

The War of 1812

The **War of 1812** was another battle for America's independence, again with Great Britain. Canada was also involved because during that time, they were still a British territory, meaning it was under the rule of another country, Great Britain.

One of the causes of the war included disagreements over shipping and trade on the high seas. Basically, it became a war to determine the influence the United States would have in the affairs of other countries. At the time, Thomas Jefferson was President, and he wanted to keep sending products manufactured in the United States to other countries, and not fight in foreign wars. Unfortunately, the U.S. became involved due to the war between Britain and France. Both countries thought the ships from America were supplying food and weapons to the other side, which led to both sides intercepting and then searching American ships for weapons. Sometimes these encounters became violent.

The United States was not very happy about it, which led to the passage of the **Embargo Act of 1807**. The act, approved by Congress and signed by President Jefferson, stopped all trade with foreign countries, not just with Britain and France. America thought the act would help stop the problems between France and Britain since they would not be receiving any food or other goods. However, it did not happen as planned. The two countries kept fighting, and the food and other products waiting to be sent overseas rotted and became spoiled while stored on American ships. The Embargo Act was ended in 1809 and the American ships were still being searched without cause.

By now James Madison became President and the people in America were becoming angrier at France and Britain. The British began a policy of **impressment**, where they would take over American ships and then force the sailors to fight for the British navy. In addition, Britain was being blamed for supplying and helping the Native Americans who were fighting against American settlements in the West. Some Americans wanted to invade Canada since it was a territory of Great Britain. Finally, in June of

1812, American leaders had enough and declared war against Great Britain. The first battle took place without a shot being fired. The American troops crossed into Canada and demanded the surrender of their troops, which did not happen, even though the Canadian troops were outnumbered. No one was hurt and the American troops returned.

Later, though, during the Battle of York in 1813, the American forces burned the city of Toronto. A few months later the American troops gained control of Lake Erie as well. Many more victories followed for America, but the British did win on two occasions in 1813, once in Canada and another in upper New York. Things slowed down during the winter but picked up again the following year when the British invaded Washington, D.C. in August of 1814, burning down the Capitol Building and the White House, plus two other buildings. In September of the same year, the U.S. won a victory which led to the destruction of Fort McHenry. As the British navy fired upon it, **Francis Scott Key** watched the battle, which inspired him to write **The Star-Spangled Banner**, the national anthem of the United States.

Following the battle at Fort McHenry, peace talks with Britain began in the same month, August 1814. The fighting was still going on but the losses by the British convinced them they could not win the war, and instead wanted peace with America. A peace treaty called the **Treaty of Ghent** was signed on Christmas Eve, 1814, officially ending the War of 1812. The War of 1812 gave the United States a strong reputation for being a powerful nation and a leader in the world.