

COPYRIGHT / USAGE

Material on this site may be quoted or reproduced for **personal and educational purposes** without prior permission, provided appropriate credit is given. Any commercial use of this material is prohibited without prior permission from The Special Collections Department - Langsdale Library, University of Baltimore. Commercial requests for use of the transcript or related documentation must be submitted in writing to the address below.

When crediting the use of portions from this site or materials within that are copyrighted by us please use the citation: *Used with permission of the University of Baltimore.*

If you have any requests or questions regarding the use of the transcript or supporting documents, please contact us:

Langsdale Library
Special Collections Department
1420 Maryland Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21201-5779
<http://archives.ubalt.edu>

ADDRESS BEFORE THE ORDER
OF THE CROWN OF CHARLEMAGNE
October 11, 1980

Mr. President General Buck, members of the Order of the Crown of Charlemagne and their ladies and guests.

It is a pleasure and distinction to be with you this evening and a privilege to talk to you about the Defense of Fort McHenry and the Battle of North Point, generally referred to as the "Battle of Baltimore" and its significance in the War of 1812.

Your venerable and prestigious Order and the comparably infantile Society of the War of 1812 have similar objectives and purposes - that is to bring together descendants of those valiant men who fought to protect their country and their ideals; to recognize and commemorate their deeds and achievements; and to inspire patriotism and loyalty to our Country.

It is appropriate that I welcome you to Baltimore, the birthplace of our National Anthem, and the location of Fort McHenry, over which the Star Spangled Banner flew on September 14, 1814.

One historian wrote that the Battle of Baltimore was an insignificant battle in an insignificant war. It is my purpose to convince you of the inaccuracy of that statement.

Let us take a panoramic view of the circumstances surrounding our young United States prior to our Declaration of War against Great Britain by our Congress on June 18, 1812.

Our Revolutionary War had won us Independence and the resources of America. England had lost a colony of unlimited

territory, and a valuable commercial customer. And she had acquired an aggressive competitor for World Trade.

With unlimited lands to the West, open for development, and with capacity for maritime trade, wealth and opportunity, World Power was within our reach.

Great Britain was desparately embroiled in a depleting war with Napoleon's France, requiring the operation and maintenance of a navy of about 700 warships manned by 150,000 ill-fed and poorly paid sailors and marines. It became impossible to obtain sufficient crews by normal free enlistment. Sailors deserted and many of them sought refuge and safety on American vessels. The British assumed the right to board and search American vessels to retrieve their deserters, but refused to acknowledge that a native Englishman could lawfully acquire American citizenship.

This was "Impressment" that infuriated Americans.

Negotiations failed to solve the crises. The flash point was reached when the British warship "Leopard" hailed the American warship "Chesapeake," and demanded its assumed right to search it for deserters. The "Chesapeake" did not promptly comply and the "Leopard" opened fire for fifteen minutes, then, by force, boarded the "Chesapeake," crossed its bloodied decks and took off four men. As a result, our Congress, after due procedure, declared war on June 18, 1912.

The Declaration of War was not a unanimous decision in Congress and became a political party issue. The Democratic Party, representing the agricultural states of the South and

developing West, favored the War. The Federalist Party of New England, the commercial and maritime states which would suffer most by the war time interruptions, were opposed to the War. New England took an attitude of passive resistance and furnished little money and few men to the war effort. The Governors of Massachusetts and Connecticut denied that the Federal Government had the power to make a draft for men upon their State Militia and discouraged enlistments.

Thus the fifteen United States, suffering from a bitter political diversity and a strong sectional division, entered into a self-declared war with the possessor of the greatest navy of that day and the proud and confident military victor over Napoleon.

Our military victories and successes had not been outstanding except for some conquests such as Lake Erie and Plattsburg and certain naval ship against ship engagements.

Great Britain's resources had been depleted, its trade and commerce frustrated, its people weary of war and of financial stresses and strains. A valuable customer has been excommunicated who would become an aggressive competitor for World Trade.

Britain needed a great victory and the refunding *of its coffers* through spoils of War - territory and replenishment of resources. Where and how could this be accomplished?

England, with Wellington's defeat of Napoleon, was now free to divert its veteran armies and experienced naval ships, under experienced leadership, against America.

Now let us examine the Chesapeake Bay scene in early 1814.

The British Fleet under Admiral Cockburn had been roaming and ravaging the Eastern and Western Shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

They had bottled up Norfolk, based troops on Tangier Island, bombarded the town of St. Michaels, landed troops at Tolchester for an attack on Chestertown, and burned Georgetown and Havre de Grace at the head of the Bay.

They had sailed up the Patuxant River and launched an attack on Washington, our young Capital, taken it and put it to the torch, leaving the Government buildings in charred ruins. Our President Madison was forced to flee.

Our Militia, in an effort to defend Washington, had failed at Bladensburg and were forced to "retire" leaving the field in the hands of the British.

Times and events were grim!

The cannons of War were pointed toward Baltimore.

But Why Baltimore?

Picture in your mind the East Coast of our young Country, not then fifty years old, made up of fifteen States politically diversified and sectionally divided, stretching southward from Maine, through New England to Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah and then westward to our newly acquired New Orleans on the Gulf Coast.

Where was the effective center of those 15 States in 1814? Baltimore, at the head of the Chesapeake, 180 miles of navigable water from the Atlantic Ocean, is the answer.

Where was the main road leading to the developing West?

The answer is the "Old National Pike" (commenced 1806), now known as Route 40, running from Baltimore westward through Cumberland, West Virginia, Ohio and Indiana to the source of those supplies - grain, furs, lumber and coal - so necessary to an expanding nation, and so important to a depleted England.

Baltimore and the Old National Pike were the gateway to the West, passing through the gap between the Allegheny Mountains to the south and the mountains of Pennsylvania, New York and New England to the north. It was the best passage west to the Great Lakes and thence south to New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico by way of the Wabash, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The attack on New Orleans was in the British plans and came in January 1815 after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent but before its approval by Congress.

Acquisition and control of this vast area would have given the British three important advantages. It would have supplied them with the West and all its riches.

It would have given them a water route south to the Gulf of Mexico. And most importantly, the taking of Baltimore and the control of the road to the West would have divided our new country. The United States of America would have been un-
united - the South and the North separated.

If there is any doubt as to the plan and purpose of the British in endeavoring to capture Baltimore, one must examine the original terms and demands made by the British diplomats meeting with our diplomats, seeking to work out a Peace Treaty

in Ghent, Belgium, during August 1814.

The British demands, among other things, were:

1. The right to seize native British ^{sailors} marines on American merchant vessels.
2. A revision of the boundaries between the United States and adjacent British Colonies and a piece of Maine.
3. The Indian allies of the British shall be signatories to any treaty, with definite boundaries for their territories, which would result in a form of sovereignty for them as an independent people.
4. The United States shall keep no naval forces on the Western Great Lakes (Ontario and Superior) and shall not erect or maintain fortified forts on the shores of the Great Lakes, and to destroy those then in existence.
5. Great Britain would have navigation rights of the Mississippi River.
6. The western boundary shall be a line from Lake Superior to the Mississippi River.
7. There were several correlary provisions including fishing rights.

In September 1814 the British fleet, with their troops aboard, were assembled in the Chesapeake Bay at the mouth of the Patapsco River off North Point. Troops under General Ross were being landed in Old Roads Bay and were advancing along Patapsco Neck toward Baltimore.

The warships were moving into position to attack Fort McHenry at the mouth of Baltimore Harbor.

Fort McHenry was fully manned.

Our militia was moving southeasterly down Patapsco Neck to resist the British advance, giving ground until the British reached Rogers Bastion, located in what is now Patterson Park. There the British were stopped.

The naval bombardment started with full force and fury but at dawn on September 14th our fifteen star, fifteen striped flag was still flying. Fort McHenry had turned back their attack.

The British army retreated to North Point and were being taken back aboard their ships. The warships were weighing anchors and withdrawing, their guns were silent.

Francis Scott Key had watched the bombardment from a British ship of truce while negotiating the release of a prisoner, Dr. Beans. Inspired, and relieved, at daybreak by the sight of our fifteen star, fifteen striped flag still flying, he wrote our national anthem.

The British had been repulsed, they had been unable to take Baltimore and the Gateway to the West. Their mission had failed. (~~The Battle of Baltimore had been won!~~)

Now, what was the significant effect and result of this American victory?

When news of the failure to take Baltimore reached the British diplomats in Ghent, their demands began to evaporate. Their hopes and expectations of territorial gain were shattered and their demands abandoned.

The Treaty of Ghent was completed and signed on December 25, 1814. Peace was agreed upon without any territorial changes, leaving the two warring nations just where they started but insuring Peace, without victory, defeat or humiliation for either side.

Finally, what were the significant results of this Peace gained on Christmas Eve?

Our Second War of Independence was successfully concluded and all that had been gained in 1776 was secured. We remained an independent nation.

Our Nation had become one Nation, with a renewed national feeling and character, which had been fading with the political and sectional strife and selfish dissension.

Our people were now Americans and felt and acted as a United States of America, with little ill-feeling as to the past but with confidence for the future.

Commerce, trade, and diplomatic relations were renewed.

The significance of all this was that the small new nation comprised of fifteen states, which had successfully created a new form of government called "democracy," had won world respect and the recognition of other leading nations.

When the combatants, the British and Americans, next met on a field of battle, they met as comrades in arms, to fight together for their ideals and convictions, and their joint defense against oppression and aggression.

If the Battle of Baltimore had been lost, so would

our National unity, our freedom and our confidence. We as an independent nation could have perished. The Battle of Baltimore was the shattering blow that defeated Britain's plans.

So it is not of great significance who won the War. The paramount importance lies in the significant net results. The "tie score" had placed us on an equal footing with our adversary. We had gained a position of respect among other people of the world. The United States of America had remained independent - "One Nation, under God, indivisible and with liberty and justice for all" as our goal.

For all these precious and rewarding happenings we should be forever grateful to God - and to those dedicated men, our ancestors, who thought, fought and risked their lives, liberties and property to see to it that our world would be a better place for you and I, (their ^{and} descendants,) to live and to join together, (as we do this evening,) to commemorate their deeds and achievements.

add'n

S. Vannort Chapman
October 11, 1980

4/11/81