no avenue of peaceful reconciliation. War was coming in 1810. It was only a matter of time.

President Madison’s War Message

By June 1, 1812, that time had run out. Madison sent his War Message to the Congress. It recounted failed attempts at diplomacy and the events that had driven him to this end. In less than three weeks, the United States was at war. Politicians and editors at the time sharply disagreed over the real causes of the war. Historians and theorists have continued to disagree over them ever since. Nonetheless from June 1812 on, any discussion of the war’s causes have begun with those outlined by Madison in his War Message. In the U.S., the Orders in Council, impressment, search and seizure, and British support for Indian deprecations were held up at the time as just causes for war. Over time and particularly in the twentieth century, however, we have seen major shifts by historians as they interpret the causes of the war.

Two works are of particular interest to those studying the causes of the War of 1812. These are: *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961) by University of Michigan Professor Bradford Perkins (b. 1925) and *The Causes of The War of 1812* (Philadelphia, PA: University of



By the President of the United States of America, a proclamation. Washington, 1812

Pennsylvania Press, 1962) by University of Wisconsin Professor Reginald Horsman (b. 1931). Besides adding much that is new and revealing on the internal political situation in Great Britain as well as the United States, both authors make a serious attempt to weigh the various factors involved in the coming war. They are both used in this essay.

The Maritime Causes

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain and France had been at war for almost a decade. Neither paid much attention to what came to be called the "Neutral Rights" of non-belligerents. America claimed its neutrality from the beginning of the conflict at the same time that it experienced a tremendous growth in trade. It was inevitable that these policies (proclaimed neutrality with an insistence on neutral rights) were to produce conflict with the warring European powers. Neither Britain nor France would concede the right of any third party to trade with its enemies. The seeds of the conflict sprouted from these opposing interests.

The maritime issues were directly mentioned in Madison's War Message and for decades were the most frequently quoted causes. However, if these were the causes, many asked why the U.S. had not gone to war earlier, when the rates of both impressment and seizures were higher than in 1812? As early as 1890, Henry Adams (1838-1918), the great-grandson of John Adams, in his monumental, nine-volume *History of the United States* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), hinted at a reinterpretation

tion providing a partial answer. Adams castigated both British policy (suggesting that it was a challenge to America's honor and interests) and the Republicans, whom he cast as incompetent. Nonetheless, he still gave maritime issues as the primary cause.

These views also were also echoed by John Bach McMaster (1852-1932) in *The History of the American People* (New York, NY: D. Appleton, 1885-1913) and Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) in *Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812* (Boston, MA: Little-Brown, 1905). Both the engineer-turned-historian and the naval theorist and philosopher, respectively, held that the British violations of American rights on the high seas were the prime cause of the war.

By the 1940s, many historians were still maintaining these as the primary cause. However, Alfred Leroy Burt (1888-1971), a Canadian-born Rhodes scholar writing in his *The United States, Great Britain, and British North America from the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812* (New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1940) and Warren H. Goodman, in his "Origins of the War of 1812: A Survey of Changing Interpretations," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (MVHR) 28/2 (September 1941): 171-186, began to show the subtlety of the issue by discussing the role of international political theory and the failure of America's policy of neutrality. Burt went so far as to state that Madison's mention of the Indian menace in the War Message was an afterthought and even Congress did not take that cause seriously.

Some writers maintained that America could have avoided the war if its diplomatic postures had been more attuned to the realities facing Britain. These writers are represented by Louis Martin Sears (1885-1960), who posits in his *Jefferson and the Embargo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1927) that Jefferson and Madison were idealistic dreamers. Another writer pointing to the U.S. diplomatic failure in dealing with the maritime issues was the English economic historian Herbert Heaton (1890-1973). In his "Non-Importation, 1806-1812," *Journal of Economic History* 1/2 (November 1941): 118-197, Heaton pointed to the total failure of American counter moves vis-a-vis the Orders in Council. Leonard D. White (1891-1958) in his *The Jeffersonians, a Study in Administrative History, 1801-1829* (New York, NY: Macmillan & Co., 1951), in the end simply said that American diplomacy only delayed, but did not cause the war. The other two authors above would have agreed. Britain was simply not as vulnerable to this type of economic coercion as Jefferson and Madison thought.

The maritime issues were real enough. The U.S. response to the British policies was in the end unavailing. It is fully within the logic of reason to lay at the feet of these British policies a cause for war in 1812. The persistent question today, however, is what would have been the result if America had 1) abandoned its policy of neutrality early on in the Anglo-French conflict, or 2) moved more aggressively on the diplomatic front, or 3) simply waited to see what outcome the European war was to bring. These questions are the fodder of future fulminating on the causes of the War of 1812.



A view of Col. Johnson's engagement with the savages (commanded by Tecumseh) near the Moravian town, October 5th, 1812.

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Land Hunger Causes

The leaders in the Congress from the newer Western and older Southern states and territories saw the elimination of European influences on their western peripheries as the solution to their economic challenges. By the early twentieth century the land hunger thesis was all the rage in academic circles. The first argument to appear in print was by Howard T. Lewis (1888-1973). In his "A Reanalysis of the Causes of the War of 1812," *Americana* 6 (1911): 506-16, 577-85, he flatly stated that Westerners wanted the rich Canadian lands and were quite willing to go to war for them. Dice R. Anderson (1880-1942), also writing in 1911, advanced the view that only by driving the British from Canada could the economy grow and the Indians be quieted (See "The Insurgents of 1811," *American Historical Association, Annual Report for 1911*, I: 165-76).

In "Western Land Hunger and the War of 1812," *MVHR* 10 (March 1924): 366-395, Columbia University historian and dean Louis M. Hacker (1899-1987) reached the same conclusion independently: He thought that the hunger for conquest in the West explained the war. Diplomatic historian Julius W. Pratt (1888-1983) vigorously continued the theme in "Western Aims in the War of 1812," *MVHR* 12 (June 1925): 38-50, stating, "[t]he belief that the United States would one day annex Canada had a continuous existence from the early days of the War for Independence to the War of 1812.... The rise of Tecumseh (1769-1813), backed, as was universally believed, by



A scene on the frontiers as practiced by the humane British and their worthy allies! Charles, William, 1776-1820, artist, 1812. Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-ppmsca-10752 (digital file from original)

the British, produced an urgent demand in the Northwest that the British be expelled from Canada. This demand was a factor of primary importance in bringing on the war.”

Professor Pratt continued this argument in his *Expansionists of 1812* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1925). There he suggested that although the land hunger thesis was but one set of causes, the vote in Congress was a bargain struck between the South and West to achieve their respective ends. Pratt maintained that it was not primarily the land the western states wanted. It was the elimination of the support provided to the Indians, by cutting off their supplies and lowering their resistance to western expansion. In the South, it was Spanish protection to runaway slaves and the limited access to Gulf ports that motivated the business interests there. Pratt, however, does not fully explain the results of the vote for war in Congress. For example, why did Pennsylvania, which by 1812 had no real Indian threat or no real desire for Florida, vote sixteen to two in Congress in favor of war?

Lastly, while George Dangerfield (1904-1986) also stressed the importance of frontier imperialism as a cause for the war in *The Era of Good Feelings* (London: Methuen & Co., 1953), Horsman concluded that there was simply too much emphasis given to the expansionist factors.

Economic Causes

All war on this planet is based in “economics.” Just ask any twentieth-century historian. Again, Professor Taylor (“Prices in the Mississippi Valley Preceding the War of 1812,” *Journal of Economic and Business History* 3 (1930-1931): 148-163, and “Agrarian Discontent in the Mississippi Valley Preceding the War of 1812,” *Journal of Political Economy* 39 (1931): 471-74) analyzed the land hunger argument by bringing forward a thesis that the war was not solely the result of maritime issues, nor land hunger, nor the Indians: it came about because of the government’s failure to provide an atmosphere that kept commodity and trade prices up. The trans-Appalachian western economies depended on 1) foreign trade, 2) access to adjoining lands, 3) peace or at least accommodation with the Indians, and 4) importantly, “national respect” (read: national honor).

Others joined Taylor. Margaret Kinard Latimer (“South Carolina—A Protagonist of the War of 1812,” *American Historical Review* 61 (July 1956): 914-929) notes that in agricultural areas in the U.S. a “depression” drove down prices in 1811 and 1812. It was no surprise that War Hawks John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), Langdon Cheves (1776-1857), and William Lowndes (1782-1822) were all from South Carolina. It was the government’s task, said these new Republicans, to protect and promote the commerce of the country. The argument sounded more like the Federalists of the 1790s than the republicanism of the Jeffersonian Revolution in 1800, but what would accomplish the political and economic aims “faster” than a removal of the perceived impediments to “prosperity”?

National Honor Causes

Some other writers rejected the political, hegemonic, and economic arguments and based their theory of the causes of the war on pure jingoistic “honor.” These theorists were represented by writers Norman K. Risjord (“1812: Conservatives, War Hawks, and the Nation’s Honor,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 18 (April 1961): 196-210), a DePauw University professor, and the renowned Reginald Horsman (“Western War Aims, 1811-1812,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 53 (March, 1957): 1-18).

Risjord maintained that even a casual search through the letters and speeches of the day reveals that those who fought were primarily concerned with the nation’s honor and integrity. Stop search and seizure, restore honor, conquer Canada and take Florida, increase respect among nations, diminish the Indian challenge, improve markets and insure “prosperity”—all this was in the mind of those voting for war! Does this thesis bring us back to the maritime issues as the prime causes of the war? Probably, but...

The national honor thesis does not fully explain sectional divisions. Why did New England ultimately and vigorously oppose the war? My answer is twofold: First, New Englanders were traders and businessmen. Losses at sea were common. Added to all of the other possible reasons for a ship’s loss, search and seizure and impressment were just other costs of doing business. They could live with that. Second, going to war offended their religious upbringing. Note here that the vast bulk of the religious opposition to the war sprang from the New England Puritan traditions.

The Nature of War in 1812

As we today try to understand the causes of the War of 1812, we must keep in mind that our view is backward, not forward. We know today what Madison and the War Hawks did not; we know what Spencer Percival (1762-1812) and his Tories did not. An understanding of what war was from the top down was known to those learned eighteenth- and nineteenth-century leaders who had studied Thucydides. Some may even have read of Gustavus Adolphus (1594-1632) or even Frederick the Great (1712-1786). But our view is tainted today by what we know of Baron Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) and the modern view of war. Clausewitz, our modern “God of War Theorist,” was a twenty-six-year-old Prussian in the service of Imperial Russia in 1812. At his death in 1831, his work, for which today he is so renowned, was unfinished. Madison never read it; neither did Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) or Alexander Macomb (1782-1841) or Jacob J. Brown (1775-1828), until perhaps after the war.

In 1812, the activities of the potential belligerents were only vaguely known to one another weeks if not months after the event. Madison and his advisors could not know what was really happening in London. And perhaps after all is said, Bradford Perkins, the Bancroft Prize-winning professor, was right. In his *Prologue to War*, he maintained that wars cannot often be explained in rational terms and that emotional factors more often than not dictate the course of history.

A unique way of looking at the causes of the War of 1812 was the technique employed by Harold M. Hyman (b. 1924), Rice University professor and editor of the *America's Alternatives Series*, written in the 1970s. Hyman, too, realized that the decisions of the Jefferson and Madison administrations between 1807 and 1812 were made only “in the light of” the information “available” to the historical participants. General George C. Marshall (1880-1959) knew the phenomenon well. He made life-and-death decisions for a decade based upon only the information at his command at the time. Using the detailed study of contemporary documents made by Robert A. Rutland (b. 1922), Hyman approached the subject asking:

Why did the decision makers (the legislative and executive branches of the U.S. government between 1805 and 1812) adopt one course of action and reject others? What influence did then-existing expert opinion (their Cabinet, with “portfolios” in State, War, Navy, and the Treasury Departments), administrative structures (an almost non-existent military staff structure), and budgetary factors (the rational opinions of Albert Gallatin, 1761-1849) exert on the decision? What did the participants hope for? What did they fear? On what information did they base their decisions? How were the decisions executed?

In *Madison's Alternatives: The Jeffersonian Republicans and the Coming of War, 1805-1812* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1975), Hyman, relying on Rutland's studies, concluded that if Madison had waited just one more year war could have been averted. However, he also noted that Madison and the nation in the years leading to the war reacted daily in face of both “known” and “unknown” facts and factors.

With all this said, here is a strong candidate for the most immediate cause of the War of 1812:

The “Unknown Unknowns” of 1811

In historians’ discussion of America’s march to war in 1812, little has been written about England’s part in precipitating the conflict and the events in 1811. Relations with Britain had been up and down since 1783. Britain had to deal with the perceived threats from Revolutionary France in the late eighteenth century and from Napoleon in the early nineteenth century.

The war between Britain and France had resumed in 1803 and in the intervening time came the *Chesapeake* incident, the Rule of 1756 enforcement that banned American ships from French ports, British intrigues with the western Indians, and impressment, each of which focused the minds of American leaders. Ever hopeful, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had pursued progressively coercive economic retaliation in an effort to promote a more conciliatory Britain. Their efforts were to fail by June 1812.

Nonetheless, during the winter of 1810 to 1811 there was renewed American optimism. There were domestic political stirrings in Britain that may, just may, presage a new policy. King George III had finally been declared irrevocably insane following the death of his favorite, Princess Amelia (1783-1810). His son, the Prince Regent, later George IV (1762-1830), was a different fellow who had toyed with both the hardline Tories and the realistic and commercially minded Whigs.

A lean toward the Tories would lead to a quickened march to war; a lean toward the followers of America’s friend, Alexander Baring (1774-1848), and the march would lead to conciliation and peace. Yes, 1811 was to be the year. There were still “unknown unknowns” ahead, but it could not go on much longer.

February 3, 1811, is not a date that quickly comes to mind when historians assemble chronologies of the War of 1812, but on that date perhaps the most significant prewar political event of the age occurred. With authority granted by the Regency Act, the Prince sent the message: Spencer Perceval’s (1762-1812) ministry was to stay in office.

The view of Madison and Henry Clay (1777-1852) that the ascendancy of the Prince Regent would lead to a repeal of the Orders in Council was dashed. The further diplomatic efforts of William Pinkney (1764-1822) as American ambassador in London, and those of Augustus J. Foster (1780-1848), the prince’s man in Washington, were to come to naught.

In July 1811, Madison directed the convening of what turned out to be the War Hawk Congress with Henry Clay as the Speaker of the House for the following November. Brushing aside Whig suggestions, Perceval continued to pursue the policies in effect since 1807 that were inimical to the Americans.

Assessing the attitudes of Madison and the Congress given what they knew in the spring of 1811 is difficult. There were still many “unknowns” ahead. The U.S. would reinstate the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809, prohibiting trade with Britain. The USS

President would strike back at impressment in its battle with the HMS *Little Belt* in May of 1811. Westerners would strike at Tecumseh's Indian confederation at Tippecanoe in Indiana Territory. Georgians would encourage "revolt" in Spanish East Florida. And the British? They would begin their steady march through the Iberian Peninsula under the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) that would lead to Napoleon's first abdication.

In *James Madison: The President, 1809-1812* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1956), Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaperman Irving Brant gives another clue as to Madison's attitude. The President had received a formal communication from the British Foreign Secretary, the Right Honorable Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822), through Foster that spring. It seemed to indicate that the Orders in Council would be obdurately defended.

Neither Perceval's death at the hand of a lunatic in April 1812 nor a firm inclination by the Earl of Liverpool (1770-1828), his successor, that the Orders in Council would be withdrawn were enough to head off the declaration of war on June 18, 1812. The final slide toward war was underway. That slide began on February 3, 1811, when the future King George IV supported one of his "known knowns"—a political party whose policies would lead to war with America.

Conclusions

As we can see, each of the causes of the war has been, and will throughout this bicentennial period, be thoroughly discussed and analyzed. What is really clear, though, is that these present and future discussions will do no more than echo the contemporary arguments raised in the spring of 1812. The decision to go to war is, and should be, complicated. One of the enduring strengths of our union is our ability to debate and put forward various and alternative explanations of past events. Whether it was the Price Regent's decision in February 1811, or a broad and deep economic and diplomatic failure, we should welcome the further discussion of the origins of the War of 1812.



Perry's victory on Lake Erie: fought Sept. 10th 1813.
 Hand-colored lithograph published by N. Currier, [between 1835 and 1856]
 Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-2775

How the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain Influenced the American Narrative

Joseph F. Callo

In this anniversary year of the War of 1812, there has been quite a bit of attention focused on the apparently never-ending argument about who won the war. That's a relevant question, of course, but what is probably more important are the long-term, strategic effects and the lessons learned from the conflict that has been labeled "America's forgotten war."

In the past, there also has been a tendency to perceive the war as a series of free-standing events. The victories of the U.S. Navy in 1812—the dramatic single-ship actions between the USS *Constitution* and HMS *Guerriere* in August, the USS *United States* and HMS *Macedonian* in October, and the USS *Constitution* and HMS *Java* in December—are prime examples of that "spotlight" approach. So is the Battle of New Orleans. And inevitably there has been a lot of attention paid to the capture

and burning of the Capitol and White House, to the point of distraction from more significant issues.

The time has come—in fact it's past due—to move on to a more thorough analysis of the War of 1812. That involves connecting the events and discussing such issues as the influence of geography and the political environments in the United States and Great Britain that drove the conflict.

Happily, there are some encouraging recent indications that we are beginning to get beyond the superficial discussions of the War of 1812. Two recent books—*1812: The Navy's War* by George Daughan and *Perilous Fight: America's Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812-1815* by Stephen Budiansky are examples. Additional positive signs include special programs that are being pursued by the U.S. Navy's Naval History and Heritage Command in partnership with local groups around the country. In addition, the recently appointed Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, announced his intention to focus on the War of 1812 as a way to enlighten Americans about the important role the U.S. Navy has played in ensuring our national security.

Against that background and in hopes of shifting toward a new perspective on the War of 1812, the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain represent special opportunities. Those two significant actions were closely related chronologically and geopolitically, and they had a profound impact on the immediate and long-term results of the war. From a geographer's point of view, the two events are classic examples of how geography plays a role in making history. In another context, a sociologist could focus on how those two events became part of the cultural essence of a major national region. And in the seven-volume *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to 1900*, there is a passage that articulates a British naval historian's view about why the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain have special geostrategic significance:

These inland waters were the scenes of important naval engagements—important, that is, in their effects, though they were waged between diminutive flotillas.... The naval warfare on the lakes, therefore, differed in several points from the naval warfare on the ocean. On the lakes, the success of a sea fight might, and did, determine the success or the failure of military operations the outcome of which would have great weight upon the result of the war; whereas, on the ocean, no success which the American warships could win could possibly have any other than a moral effect.¹

The Battle of Lake Erie

Two reasons—one short-term and one long-term—why the Battle of Lake Erie is of more than passing interest are summarized in *Sea Power: A Naval History*, edited by E.B. Potter and Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz. In that book, the authors state that after the battle:

The British, promptly evacuating Detroit and Malden, retreated up the Thames River Valley with their Indian allies, but (U.S. General) Harrison's forces overtook them. ... In this encounter, known as the Battle of the Thames, the Indian leader Tecumseh was killed. With his death, Indian opposition to the Americans

collapsed. The “northwest” rested securely in American hands, and British plans to create an Indian buffer state between the United States and Canada had to be abandoned.²

In their evaluation, the authors focused on an immensely important strategic issue, namely the potential future expansion in the Northwest of the United States. That was a subject that was not only of huge political importance at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but had a significant influence on the geographic character, as well as the “cultural personality,” of the nation in which we live today.

In its details, the Battle of Lake Erie is really two tightly intertwined narratives. One story involves how the battle fit in the overall logistics and communications role of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain during the War of 1812. The war along the northern border of the United States was much more than a struggle to occupy land, although some see it in those limited terms. In a rugged frontier area and at a time when ground transportation was difficult—at times impossible—control of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain was critical. The Duke of Wellington reflected a clear understanding of that reality in 1814, when he commented: “[N]either I nor anyone else can achieve success (in the war), in the way of conquests, unless you have naval superiority on the lakes.”³ Wellington, who saw well beyond the ground tactics of his campaigns, made similar comments about the broader importance of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain on a number of occasions.

From a strategic perspective, the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain—more specifically who *controlled* those lakes—was the key to the entire northern theater of the war. And up to the point of the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813, the strategic issues had not been decided. Each side had its successes and failures. Lake Ontario is an example of these alternating fortunes. In the spring of 1813, the United States had transitory control of the lake; on May 27, successful attacks were carried out against the Canadian capital of York (now Toronto) and Fort George. As a result, the British evacuated the entire Niagara frontier. By June, however, the British had taken nominal control of the lake, and as a result a major American expedition into Canada was defeated. Then in August and September the Americans once again held the upper hand. What was developing was, more than anything else, a shipbuilding race between the United States and Great Britain on the key northern lakes.

The second story of the Battle of Lake Erie is that of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, the young naval officer who emerged as its hero. Perry was born in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. His father, Captain Christopher Perry, and younger brother, Matthew, were both career naval officers, and he joined the Navy as a midshipman at age thirteen. Perry served in the Caribbean, Mediterranean, and Atlantic. At the beginning of the War of 1812, he was placed in command of twelve gunboats operating out of Newport, Rhode Island, and New London, Connecticut.

Anxious for a more active command, Perry asked to be transferred. As a result, he was sent to the Great Lakes to serve under Commodore Isaak Chauncey, who was in

command of the U.S. Navy's operations there. Eventually, Perry was sent to Presque Isle (now Erie, Pennsylvania) to supervise the construction of a fleet to be deployed on Lake Erie and then to take command of that fleet. In that assignment he worked closely with Noah Brown to complete six vessels, including two brigs, that eventually joined three other vessels from the area to form the U.S. fleet that fought the Battle of Lake Erie. In gathering and organizing the resources required to build and then train a cohesive fleet from the ground up was a monumental task, something far beyond what might be expected of a young naval officer.

Perry admired the courage of his fellow officer, James Lawrence, who had been killed in combat in June 1813 while captain of the USS *Chesapeake*. When mortally wounded, Lawrence's final command was the now-famous line "Don't give up the ship." Perry adopted Lawrence's entreaty for his battle flag at the Battle of Lake Erie. He was also an admirer of Great Britain's Admiral Lord Nelson, and particularly his combat doctrine, which Nelson defined in a memo to his captains before Trafalgar: "But in case Signals can neither be seen or perfectly understood, no Captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an Enemy."⁴

In important ways, Oliver Hazard Perry was typical of the new breed of U.S. Navy officers who emerged during the War of 1812. They were skilled at their profession and "forward leaning" in their tactics, just as their new country was becoming more outward looking in the global arena.

The Run-up to the Battle of Lake Erie

During the early stages of the war, things had not gone particularly well for the American forces in the Great Lakes Region, especially in the ground campaigns. The British had seized control of Lake Erie when war broke out, and they took advantage of their control to, among other things, capture Fort Detroit. American leadership on the ground was poor and leadership from Washington inconsistent, to put it kindly.

There was a sense among U.S. leaders that most Canadians would welcome becoming part of the United States. Thomas Jefferson reflected that attitude when he wrote to a friend, "The acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching, and will give us experience for the attack of Halifax the next, and the final expulsion of England from the American continent."⁵

Jefferson and the many others in the United States who had similar attitudes about Canada could not have been more wrong. To a large extent, the Canadians were committed to remaining a British colony and were not hesitant to fight to demonstrate that loyalty. One Canadian magazine recently reflected that attitude on its cover, making the unequivocal claim: "The War of 1812—The War that Saved Canada."⁶ Another Canadian magazine recently expressed a similar mindset on its cover: "1812—The War that Shaped our Nation."⁷

The Americans had repeatedly tried to take the offensive on the ground, including attacking and burning York with little militarily significant effect. In contrast,

Commodore Chauncey had pursued a conservative naval strategy that at least maintained a viable American presence in the theater. And he had regained nominal control of Lake Ontario before looking southwest toward Lake Erie.

Things were destined to change, however, when twenty-seven-year-old Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry arrived at Lake Erie. Perry's first task was to assemble the fleet he would command. Building a fleet in the wilderness was no easy task, and Perry lacked both manpower and materiel for his assignment. Iron had to be shipped overland from Pittsburgh, as did rigging, cannons, and cannon shot. Canvas came from Philadelphia. Perry's energy and determination overcame these challenges. However, one of the construction compromises he was forced to make in building his new ships was that they were all constructed with unseasoned wood, meaning they would last for one major engagement only. This added to the importance of the impending battle: A standoff with the British would severely damage the U.S. cause.

Perry's fleet of nine ships mounted a total of fifty-four guns, a number that did not equal that of the smallest of Admiral Lord Nelson's ships-of-the-line at the Battle of Trafalgar. Still, with this armament, Perry's fleet could deliver a theoretical "weight of metal" amounting to 936 pounds. In contrast, the opposing British ships, with their capability to deliver a theoretical "weight of metal" of only 496 pounds, were seriously outgunned. This basic firepower advantage of the U.S. fleet is frequently overlooked in popular depictions of the battle.

Among the critical circumstances in events leading up to the battle were Perry's ability to get his largest and most powerful ships—the two newly constructed brigs—out of Presque Isle, where their exit was blocked by a sandbar and British ships patrolling the lake. Perry waited for his moment: at a time when the blockading British ships were off station, he floated his new (and as-yet-unarmed) brigs across the bar and on to the lake. It was a feat that required technical skill, sheer physical strength, and audacity—and it is yet another aspect of the battle that has gotten little attention in contemporary accounts.

The two new American brigs were named USS *Niagara* and USS *Lawrence*. The latter was named for Perry's best friend, and as Perry's flagship she flew the "Don't Give Up The Ship" battle flag. Each of the new ships was armed with eighteen 32-pound carronades and two long 12-pound guns, making them the most powerful warships on the lake.

Perry's opponent in the coming engagement was Captain Robert H. Barclay, a one-armed veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar. Barclay had accepted the command after it had been refused by another officer. Although he was outnumbered, Barclay had a potential advantage of longer range guns. As was the case for the U.S. forces, the British suffered from a lack of supplies, all of which had to be transported overland from York.

At one point Barclay was able to blockade the American port at Presque Isle; at another, he was in turn blockaded at Put-in-Bay, Ohio. By the time the battle started, the Americans were probably in the stronger position.

In an ironic twist, it was Perry, not his British opponent, who imitated Admiral Nelson's famous briefing of his captains before the Battle of Trafalgar. Perry anticipated beginning the battle with the enemy in a line-ahead formation. He hoped to match up his principal ships with the largest of the British vessels: Perry in *Lawrence* against Barclay in the British flagship *Detroit*, the American *Caledonia* against the British *Hunter* and the American *Niagara* against *Queen Charlotte*. Once the action began, the smaller ships in the American fleet would seek out targets of opportunity.

Most important, Perry also copied Nelson's combat doctrine (the overall attitude that takes over in the chaos of battle) by urging his captains to lay their ships alongside those of the enemy. It was a doctrine that that would prove effective in the combat to come.

The Battle of Lake Erie is Joined

Shortly before noon on September 10, 1813, the two fleets were approaching one another. Perry in the USS *Lawrence* was upwind and therefore in the favored position; he and several smaller American ships went for the center of the British line. The USS *Caledonia*, a sluggish ex-merchantman, lagged behind Perry, and the USS *Niagara* inexplicably maintained station on *Caledonia*, leaving the *Lawrence* virtually alone under the guns of most of the British force for two hours.

Lawrence's crew gave a good account of itself, but the ship was eventually reduced to a near-total wreck, with more than half the crew killed or wounded. At that point *Lawrence* struck her colors, and Perry had himself rowed to *Niagara*, which thus far was virtually undamaged. With a fresh crew, Perry rehoisted his "Don't Give Up the Ship" battle ensign and rejoined the action against the main enemy ships.

As the British fleet maneuvered, the HMS *Queen Charlotte* and HMS *Detroit* collided and became entangled alongside one another, facing in opposite directions. The situation could not have been worse for the British or better for Perry. Locked together and unable to maneuver, Barclay's two major ships couldn't bring their guns to bear on the *Niagara*. In that most fortunate circumstance, Perry was able to rake the bow of one enemy ship and the stern of the other.⁸ Before long, both ships struck their colors, and the smaller British vessels followed suit. It was a stunning and clear-cut victory for Perry and his fleet. It was also the first recorded occasion when an entire Royal Navy squadron had surrendered to an enemy. This was another in the string of engagements that provided both a psychological boost and a strategic gain for President Madison and the U.S. general public, while providing further embarrassment at Whitehall and the Admiralty.

Perry's message to General William Henry Harrison is legendary: "Dear Gen'l:—We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop. Yours with great respect and esteem. O.H. Perry"



Battle of Lake Erie. Painted by William Henry Powell. Published: [New York]: Johnson & Miles, c.1877. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-3483

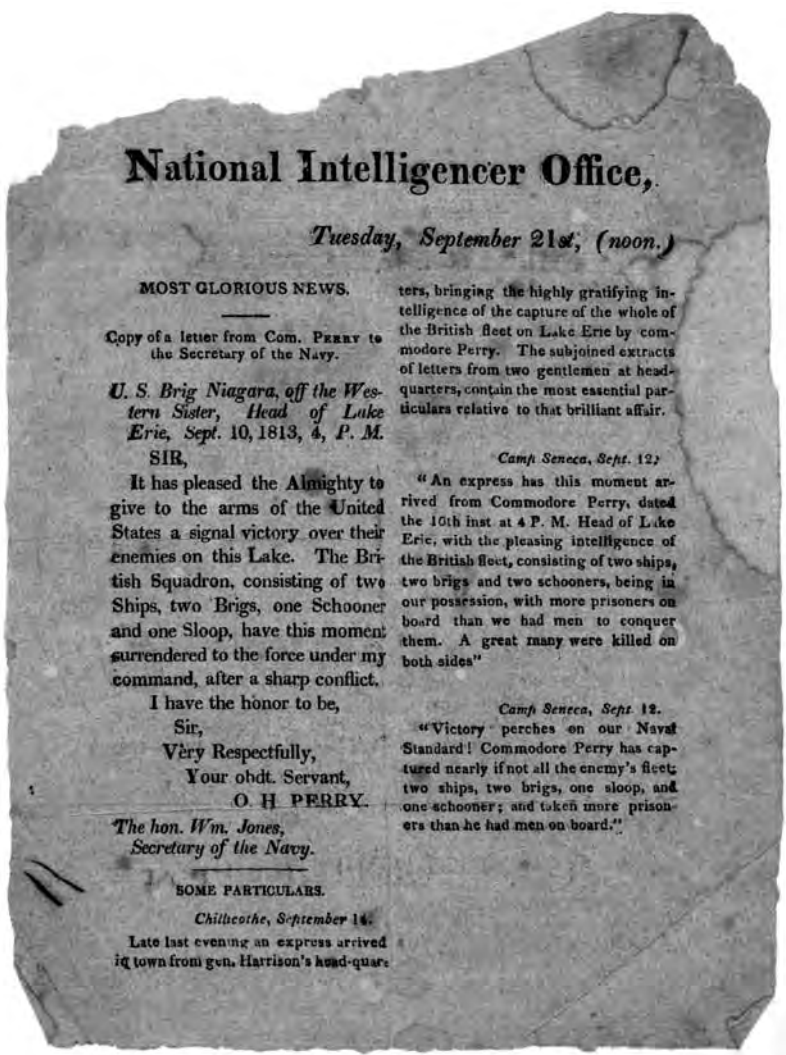
Aftermath

In his book *The People's Navy: The Making of American Sea Power*, Kenneth Hagan summed up the immediate implications of Perry's triumph:

The British position in Michigan and Ohio was now untenable; the Northwest was safely American. Transported by the fleet and joined in battle by the commodore, General Harrison swiftly moved across Lake Erie and broke a British army at the Battle of the Thames on 5 October. By then an elated president had already ordered the young naval officer (Perry) promoted to captain—the navy's highest permanent rank prior to the Civil War.⁹

But Hagen's view only skims the surface of results of the Battle of Lake Erie. At the time, although Perry's victory had a positive effect on American morale, it was counterbalanced in Washington by the defeat of Napoleon, an event that elicited a sobering thought: Britain now was free to devote more attention and greater resources to its war in America.

In fact as events continued after the Battle of Lake Erie, there was a strange mixture of positives and negatives in Washington and London. The battle's outcome was a positive in the United States and surely a negative in Great Britain. The defeat of Napoleon was a negative in the United States and a positive in Britain. Both the Americans and the British were frustrated with the war and anxious to turn their nations' attention to more positive matters. The Battle of Lake Champlain would go a very long way toward clearing the air.



National Intelligencer Office,

Tuesday, September 21st, (noon.)

MOST GLORIOUS NEWS.

Copy of a letter from Com. PERRY to the Secretary of the Navy.

U. S. Brig Niagara, off the Western Sister, Head of Lake Erie, Sept. 10, 1813, 4, P. M.

SIR,

It has pleased the Almighty to give to the arms of the United States a signal victory over their enemies on this Lake. The British Squadron, consisting of two Ships, two Brigs, one Schooner and one Sloop, have this moment surrendered to the force under my command, after a sharp conflict.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Very Respectfully,

Your obdt. Servant,

O. H. PERRY.

*The hon. Wm. Jones,
Secretary of the Navy.*

SOME PARTICULARS.

Chillicothe, September 14.

Late last evening an express arrived in town from gen. Harrison's head-quarters,

bringing the highly gratifying intelligence of the capture of the whole of the British fleet on Lake Erie by commodore Perry. The subjoined extracts of letters from two gentlemen at headquarters, contain the most essential particulars relative to that brilliant affair.

Camp Seneca, Sept. 12.

"An express has this moment arrived from Commodore Perry, dated the 10th inst at 4 P. M. Head of Lake Erie, with the pleasing intelligence of the British fleet, consisting of two ships, two brigs and two schooners, being in our possession, with more prisoners on board than we had men to conquer them. A great many were killed on both sides"

Camp Seneca, Sept. 12.

"Victory perches on our Naval Standard! Commodore Perry has captured nearly if not all the enemy's fleet: two ships, two brigs, one sloop, and one schooner; and taken more prisoners than he had men on board."

Tuesday, September 21st, (noon.) Most glorious news.

Copy of a letter from Com. Perry to the Secretary of the Navy. *U. S. Brig. Niagara, off the Western Sister, Head of Lake Erie, Sept. 10, 1813, 4 P.M.*
[Washington 1813]. Printed Ephemera Collection; Portfolio 190, Folder 26

One of the least recognized aspects of Perry's victory was the psychological impact of an American victory in a *fleet* action. Up to that point, the U.S. Navy had, as noted, achieved a number of noteworthy victories in single-ship actions, but the engagement on Lake Erie was the first fleet action between the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy during the war. If the single-ship victories were embarrassing and irritating to the Royal Navy, the British government, and the British public, Perry's victory on Lake Erie had to be more profoundly disturbing. It could well have been the beginning of the realization among Britain's political and military leaders that it was not going

to have its way in the war.

At the beginning of the war and in its early stages, there was a mixed perception of Americans among the British leadership and general public. These perceptions, along with the residual animosity over America's revolt against her mother country, were not unimportant in shaping attitudes about the war.

On the one hand, Americans were frequently perceived as unpolished outsiders, a rebellious and ungrateful group that didn't really know its manners. The other view of Americans was as rough-hewn, rugged, and obstreperous people who could be dealt with if the methods were harsh enough. There was a striking carryover in these views with the British perceptions of the colonists who had declared their independence in 1776. Against that background of perceptions, the events of September 10, 1813, on Lake Erie were profoundly mind-changing. Following the Battle of Lake Erie, the British came to know that the Americans, whatever else they might be, were evolving into a seagoing nation that could stand toe-to-toe against British arms in a *fleet* action—and win. That realization would be emphatically underscored at the forthcoming Battle of Lake Champlain.

The Battle of Lake Champlain

To help us focus sharply on the Battle of Lake Champlain—also referred to at times as the Battle of Plattsburgh—we have the words of a sea power visionary, Rear Admiral A.T. Mahan, and William Jones, who served as Secretary of the Navy during the mid and latter stages of the War of 1812.

Mahan wrote unambiguously, identifying the American victory on Lake Champlain on September 11, 1814, as the tipping point in the conflict:

The Battle of Lake Champlain, more nearly than any other incident of the War of 1812, merits the epithet “decisive.” The moment the issue was known, [British General] Prevost retreated into Canada: entirely properly, as indicated by the Duke of Wellington's words before and after...The war was properly ended by Prevost's retreat. What remained was purely episodic in character, and should be so regarded.¹⁰

For his part, when Secretary of the Navy Jones heard of the American victory off Plattsburgh, he reportedly exclaimed:

[T]o view it in the abstract, it is not surpassed by any naval victory of record; to appreciate its results, it is perhaps, one of the most important events in the history of our country.¹¹

Mahan and Jones, who played an important (and largely overlooked) role in the war's outcome, were both seeing beyond the single event to its larger historical meaning. They recognized that the strategic implications of the Battle of Lake Champlain were in fact even more important than those of the Battle of Lake Erie. For example, if the Battle of Lake Champlain had been won by the British, there is a probability that the United States would have had a very different and less globally focused history. In fact

there is a possibility that there would have been no future United States as we know it.

Just as the Battle of Lake Erie was composed of two intertwined components, one about strategy and one about a person, so was the Battle of Lake Champlain. In this case the personal story was about Master Commandant Thomas Macdonough.¹²

Macdonough was born and raised in the Delaware countryside near Middletown. The sixth of ten children, he entered the U.S. Navy as a midshipman at the age of sixteen. Like many of the officers of his era, he earned a reputation for aggressive leadership during the Barbary Wars. In 1803, he participated as a young officer in the recapture of the frigate USS *Philadelphia*, which had run aground and then been captured by the Dey of Tripoli. This daring action, led by Commodore Stephen Decatur, was carried out under the guns of the harbor of Tripoli. The retaking of the ship in hand-to-hand fighting and its subsequent burning (to deny its use by the Dey) was considered one of the era's most daring naval actions.

Macdonough also was one of the young officers known as "Preble's Boys," a group of standout officers who served under Commodore Edward Preble during the first Barbary War. As a measure of the quality of those designated as "Preble's Boys," seventeen of the eighteen major U.S. naval victories during the War of 1812 were achieved by that group.

Following the War of 1812, Macdonough went on to command the USS *Constitution*. He also commanded the former Royal Navy frigate that had been captured by the United States Navy, USS *Guerriere*, and the first U.S. ship-of-the-line, USS *Ohio*.

The Run-up to the Battle of Lake Champlain

Whatever boost in morale might have been triggered by Perry's victory on Lake Erie, it would have been short lived, and as the threat from Napoleon was eliminated, the British developed a three-pronged strategy that they believed would crush the United States' will to fight on. The miscalculation concerning the U.S. willingness to continue fighting was yet another error in thinking that characterized both sides during the war.

Among the factors that led to the miscalculation at Whitehall and the Admiralty were the successful blockade that the Royal Navy had applied to the U.S. Atlantic coast, the failure of U.S. efforts to mount a successful land campaign along the Canadian border, and the defeat of Napoleon by Britain and her European allies. Given those factors, the British political and military leadership concluded that the time was right for a series of heavy military blows that would drive President Madison and the Congress to accept Britain's terms in the treaty negotiations at Ghent.

The first element of the British strategy involved expeditionary warfare attacks on the Baltimore, Washington, and Norfolk regions of the U.S. Atlantic coast. Those three areas formed the operating center for the American privateers that were taking a heavy toll on Britain's ocean commerce. These attacks achieved tactical successes, but they failed in their basic objective of ending the activities of U.S. privateers and thus had limited strategic significance. In fact, the campaign, led by Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn, probably strengthened U.S. public animosity toward Great Britain



M'Donough's victory on Lake Champlain. Lithograph by N. Currier, c.1846.
 Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-2353

as well as the determination of America's political leadership to press on with the war.

Because of their symbolism, the British anticipated that torching the principal buildings of Washington would show Americans that the British could operate on America's coast with impunity. Perhaps they were right about initial reactions. However, in the perspective of time, the burning of the Capitol and the president's residence only hardened public opinion against the British. It was similar in that respect to the firing into and boarding of USS *Chesapeake* in June 1807 by a boarding party from the HMS *Leopard* and their removal of four members of *Chesapeake's* crew as British deserters.

The second element of the strategy was another expeditionary warfare attack, in this case against New Orleans. This part of the strategy was intended to break the U.S. hold on Florida and the land to its west. This effort ended in a British defeat by General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, which was fought shortly after the peace treaty ending the war was signed in December 1814. But if the battle had no bearing on the final terms of the Treaty of Ghent, it no doubt contributed to the increased sense following the war that the United States was a major international player.

The third and arguably most dangerous part of the strategy involved a ground attack that was intended to drive south from Canada down the west shore of Lake Champlain and then down the Hudson Valley, deep into the Northeast region of the United States. The plan required clear control of Lake Champlain by the British to permit the movement of a British army of 10,000-plus veterans of Wellington's campaigns in Europe. Complete control of the lake was necessary to guarantee resupply of the British force as it moved down the Hudson Valley.

It was anticipated by the British that their thrust into the heart of the Northeast, which had generally opposed the war, might actually split the region off from the United States. They were encouraged in that hope by the ongoing logistical support that the residents of Vermont had provided to British naval units on Lake Champlain, as well as the general opposition to the war among the New England States. But as U.S. political leadership had misjudged the ease of splitting Canada from the British Empire, the British misjudged the strength of the bonds uniting their former American colonies.

This third segment of the strategy, if successful, could have ended the United States as it existed at the time and most certainly would have constricted the development of the nation during the coming centuries. The penetration of a powerful element of the British army down the Hudson Valley was an existential threat aimed at America's heart. Jack Sweetman provides further perspective on this threat in *American Naval History*. In his entry for September 11, 1814, he wrote:

The major British military effort of the war began in August, when an army of 11,000 men under Major General Sir George Prevost, Governor General of Canada, moves down the Richelieu River towards Lake Champlain and the Hudson River Valley...to oppose him on land, the Americans can muster only 1,500 regulars...but Prevost believes ...that he must hold command of the lake, which is contested by Commodore Thomas Macdonough's American squadron.¹³

Paralleling Perry's accomplishment on Lake Erie, Commodore Macdonough had built a significant fleet. Unlike Perry's force, however, Macdonough's was slightly inferior in numbers and firepower to the British fleet on the lake. Macdonough's force included the 26-gun USS *Saratoga*, the 24-gun USS *Eagle*, the 17-gun USS *Ticonderoga*, the nine-gun USS *Preble*, and ten gunboats, for a total of fourteen vessels. When the Battle of Lake Champlain began on September 11, 1814, Macdonough's force was facing a Royal Navy fleet consisting of the 37-gun small frigate HMS *Confiance*, the 16-gun brig HMS *Linnet*, two 11-gun sloops (HMS *Chubb* and HMS *Finch*), and twelve gunboats, for a total of sixteen vessels.

In addition to a slight numerical advantage, the British fleet had an advantage of firepower, with a combined "weight of metal" of its guns of 2,146 pounds against the U.S. fleet's "weight of metal" of 1,907 pounds. Similarly, there were 937 crew members in the British fleet versus 882 in Macdonough's force.

The approaching battle would be a combined army-navy operation, and on August 31, the British Army under Lieutenant General Sir George Prévost initiated the invasion of U.S. soil with a march south toward Plattsburgh. He believed that control of Lake Champlain was critical to his success, and he had been instructed by Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies, to take care to avoid overextending his supply lines. The understanding among the British leaders that naval control of the lake was absolutely essential would play an important role as events unfolded.

Captain George Downie was in command of the Royal Navy squadron that would provide the support that Prévost considered essential. He had just taken delivery of the

newly-constructed HMS *Confiance*, a fifth rate frigate that became the most powerful single ship on the lake when launched on August 25. On paper Downie had a marginally superior fleet than Macdonough, but his crews lacked the degree of skill generally associated with the blue-water Royal Navy.

Weather and geography were two related factors that were of concern to both Prévost and Downie. Late fall in the region was a difficult time for military operations, particularly ground operations. By November roads, such as they were, became impassable. Maintaining supply lines was extremely difficult and basically limited to water-borne transport. Feeding and sheltering an army would be a challenge. These factors must have created a sense of urgency about the invasion for Prévost and Downie; inevitably there would have been doubts about the practicability of the campaign. On the American side of the equation, the weather and geographical factors would have been important causes of optimism for Macdonough and his U.S. Army counterpart for the coming action, U.S. Brigadier General Alexander Macomb.

Although heavily outnumbered, Macomb had prepared well for the coming battle. As he braced for the attack on Plattsburgh, he skillfully managed a combination of militia, local volunteers, convalescent soldiers from a nearby hospital, and a small number of regular army soldiers for maximum effect. Small units were sent out for raids against the advancing army and bridges were destroyed to slow the British progress. Still, by September 10 Prévost had reached Plattsburgh, where Macomb had established strong artillery and infantry positions.

The Battle of Lake Champlain is Joined

Macdonough decided to fight from an anchored position, and the skill with which he positioned his ships indicated an understanding of fleet tactics surprising for someone of his age and experience. In the position Macdonough selected—in Plattsburgh Bay, with shoal water at his back—the British would have to sail around Cumberland Point to get at the U.S. fleet. To the south of the American ships was Crab Island. It blocked any effort Downie might make to get some of his ships behind Macdonough's force, allowing him to "double" individual American ships by positioning British ships on both sides of Macdonough's fleet. One of the most significant aspects of Macdonough's position was that it cancelled the British advantage of having guns of greater range.

As so often happens for those who plan well before combat, luck became a factor. And in this case, luck tilted in the Americans' direction when the day began with light winds. In light air, Downie's maneuvering as he rounded Cumberland Point was slow. And as the two fleets engaged, he was sailing directly toward the American ships, which were anchored bow to stern on a north-south axis, with both bow and stern anchors set. Downie was sailing directly into enemy fire for a period of time when he could not return fire. Thus, in the opening round of the action, Macdonough raked Downie's ships as they approached head-on.¹⁴

Macdonough's four main ships were anchored bow-to-stern in a line, with gunboats



Battle of Plattsburg. Engraving. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-49655

occupying the intervals between them. The *Eagle* was at the head of the line, followed by the *Saratoga*, *Ticonderoga*, and *Preble*. Macdonough also had the foresight to rig spring lines to his anchor cables, allowing him to rotate his ships at anchor. This was extremely important, since almost all of a ship's armament in the age of sail was fired through the side. That meant the guns could be aimed right or left through only a few degrees of arc. For major shifts in the direction of fire, the direction of the ship had to be changed. The use of spring lines and kedge anchors made it possible for a ship to change its axis through many degrees of arc.

Before the battle was joined, Downie had been rowed around Cumberland Point so he could see the American ships. He determined to sail past the Americans and then turn and come back up alongside Macdonough's ships. As he took his fleet around Cumberland Head at a little past 9 a.m., Downie's fleet was in a line abreast. At that point, the light winds and devastating fire from the American ships took over. The *Chubb* wound up breaking through under the stern of the *Saratoga*, but she came under the concentrated fire from the American gunboats and struck her colors. The *Linnet* swung up and around the *Eagle*, temporarily taking her out of action.

Downie aboard the *Confiance* maneuvered to the head of the American line, where he planned to anchor across the head of the first American ship. He managed to anchor several hundred yards from the *Saratoga*, and from that point he delivered several punishing broadsides. Macdonough on the *Saratoga* answered in kind, and early in the action Downie was killed. The *Finch* ran aground off Crabb Island (as Macdonough anticipated one of the British ships probably would) and had virtually no effect on the battle's outcome.

At a key point in the action, Macdonough was able use his spring lines to bring his undamaged guns into action. The *Confiance* had attempted but failed to do the same. After more than two hours of constant bombardment, the action was over.

Macdonough was the clear victor, and Lake Champlain was under firm U.S. control.

It would be difficult not to see Macdonough as an exceptional tactician and courageous naval leader. By positioning his ships in a way that negated his opposition's advantage of longer range cannons and then anchoring in a way that allowed him to adjust to the circumstances of the action as it developed, Macdonough was able to overcome an opponent who, at least in theory, should have prevailed in the action.

There is a significant degree of irony in the fact that Macdonough was influenced strongly by Britain's Admiral Lord Nelson in his tactics, particularly those Nelson employed in his victory at the Battle of the Nile in 1798. However, it's important to note that Macdonough did not slavishly follow Nelson's actions. For example, he chose the initial position of being anchored with shoal water to his back. That was the position of Nelson's Nile opponent, French Admiral Francois Brueys. On the other hand, Macdonough imitated Nelson's use of spring lines to increase the effectiveness of his firepower. Macdonough didn't learn just the facts of Nelson's victory, he learned the underlying principles of Nelson's success and applied those to the situation he faced off Plattsburgh. Perhaps most important, Macdonough was thoroughly prepared for the battle.

It may or may not have been deliberate, but it's interesting that even Macdonough's initial assessment of the Battle of Lake Champlain mirrored Nelson's at the Nile. In his report to his commander-in-chief, the Earl St. Vincent, Nelson's words were, "Almighty God has blessed his Majesty's Arms in the late Battle by a great Victory over the Fleet of the Enemy." In his message to Secretary of the Navy William Jones, Macdonough wrote a condensed version with essentially the same thought, "The Almighty has been pleased to grant us a signal victory."

There could be no greater tribute to Macdonough's professionalism than the words of British author William Laird Clowes, who focused on Macdonough's preparations for the battle:

Nothing was left to chance. Not only were his vessels provided with springs [spring lines] but also with anchors to be used astern in any emergency, so that they might shift their broadsides when necessary. If one battery was knocked out pieces he intended to use the other. Macdonough further prepared the *Saratoga* by laying a kedge anchor broad off on either bow, with a hawser and preventer hawser hanging in bights under water, leading from each quarter to the kedge of that side.¹⁵

Clowes also commented on Macdonough's overall performance and its strategic consequences. He was getting beyond tactics and a view of battles as free-standing events when he wrote:

Macdonough had performed a most notable feat, one which, of the whole, surpassed that of any other captain of either navy in this war. . . The consequences of the victory were very great, for it had a decisive effect upon the negotiations for peace which were then being carried on between the American and British commissioners at Ghent.¹⁶

The Immediate Results

The first result of the American naval victory on Lake Champlain and the stubborn resistance of Macomb's greatly outnumbered force of militias, local volunteers, and regular U.S. Army troops was that Prévost withdrew his army back into Canada. At that point it was clear that there could be no invasion of the United States by the British until the following spring, and that was a point in time that would be overtaken by the Treaty of Ghent and the end of the War of 1812 on Christmas Eve of 1814. In the course of events, neither the United States nor Great Britain held the trump card during the negotiations at Ghent. But thanks to the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain, particularly the latter, the negotiating position of the United States commissioners—John Quincy Adams, Albert Gallatin, and Henry Clay—was immeasurably strengthened.

As might be expected, there was an immediate short-term political benefit to President Madison and the Democratic-Republican Party (sometimes referred to during the era as the Republican Party), which had been established by Thomas Jefferson and Madison. Word of the American victory on Lake Champlain reached Madison at about the same time as news of the failure of the British attack against Baltimore's Fort McHenry. As Prévost and his army withdrew to Canada, the elements of Rear Admiral Cockburn's forces launched against Fort McHenry and Baltimore were withdrawing down Chesapeake Bay. It was finally becoming clear that Madison's overall policies—notwithstanding ongoing misjudgments about specific circumstances—were being vindicated.

Madison's reaction to the two pieces of news was understandably expansive, and he was liberal in his praise of Macdonough's achievement, as well as those of the commanding officers who had achieved the earlier American victories in single-ship combat.

Because of the strong Federalist opposition to the war, Madison's legacy was in considerable doubt during the conflict. Not surprisingly, the war's outcome improved perceptions of his presidency considerably, in both the short and long terms.

The Treaty of Ghent

The Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24, 1814. The negotiations had been going on since the previous August. The British negotiators were Royal Navy Admiral James Gambier, admiralty lawyer William Adams, and minor British diplomat Henry Goulburn. It was clear in the negotiations that they had no significant decision-making power. That power resided with the prime minister, colonial secretary, and the foreign secretary.

Many observers note that the treaty simply established a "status quo ante bellum." That opinion is frequently followed by the observation that thousands had died in the war for nothing. There were no exchanges of territory, and no punitive features to the agreement. The latter situation was particularly troubling to many in Britain; after all,

it was the United States that declared war. For their part, many Americans were distressed because the treaty didn't address impressment or restraints on U.S. ocean trade, the two issues that became the battle cry for those who had advocated going to war.

As it turned out, the concerns over impressment and free trade had become moot with the fall of Napoleon. Britain began reducing the size of the Royal Navy, eliminating its recruiting problems. As a result, British impressment of American seamen was never resumed after the war. In addition, Parliament had rescinded its Orders in Council, which were the basis for Britain's interference in U.S. trade, assuring free trade for U.S. merchants.

For its part, Britain could be confident that there would be no territorial ambitions about Canada on the part of the United States. This issue also concerned most Canadians. As previously noted, they had no wish to separate from the British monarchy.

There was one group that was devastated by the Treaty of Ghent: Native Americans who had allied themselves with Britain in the war. In return for the Indians' support against the United States, the British had promised that they would have their own nation. The British had intended that the establishment of an Indian nation would block further U.S. expansion into the Northwest. When the Treaty of Ghent was signed, however, from the British point of view there was no further purpose to push for this nation. In a statement loaded with both irony and cynicism, the treaty said that the Indian confederation headed by Tecumseh (who had been killed at the Battle of the Thames in October 1813) would be given "all the rights and privileges they enjoyed before the war."

Lasting Effects of the War

One of the longer-term positive impacts of the War of 1812 was the plain fact that America had survived the war, not just as a viable nation but as one on an upward trajectory of economic power and world influence. Notwithstanding the diplomatic miscalculations, internal political dissention, and military reversals in the field and at sea along the way, America had emerged as a united and vigorous nation. Louis Sérurier, the French minister in Washington at the war's end, saw the new status of the United States in terms of national character and naval power:

Finally the war has given the Americans what they so essentially lacked, a national character founded on a glory common to all. The United States are at this moment, in my eyes, a naval power. Within ten years they will be masters in their waters and upon their coasts.¹⁷

In truth, the minister underestimated the degree of mastery of the seas that the United States' industrial power and naval policies would accomplish. Within decades the United States would be well underway toward becoming not just a regional power but a global one.

Another longer-term result of the war was the recognition among the U.S. political leadership and the general public that if the United States was to have a significant

place among the world's nations, it must have a standing army and navy. The war had begun with the United States woefully unprepared militarily. It ended the war as a nation that was taken seriously around the world. That circumstance was not brought about by America's negotiating prowess. It was the result of negotiation backed by what its army and navy had achieved in combat.

A third result of the war was that it initiated a new relationship between the United States and Great Britain. The fact that there was a deeply emotional dislike between the citizens and the leadership of both countries leading up to the War of 1812 and extending to the Treaty of Ghent is undeniable. The resentment among the American colonies that triggered the War of Independence and the bitterness in Britain over America's renouncing its loyalty to the British crown was palpable. One of the most tangible expressions of this dislike can be found in the newspapers of the two countries. An item from the London newspaper *The Evening Star* is representative:

England shall not be driven from the proud pre-eminence, which the blood and treasure of her sons have attained for her among nations, by a piece of red, white, and blue-striped bunting flying at the mastheads of a few fir-built frigates, manned by a handful of bastards and outlaws.¹⁸

Following the Treaty of Ghent, however, the animosity on both sides began to dissolve. Slowly at first and then more rapidly, hatred evolved into respect and perhaps even familial feelings. The mutual support between the two countries was significant during the periods of war and peace during the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries, to the benefit of the people of both nations.

The Most Critical Consequence

Arguably the most important consequence of all was something that had nothing to do with either the initial reasons for the war or the treaty that ended it. It had to do with ideas of liberty. What the victories and defeats, mistakes on both sides, and the good and bad luck of the War of 1812 all added up to was a happening that is still playing out—the marriage of democratic political concepts to sea power. It was a phenomenon that harks back to Themistocles and the triremes of the Athenian empire of the fifth century B.C. The conjunction of American theories of liberty with global sea power in 1814 was an enormously important—and mostly positive—outcome that has significantly influenced world history.

Endnotes

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6. *Legion Magazine*, Jan-Feb 2012
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8. "Raking" involved firing broadsides into an enemy's bow or stern, with the shots traveling along the ship's axis.
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10. Mahan, Rear Admiral A. T., *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812* Vol. 2 (Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1919) 381, 382
11. Eckert, Edward K. *The Navy Department in the War of 1812* (Gainsville, Florida, University of Florida Press, 1973) 35
12. In the U.S. Navy of the time, Master Commandant was the rank between Lieutenant and Captain. While he was assigned to the Lake Champlain area, Macdonough was referred to as "Commodore," since he was in command of a squadron.
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March in Rondout Valley

The rain kept on
with strong gusts of wind
all through the night.
This morning the road is clear
where floods were predicted,
the rain has washed away
gravel-covered snow.

There are signs
that the farm markets
will open again this season,

smiling young girls
from ten-generation families,
descendents of New Netherlands
will return to their cash registers,
place fruits and vegetables
in the ancient weathered bins.
Later in the season, cabbages
brought from Katwijk aan Zee
four centuries ago
will once more be for sale.

In this timeless world
there's a tone of blue
rarely seen in the sky.
Maybe azure, or aquamarine-
all I know is, it's beautiful,
a word that looks
and sounds beautiful.

Someday, I will know
the names of the colors,
the birds, and the trees.

Tim Dwyer

Book Reviews



Carved from Granite: West Point Since 1902, Lance Betros. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 2012. (458 pp.)

At Brigadier General (Ret.) Lance Betros's ceremony marking his retirement from the U.S. Army after thirty-five years of service, Lieutenant General David H. Huntoon, Jr., called attention to Betros's latest book, *Carved from Granite: West Point Since 1902*, and singled out the two defining qualities of a cadet—character and intellect—that are the key elements of the book's thesis.

These observations by the fifty-eighth Superintendent of the United States Military Academy (USMA) must have given Betros great satisfaction. Huntoon and his successors clearly are the targets of the author's recommendations for improving the academy so it can reach its potential "to produce even better officers in the future."

Carved from Granite is truly an insider's look at the institutional history of the USMA. Betros graduated from West Point in 1977, a year after his class was buffeted by a cheating incident that rocked the academy's very foundations. He went on to serve as an instructor of American History there from 1986 to 1989 and then (after completing his doctorate at the University of North Carolina) as a professor and head of its Department of History from 2005 to 2012.

Betros devoted his scholarship to the study of West Point. In his first book, a collection of essays entitled *West Point: Two Centuries and Beyond* (2004), he argued that the first century of the "old West Point," after Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer (1817-1833) set up the system, was marked more by continuity than change. Betros's thesis was: "Steeped in military tradition and proud of its long legacy of service, West Point stands like granite against the tide of social currents.... Continuity—not change—is what most characterizes West Point and the Corps of Cadets." However, after six additional years of research that informed his writing of *Carved from Granite*, Betros came to a markedly different conclusion, at least regarding the period since the academy's 1902 centennial. During those years, he argues that the granite had shifted, and "change, not continuity best describes the history of West Point." The corpus of his book elaborates on those changes.

The organization of *Carved from Granite* provides an in-depth history of the USMA and a detailed analysis of its core programs. The opening chapter covers the first century of West Point's life—the "Old West Point"—as background for the academy that has continued to evolve since 1902. The rest of the book explores governance, admissions, academics, physical education, military training, leader development, and character development. In each of these areas, Betros can report change, mostly for the better,

as the Corps of Cadets has grown from 500 to 4,417. Philosophically, he found that West Point had moved away from paternalism, the concept that academy officials knew “what was best for young cadets” and permitted no variation to the established program. Additionally, West Point gradually replaced its unforgiving culture of attrition with a more nurturing environment that forgave minor failures and promoted progressive development. In the area of governance, he found that after the cheating scandal of 1976, the locus of administrative power had moved from the Academic Board (representing the major departments) to the Superintendent, the senior military officer who serves as the academy’s president. In short, West Point had undergone a transformation from collegial to centralized governance. In specific programmatic areas, Betros gives high marks to reforms in academics, military training, and leader development based on a diversified core curriculum, an academic majors program, a four-class leadership system, and realistic training for the challenges cadets will face in their military careers.

While *Carved from Granite* is directed at the larger West Point community, its appeal should extend to all educational institutions, as it calls for setting priorities so that the focus of academic leaders is on students’ intellectual and moral development. Betros concluded that “Throughout its history, West Point has been most successful when its leaders focused on character and intellect as the preeminent developmental goals for cadets; conversely, the institution experienced the greatest difficulties when its leaders gave unwarranted priority to other less important goals.”

While Betros stresses the dimensions of the West Point experience that have earned its reputation for excellence, he wants to make it even better—for the benefit of the nation, the Army, and cadets. He cites three problems and proposes solutions for each. In the first, governance, he wants the academy “to reinvigorate the Academic Board to provide counsel on all matters related to cadets, faculty, and the integrated curriculum.” From Betros’s perspective as a former member of the Academic Board (composed of the Superintendent, Commandant of Cadets, and heads of academic departments), a greater role for that body would balance the long-term perspective of the tenured faculty with the more immediate focus of West Point’s chief administrator, who generally serves a five-year term. Such a change would indeed rely on collegiality with the Superintendent and his staff, as many historians have highlighted the inertia against change that epitomized the Academic Board’s pre-1977 performance as West Point’s “dominant policy-making body.” In his introduction to *West Point: Two Centuries and Beyond*, Betros noted that throughout the academy’s history, critics viewed the Academic Board “as the main culprit” to “salutary change.” Since he thinks that the initiatives of the Academic Board have enhanced the quality of education, his earlier caution remains operative: “Only time will tell if the new balance of power will keep the Academy at the forefront of innovation or overwhelm it with constant change.” The Superintendent who implemented the change in governance, Lieutenant General Andrew J. Goodpaster, would applaud what has transpired since he said, in an oral history that I conducted, that he had strengthened the role of the Academic Board

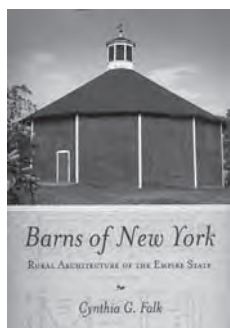
by “making it very clear that they [its members] would be responsible for giving the academic direction needed at the Military Academy.”

The second problem cited by Betros relates to the admission of new cadets. While he found that the academy had improved its system for accessing talented cadets with competitive Congressional appointments, the whole candidate evaluation system, and affirmative-action initiatives, he remains concerned that it has “allowed a large number of lower-quality applicants to enter West Point and thus displace more-qualified applicants.”

The third area of concern, closely related to the second, is “the effect of intercollegiate athletics on the overall quality of the Corps of Cadets.” Even as the scandal with the Penn State football program has unfolded in the summer of 2012, Betros singles out West Point’s “heightened emphasis on intercollegiate athletics” as one of the “most dangerous” problems the academy faces. Since the football program is the flagship for varsity sports at West Point (as it is at many other top-tier colleges and universities), it is the target of many of Betros’s criticisms. From his perspective, it detracts from West Point’s core mission of educating, training, and inspiring the Corps of Cadets. There is irony involved here: West Point recruited Betros to play varsity football and, as he related at his retirement ceremony, he first heard of West Point from the Army football coach who visited his Poughkeepsie home to recruit him for the program. Maybe because of his time as a football player in the 1970s and his work in securing the NCAA’s certification of West Point’s athletic programs in 2009, Betros hopes the academy will “take a stand against the commercialized and professionalized world of intercollegiate sports.” In particular, he would like to see West Point re-embrace its former, longstanding commitment to the principle that competitive athletics “were a complement to the overall physical program and that winning was not the principal goal.” This idea was institutionalized by “Master of the Sword” Herman Koehler, West Point’s director of physical education from 1885 to 1923, but it has waned markedly over the past several decades.

General Betros has leveraged the insights gained by many years’ experience at West Point to propose changes to make a great institution even better. He is proud that “By the early twenty-first century, the Academy had achieved a reputation as an elite undergraduate institution and one of the premier leader development institutions in the world.” In the perennial struggle about following the hallmarks of either ancient Athens or Sparta, he wants the leaders of the U.S. Army and the United States Military Academy to focus on the bedrock that has made this degree of excellence possible—the development of an environment in which leaders of character and intellect can thrive. That’s the academy that must continue to be carved by its leaders from the granite of West Point.

Colonel (Ret.) James M. Johnson, Hudson River Valley Institute



Barns of New York: Rural Architecture of the Empire State, Cynthia G. Falk. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012 (268 pp.)

Farming might be the only occupation in which the better you do, the worse off you are. When farmers increase production, the law of supply and demand drives down the amount paid per pound of milk or bushel of apples. The only possible response is to produce even more, and on it goes.

Farmers who embrace change are the ones who survive.

Not surprisingly then, change—"constant alteration and adjustment" (xii)—is the theme Cynthia Falk keeps coming back to in *Barns of New York*. In the Hudson Valley, for example, the coming of the railroad caused farmers to switch to dairy or increase the size of their herds to accommodate the New York City market. As farmers began to specialize, barns reflected this specialization. The man-made landscape came to include barns of all shapes and sizes, as some farmers built new, some modified what they had, and some tried to make do. Armed with Falk's book, the roadside observer will be able to distinguish between an English barn and a Dutch barn, between a hop house and a dairy barn. Educated guesses can be made about the ages of barns because Falk gives us dates that correspond to steps in barn evolution. The generous number of illustrations is one of the book's strong points.

Barns matter, as Falk points out, because they "can tell us more about...history and culture than one-of-a-kind landmarks that are so often pictured in architectural histories and tourist guide books" (i). They are important precisely because they are (most of them) not extraordinary but commonplace. They are commonplace both in the sense that there were many examples built of certain types of buildings, and they were the work stations of the common man and woman. In the early republic, ninety percent of Americans were farmers, and at least fifty percent for most of the nineteenth century. Agriculture remains one of the largest components of the state's economy. Today, a tiny fraction of the population grows and raises more food than ever, and abandoned farmland covers upstate New York.

Barns can usually be categorized accurately from the outside. Understanding them takes place on the interior. Details in the construction and floor plan of barns tell you more about people—how the farmer spends his day—than houses or other work environments do. In a house, what people bring into it—furniture, pictures, clothes, books—tell us about them and how they use space. Different families might put the same room to different uses. The house itself is a shell that awaits people to give it meaning.

Not so with barns. Certain tasks require certain features in the barn's construction: Cows cannot be milked in the granary or grain stored in the milking parlor. Barns are the articulation of human behavior in ways houses aren't.

Falk's barns are populated with farmers and livestock. Happily for the reader, she

often crosses over from a discussion of architecture to a discussion of processes. The dairymen we meet are concerned about keeping dust out of the milk and cooling fresh milk until it can be moved to market. They design their workspace accordingly. Falk's farmers are here collecting and spreading manure, there threshing, shucking corn, filling silos—up early, working late. There is no clock-watching in farming.

While all the types of barns are covered, there is a certain lack of proportion to the book. The basement barn, which Falk treats together with the bank barn (a barn built into the side of a hill), "is the most common type of barn" (36). She gives it about six and a half pages of text. The three-bay English barn, which evolved into the bank barn, gets just over a page of text. (In most cases, a bank barn is just a three-bay English barn with a basement.) Meanwhile, far less important barns used to store and process tobacco, grapes, and hops are covered comprehensively. Tobacco has never been a major crop in New York, Falk writes, but she gives it twice the space she gives the English barn (169). Alas, the unheralded English barn, not as exotic as its structural cousin the Dutch barn, still awaits its day in the sun.

Falk says the problem is that "documentary sources about vernacular architecture are scarce" (34). By documentary sources, she must mean printed sources, because thousands of vernacular buildings exist today as primary sources. Members of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society and Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture have written dozens of scholarly articles based primarily on observations made of extant vernacular barns.

Indeed, vernacular architecture is under-represented and not explained. "Vernacular architecture" is a term of art in the study of material culture. Henry Glassie, cited several times by Falk as an authority, has written widely about architecture he calls "vernacular" or "folk." "Folk objects," says Glassie, are "non popular, non academic" (*Patterns in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, 5). Vernacular architecture is often tradition-based and local, developed by a specific people addressing specific needs, utilizing building material and technology available in their time and place. Dutch colonists in the Hudson and Mohawk valleys built barns like the barns they had known across the ocean, and their children and grandchildren continued to build those barns. For over 200 years after European settlement, all barns were vernacular. Very few barns built from the early twentieth century forward can be called vernacular.

Falk's book is top-heavy with discussion and illustrations of barn plans published in architectural journals, textbooks, and government publications as a way to press her point that the farmer was constantly being educated about improvements that would lead to greater productivity. However, innovations were not universally adopted. Statistically, most farms went out of business because the farmer went into another type of employment, or his children did, and so it is safe to say *most* farmers did not adopt modern equipment and practices. There is a danger, therefore, in relying too heavily on what agriculture school professors and salesmen said farmers should be doing. For instance, Falk reports that "horse powered machines remained prevalent until the turn of the 20th century." (184) Actually, on marginal farms in the Hudson

Valley and Catskill Mountains, of which there were many, horses were common until after World War Two.

The missing link between the farmer and the plans developed by experts is the adaptation of those plans by the farmer. Except where we are being shown plans of an identified barn on an identified farm, Falk provides no examples of barns that actually followed the plans she uses to demonstrate progressive farming practices. Data collected through field work showing which recommendations in new barn construction were followed would be an interesting addition to the literature.

Curiously, there is a lack of farmers cited as sources. The endnotes contain one citation of an interview in the first 156 pages, which may or may not have been of a farmer. While photos of barns are used to illustrate the text, there are no barns cited as sources.

Generalizations have been made from limited printed material when more care could have been taken. Hay presses, Falk says, “were usually portable” (124). She cites in her endnote an advertisement for a portable hay press from an 1855 agricultural journal. Next she reports that the hay press was replaced by the hay baler. The hay press and hay baler, however, fulfilled different needs. Here in the Hudson Valley, where farmers were happy to help feed the tens of thousands of horses on New York City streets, non-portable hay presses were installed in barns and created bales that were shipped downriver, even as the same farmers stored loose hay for their own use. Later, after World War Two, hay balers pulled in the field by tractors eliminated the practice of storing loose hay.

For Falk, associate professor of Material Culture at SUNY Oneonta, *Barns of New York* is an ambitious undertaking. This is the first book dedicated to a statewide overview. She has filled a void on an often overlooked, richly deserving topic and covered a lot of ground in a concise manner.

Don't leave Falk's book on the shelf. Take it with you on a drive and use it to make sense of those buildings you ordinarily pass without recognition. The architecture of barns is the architecture of work done mostly, not long ago, by man and animal. If you are looking for a place to connect with the past, you cannot do much better than a barn.

Ted Hilscher



***My Reach: A Hudson River Memoir*, Susan Fox Rogers. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011. (240pp.)**

Susan Fox Rogers, visiting associate professor of Writing at Bard College, strikes out on her own with her first book, a well-structured memoir. She captures many fascinating aspects of the Hudson River Valley, including its natural and environmental history, industry, famous individuals, early explorers, and native tribes. With Rogers as a guide, the reader follows her gaze, adopting her unique perspective as she ruminates about the local histories of towns along whose shores she paddles. The narrator tells us: “Being on the water does magical things—purifies and heals, washes and cools, enlivens and frightens.” As she voyages forth in her kayak, she also confronts the loss of her parents, whose voices reverberate throughout the narrative. In this search for solace, she is not afraid to face the emotional force of mourning. Throughout, she is sustained by the river. This is a noteworthy account, equally impressive as her brave and gripping journey by kayak from North Tivoli Bay to Manhattan. Propelled by a sense of discovery, the reader is launched onto the Hudson River, the central pervading presence. With this adventurous memoir, we experience the narrator’s great array of firsthand reflections, thereby gaining an intimate acquaintance with all she perceives.

A “reach” is a section of the river, and the author affectionately calls hers in Tivoli “Rogers Reach.” Toward the outset, she shares an intimate glimpse: “The life of a river I wanted to know would be found in exploring abandoned icehouses or cement factories that stand on the banks. Learning the river would mean seeing the sturgeon that course its depths, the snapping turtles and crabs lodged in the mud, and the osprey that plunge dramatically into the water as they hunt for food. If I wanted to know the river, I had to venture out.”

From the vantage point of her kayak, Rogers observes an abundance of wildlife and constructs surprisingly endearing portraits of often taken-for-granted species, such as the snapping turtle and sturgeon. Staying keenly alert to weather patterns, she spies migrating Canada geese and monarch butterflies. She demonstrates environmental sensitivity and refined sharp eyes while sharing her appreciation for “wisteria and lilac in irresistible bloom,” reeds and cattails, great blue heron, beaver, mute swans and osprey, Bald eagles, and spatterdock. She also shares information on lesser-known species: “there were heath hens, now extinct, and mountain lions, the last one shot in the 1850s.” Though not preachy, Rogers is an environmentally conscious observer who develops a caring ethos, choosing to include information about the Storm King Case and pollution, including PCBs.

For instance, Rogers offers an especially intriguing description of the snapping turtle: “there is something so prehistoric, so monstrous, in the fleshy, clawed feet and

almost-flat carapace that I find the turtle fascinating, even beautiful.” Then, she cleverly builds a bridge between environmental degradation and her mother’s illness: “Hudson River turtle soup holds 230 ppm of PCBs. Did my mother ever make turtle soup? Where did her cancer come from?”

Her account of the sturgeon is also particularly impressive, as Rogers explains the scientific basis for a revelation: “Sturgeon are a relict species, that is, they haven’t changed since the Mesozoic era, some 65-230 million years ago. So I was, in fact, touching something with a genetic code more ancient than the dinosaurs.” Continuing her illustration, she asks: “What did touching a sturgeon feel like? Smooth, like leather. Slick, like time. Solid, like love and death.” Weighing 120 pounds and boasting a “toothless oval underslung mouth,” sturgeon, she reminds us, were once referred to as “Albany beef.” Such engaging scenes are reminiscent of Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

After the loss of her parents, Rogers’ observations serve an essential function. Part paean to fauna, she celebrates: “there was nothing as glorious as the turtle or the eagles, nothing as affirming as the pair of ducks or the nesting cormorants, nothing as simple and as beautiful as each paddle stroke, nothing as sure as the movement of the river.” Impressively, she is able to express profound emotion without overwrought prose. Certain lines become appropriately poetic, as when she writes: “The thrum of dawn was on.” Her language is aptly descriptive but not overly indulgent or flowery, and she constructs precise imagery. Like her father, she holds an “allegiance to truth,” thereby constructing realistic rather than romanticized or idealized depictions. One senses an unmasked human being with a fine intelligence coming off the page.

The memoir achieves variation with nods to Hudson Valley industry; some of her jaunts contemplate ice harvesting, tugboats, and brickyards. While recounting her swim across the Hudson, she notes matter-of-factly: “Oil spills that coat the river or sewage pipes that break are not uncommon events.” During this suspenseful and dramatic episode, a barge closely approaches her: “I’m not sure why I didn’t see the *Virginia C.* as I crossed the river from Beacon to Plum Point.” This leads to a striking simile: “The vision of the barge on the horizon made me feel like a butterfly in a stiff wind trying to dodge an oncoming car.” Rogers does not shy from the fact that this is “a working river,” with tugs transporting “oil, junked cars, a huge range of building supplies.” Due to her newfound realization of the extensive pollution in the Hudson, she volunteers to clean up the river, and remarks: “hailed spent tires out of North Tivoli Bay, as well as a range of other stuff people toss overboard—dolls, coolers, Styrofoam, plastic jugs.”

Furthermore, the narrative recalls early explorers, famous inhabitants, and contemporary, often quirky river dwellers whose lives take shape along the Hudson. At times, she presents deeper considerations of the region’s landmarks, interjecting precious tidbits of local history. One historical figure who strongly stands out is Dorothy Day. Landing near Rose Hill in the aftermath of her mother’s death, Rogers recounts Day’s mission, concluding: “Solace for our suffering, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, could be found in community.” In an interesting fashion, she notes of Rose

Hill: “That one house could move from sheltering the wealthy to orphans to Catholic radicals, and now an artist, is a story that, with variation, can be told throughout the valley.” As her paddle cuts through waves, she imaginatively conveys the perspective of Robert Juet, the *Half Moon*’s first mate, admitting: “When I read Juet’s journal, I want in on this voyage, to feel the miracle of seeing this land in such a pure state.”

Importantly, Rogers does not leave out the deep history of the indigenous peoples of the region. She reminds readers of important place names; for example, she explains that the Algonquian name Cocksackie translates to “owl hoot.” One of the most compelling scenes occurs when Rogers, along with Mary Burns, explores Magdalen Island. With the investigative acumen of Nancy Drew, she asks Mary, “What are all the little pink flags?” only to learn that they indicate “looter pits,” holes dug by people in search of Native American relics, “where someone had taken arrowheads, pottery, the story of a people.” Rogers explains she recovered “burned fish bone, nutshells, and seeds.” For readers whose interest is piqued and would like to learn more about the history over which Rogers lingers, she provides a “Books Consulted” section with over 40 selections.

Spending such a great deal of time on the river allows Rogers rewarding reflections and she maintains a sense of magical discovery. She confesses: “the river had seeped into my life so fast, so naturally. When I spoke about my kayak outings, I caught myself saying ‘I love the Hudson River.’ And I wondered if it was possible to love a river.” These powerful realizations help her to cope with the loss of her parents and are essential to her healing. Through this journey, the reader implicitly realizes the cathartic nature of the writing process as well as the restorative benefits of creating close connections with place. In this respect, *My Reach* is reminiscent of Terry Tempest Williams’ *Refuge*. Both texts transform grief into renewal through intense bonds—Williams with Great Salt Lake and Rogers with the Hudson. As Rogers’ memoir eloquently memorializes her parents, the beneficent powers of the river become even more apparent.

This is a rewarding and highly engaging memoir that Hudson Valley readers will no doubt want to share with their loved ones. Rogers’ main messages remain relevant: she reminds us of the therapeutic value of near-at-hand nature, the importance of companionship, and that we must all continue forth courageously. As her mother emphatically told her, “You have to commit to life.” She similarly affirms, “I was, as I had hoped, paddling toward light.” The memoir ultimately transmits a healing ritual, in which kayaking becomes almost ceremonial. At its core, Rogers’ text is held together by a building sense of solid rejuvenation and unending possibility.

Stephen Mercier, Marist College



The Memory of All Ancient Customs: Native American Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley, Tom Arne Midtrød. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. (289 pp.)

Retelling the native past of the Hudson Valley is like making a quilt out of scraps. Thankfully, Tom Arne Midtrød has the patience to do patchwork. Meticulously, he stitches together many fragments of published and archival evidence in this new book about the valley's Indians in the colonial period. Along with the growing shelf of new titles on the region's natives by Robert S. Grumet, Paul Otto, and Amy C. Schutt, this study deepens our understanding of the people who lived in one of the busiest corridors of British North America yet too often are misunderstood or forgotten.

Midtrød's study focuses on both downriver and upriver folks who lived from the modern site of Greater New York City all the way to the Albany area. All of these people spoke close variants of the family of Algonquian tongues known as "Delaware" or "Lenape." As Midtrød demonstrates convincingly, "strong ties linked these various groups to one another." Villagers belonged to real and metaphoric extended families, shared a set of diplomatic customs and ideas, and had a general tendency to side with their fellow river folk when dealing with intrusions from outside Indians or Europeans (xix). In telling the story of the first two centuries of colonization, Midtrød faces a number of challenges. The seventeenth-century Dutch accounts are both sparse and maddeningly unspecific; many Dutch authors wrote about Indians as a generic monolith, making no distinction between inland, river, and coastal peoples. And later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English administrative sources are sometimes spotty. The Indian peoples of the Hudson appear inconsistently and under a changing set of group names.

Midtrød aims to write a study with "relations among Native peoples at center stage" (xii). His "central premise" is that valley folk "tended to deal with the colonizers as they did any other group of people," and that this insight can take us beyond the simplistic "binary juxtaposition of Natives and newcomers" (xv, xiii). A glance at the chapter titles might give the impression that the book is a narrative. They progress from "Struggling with the Dutch" to "Living with the English" to "Disaster and Dispersal." But the nine chapters are only loosely chronological and often draw evidence from a wide range of time periods. The result is not exactly a story, but a stage-by-stage analysis of the river's native politics from contact to the American Revolution. The author also devotes the bulk of his attention to the seventeenth century, when valley Indians figured more prominently in colonial papers on native affairs.

The book's topical approach helps trace the contours of the native political landscape. In his first two chapters, which describe the workings of Indian diplomacy, Midtrød makes a number of sensitive observations about the power of metaphor and fictive kinship in the river Indian political culture, and he is cautious never to overgen-

eralize. His method of mixing early and later evidence helps him argue convincingly that river Indians had a sustained tradition of respecting each other's local authority while often forming loose alliances in times of trouble. They were "no mere collection of disconnected groups," but rather independent villages that shared old and lasting bonds of blood, sympathy, and friendship maintained without "permanent councils or other forums" (23, 60). Upriver and downriver villagers held common beliefs about how to avenge murders, settle boundary disputes, and welcome native refugees into their homes. The central problem river folk faced was that colonists did not care for these customs, nor were they as committed to the ideal of peace.

Instead of narrating the grim series of aggressive wars led by New Netherland governors Willem Kieft and Petrus Stuyvesant from the 1640s to 1660s, Midtrød steps back to examine larger trends. Primarily, he finds the Netherlands guilty of general indifference to Indian practices and customs. For example, the Dutch were "unwilling to adapt to Native notions of reciprocal gift exchange" and the Indians were "disappointed to find [the colonists] openly scornful of their religion" (65). While "Native leaders could not make the newcomers find their place as junior partners beholden to the locals," they did reach "a second best outcome": "the Dutch and Natives were in principle equals in their treaties and agreements" (78). But as the English took command of the Hudson Valley's colonial settlements in the 1660s and 1670s, this idea of equality between began to fade.

The book's finest moments come when Midtrød traces the "change in posture" in river Indians' political position in the 1660s and 1670s (87). Making excellent use of a number of unpublished sources, he shows how the Hudson natives navigated a series of confluent events. Around the same time that the English drove the Dutch out of the governor's house on Manhattan Island, King Philip's War broke out in New England. The inland Iroquois Confederacy seized this opportunity to make themselves the regional broker between all Indians in the Northeast. During this turmoil, the river Indians increasingly began to use the honorific "father" for English governors, rather than "brethren." The English in turn began to call the natives "children." Yet Midtrød is quick to show that these terms were not necessarily loaded with "European connotations of stern and authoritarian patriarchy"; the river folks also used the metaphor of elder brethren when speaking with the Iroquois (88). Thus by the 1690s, "Hudson Valley Indians had two senior relatives in their immediate neighborhood: the Iroquois and the government of New York" (129). Placing the river peoples within their larger imagined family explains how they saw the century to come—they could appeal to both their brothers and fathers or play one off against the other.

The book moves rather briskly from the 1690s to the 1780s, as disease and land loss led to the fracturing of the native political world, with the majority of river peoples heading west and only a few small communities remaining after the Revolution. As their numbers thinned from disease, many decamped to Anglican and Moravian missions, while others began slow and fitful moves toward future homes in the American and

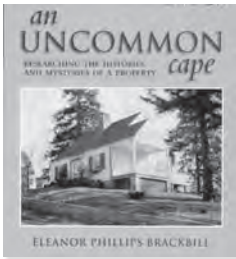
Canadian Great Lakes and Plains, where their communities survive today. Still the eventual exodus inland “should not obscure the fact that the Indian societies of this area had been remarkably tenacious” for two centuries of the colonial invasion (210).

While his analytical bent is generally a strength, it unfortunately lets Midtrød slip into jargon. When discussing gift-giving, talking, marrying, mating, fighting, and gossiping between Indians, he favors abstract terms like “modes of intergroup relations” or “spheres of interaction,” or else he borrows phrases that seem to belong in a corporate boardroom. At one point, he describes sachems’ dealings with their neighbors as “an integral part of their strategic outlook” (100). He is especially fond of the buzzword “network,” a term that better evokes blinking servers and plastic-coated wires than the reasons people paddled canoes and followed paths from one wooden village to another.

Still, with its hard-earned insights drawn from wide and deep research, *The Memory of All Ancient Customs* is a valuable resource to historians of the region. Midtrød’s admirable attention to Indian perspectives helps him put together his many swatches of evidence and recreate the fabric of the colonial-era Hudson.

Andrew C. Lipman, Syracuse University.

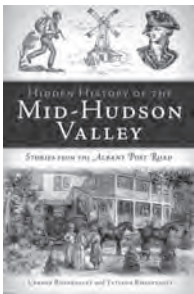
New & Noteworthy Books Received



An Uncommon Cape: Researching the Histories and Mysteries of a Property

By Eleanor Phillips Brackbill (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012)
259 pp. \$24.95 (hardcover) www.sunypress.edu

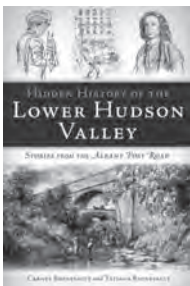
The Hudson River Valley is filled with houses rich in history and architectural significance. Among these is the author's 1930s-era Cape Cod style, an example of a McCall's mail order home common during that era. Enduring a relocation to allow for the construction of Interstate 95 as well as thirty-two different landowners over 350 years, the history of Brackbill's property is intertwined with the history of the region surrounding it. Focusing on four of its many owners, the author tells the story of a structure and land that encompasses generations' worth of societal development.



Hidden History of the Mid-Hudson Valley

By Carney Rhinevault and Tatiana Rhinevault (Charleston, SC : The History Press, 2011) 192 pp. \$19.99 (paperback) www.historypress.net

The first of two new books chronicling stories from the Albany Post Road, once the Hudson River Valley's main travel artery, this volume focuses on Dutchess and Columbia counties. It covers famous residents (Samuel Morse, Martin Van Buren) as well as lesser-known individuals (Nathaniel Pendleton, the Smith Brothers) who had an impact on the region. Important local events and places—the Anti-Rent Wars in Columbia County, the Underground Railroad, and the 1963 Poughkeepsie book burning—also are highlighted. Using a combination of historical resources and local lore, this book sheds new light on this important road.



Hidden History of the Lower Hudson Valley

By Carney Rhinevault and Tatiana Rhinevault (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012).192 pp. \$19.99 (paperback) www.historypress.net

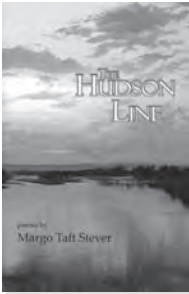
This second set of stories from the Albany Post Road covers its passage through Westchester County and down into New York City. The authors bring to life a wide array of people, places and events—including the Philipse family of Yonkers and Sleepy Hollow, Sing Sing Prison, and the 1949 anti-Communist riots at Cortlandt. Complete with hand-drawn images to supplement the text, the book also includes a three-part section chronicling Revolutionary War spies.



Apostle Islands

By Tommy Zurhellen (Kensington, MD: Atticus Books LLC, 2012)
240 pp. \$14.95 (paperback) <http://atticusbooksonline.com>

In the sequel to his debut novel *Nazareth, North Dakota*, Hudson River Valley author Tommy Zurhellen once again delivers modern myths and miracles that will delight the faithful reader. Set mostly in the present, and mostly around Lake Superior, Zurhellen uses vivid imagery to create relatable characters and situations. Whether it is the Last Supper or an innovative twist on the Book of Revelation, the style and character of writing makes *Apostle Islands* an exciting and enjoyable read.



The Hudson Line

Poems by Margo Taft Stever (Charlotte, NC: Margo Taft Stever, 2012).
38 pp. \$8.50 (paperback) www.mainstreetrag.com

A collection of poems from a Hudson River Valley author. Using the region as a backdrop in a number of poems, *The Hudson Line* explores a variety of themes, including longing and uncertainty. The author utilizes vivid and at times stark visual imagery to create and manipulate the reader's emotions. While many of the sentiments are familiar, Stever's unique presentation conveys a new and refreshing approach.



The Mightier Hudson:

The Spirited Revival of a Treasured Landscape

By Roger D. Stone (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2012)
264 pp. \$24.95 (paperback) www.lyonspress.com

The industrial history of the Hudson River and its waterfront towns has shaped the region for centuries, with both beneficial and detrimental results. As the economic focus of many towns has shifted from industry to tourism, the Hudson River Valley has undergone an ecological revitalization both in the water and on land. In *The Mightier Hudson*, the author highlights some of the many transformations taking place, among them turning the former Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge into the Walkway Over Hudson, the City of Hudson's renewal, and the many recreational opportunities the river now provides. Complete with quotes from individuals responsible for these initiatives as well as many personal memories, the book sheds light on the triumphs and challenges surrounding the environmental restoration of the Hudson River.

Andrew Villani, The Hudson River Valley Institute

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The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College is the academic arm of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. Its mission is to study and to promote the Hudson River Valley and to provide educational resources for heritage tourists, scholars, elementary school educators, environmental organizations, the business community, and the general public. Its many projects include publication of *The Hudson River Valley Review* and the management of a dynamic digital library and leading regional portal site.

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