Alexandria War of 1812 Commemoration
War of 1812 Walking Tour

Introduction

The War of 1812 was a 32 month conflict primarily between Great Britain and the newly independent United States. Many factors contributed to the conflict, including the impressment of American sailors, trade disagreements, and an attempt to claim Canadian and Native American land. War was declared on June 18, 1812, and ended three years later in a truce. The City of Alexandria was involved in 1814, when British troops arrived and loaded supplies before attacking Baltimore. Instead of fighting, the Alexandrians surrendered and welcomed the British, stalling them for five days, thus giving Baltimore time to prepare for battle. Without Alexandria, Baltimore would have most likely lost its battle with the British.

Ramsay House Visitor Center

221 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314
703-746-3301
VistAlexandriaVA.com

The Ramsay House was named for William Ramsay, a Scottish merchant and the founder of Alexandria. At the time of the War of 1812, Alexandria was a part of the District of Columbia and had a population of about 7,200 people. It was one of the primary seaports of the United States, thus becoming a target of the British troops during the war.

*When facing market square, turn right on **N Fairfax Street**. The **Carlyle House** will be on the **right**.*

Carlyle House

121 N Fairfax St, Alexandria, VA 22314
703-549-2997
CarlyleHouse.org

William Herbert, the son-in-law of John Carlyle, lived in this house during the War of 1812. In July 1814, William Herbert was appointed by Alexandria's Common Council to Alexandria's Committee of Vigilance, which was responsible for monitoring the approach of British troops. Thomas Herbert, the brother of William Herbert, was the president of the Alexandria Common Council when, in order to protect the safety of the city's residents, it voted to surrender to the approaching British.

*Continue on **N Fairfax Street**. The **Bank of Alexandria** will be **next to Carlyle House***.

Bank of Alexandria
133 N. Fairfax St., Alexandria, Virginia
(Note: Not open to the public)

The Bank of Alexandria was founded in 1792 by a board of directors, including William Herbert, and was established in its current location adjacent to the Carlyle House property in 1803. In early August of 1814, several commercial banks, including the Bank of Alexandria, loaned the government $200,000 in exchange for building defenses against the British, prior to knowing that British ships were coming upriver. However, in late August of 1814, the Alexandria town and county militia were called out en masse to take post between Piscataway and Fort Washington, taking all of Alexandria's arms and artillery. When these supplies were blown up by the commander of Fort Washington, Alexandria was left defenseless against the oncoming British troops.

*Take a left on **Cameron Street**, and then take a left on **N Royal Street**. **Gadsby's Tavern Museum** will be across the street.*

Gadsby's Tavern Museum
134 N Royal St, Alexandria, VA 22314
703-746-4242
GadsbysTavern.org

The buildings known as Gadsby's Tavern today were operated by Thomas Triplett during the War of 1812. Triplett's Hotel not

only offered travelers lodging, but also served as a place for social, political, and business gatherings. The tavern also was the place for local elections and, in December 1813, William F. Thornton was elected as a General of the infantry. Less than a year later, he would be chosen by President Madison to spy on a British camp in Maryland.

The famous earlier proprietor of Gadsby's Tavern, John Gadsby, moved from Alexandria to Baltimore in 1808 to run the Indian Queen Tavern. Francis Scott Key completed the "Star Spangled Banner" while spending the night on September 16, 1814 at the Indian Queen Tavern.

*Continue on **N Royal Street**. **City Hall/Market Square** is across the street from Gadsby's Tavern Museum.*

City Hall/Market Square
301 King St, Alexandria, VA 22314
703-838-4000
AlexandriaVa.gov

On the morning of August 29th, city residents awoke to find a battle line of British ships aimed directly at Alexandria. Even from the center of the city, the waterfront and the surrounding ships could be clearly seen. In order to protect the welfare of the city, Mayor Charles Simms agreed to surrender to the British and follow their terms and conditions. These included the taking of all armaments and goods awaiting export in the warehouses, repairing damaged ships, and providing beverages for British troops.

*Proceed from **N Royal Street**, across King Street, onto **S Royal Street**. The former **Alexandria Gazette Office** will be across the street, an unidentified address on the 100 block.*

Alexandria Gazette Office
West side of 100 block of South Royal Street
(Note: The exact address of the Alexandria Gazette Office is currently unknown)

The Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political, was a prominent newspaper run by

Samuel Snowden and John Douglass Simms. The newspaper openly criticized the War of 1812 from its beginning and actively defended Alexandria's choice to surrender, providing insight into the American Public's opinion of the war. There were many ideological differences among the citizens, foreshadowing the modern political divide found in today's society. During the British occupation of Alexandria, publication of *The Alexandria Gazette* ceased temporarily.

*Return to **King Street** and take a **right**. Turn right onto **S Fairfax Street**, where the **Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum** is on the **right**.*

Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum
105 S Fairfax St, Alexandria, VA 22314
703-746-3852
ApothecaryMuseum.org

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary was a prominent apothecary in Alexandria that operated in this location from 1805 until 1933. During the War of 1812, the shop was run by Edward Stabler, a Quaker who was appointed by the Religious Society of Friends to prevent Alexandrians from bearing arms against the British. Fortunately, there were no troops in Alexandria when the British arrived, resulting in the peaceful occupation of the city, rather than conflict.

*Continue down **S Fairfax Street** and then turn **left** on **Prince Street**. Follow the street to the **intersection of Prince and Union Streets**.*

Foot of Prince Street
Intersection of Prince and Union Streets

One of the most infamous incidents of the British occupation of Alexandria came when three US Navy officers attempted to capture a young British midshipman at the foot of Prince Street. British ships in the harbor nearly opened fire on Alexandria, resulting in panic and hysteria among residents. However, town authorities were able to convince the British to hold fire, and conflict was avoided.

*Walk to the left on **S Union St**.*

Fitzgerald Warehouse
100 South Union Street

During the occupation of Alexandria, British troops looted many warehouses for supplies and goods fresh from the shipping docks. This included 16,000 barrels of flour, 1,000 hogsheads of tobacco, 150 bales of cotton, $5,000 worth of wine, sugar, and other articles, and about 21 ships. This loss of resources seriously impacted Alexandria's economy, as well as its position as a major seaport.

*Continue down **S Union St** and take a **right** on **King Street**. Then, take a **left** at the end of **King Street** to the **Torpedo Factory**. Stand facing the Potomac River.*

The Torpedo Factory/Waterfront
105 N Union St, Alexandria, Virginia 22314
703-838-4565
TorpedoFactory.org

After five days of occupation, British troops left Alexandria to attack Baltimore. However, Baltimore residents had spent those five days preparing for battle, resulting in their ultimate victory. Without the surrender of Alexandria and the delay of the British ships, the War of 1812 may have been lost, and the United States as we know it would have been changed forever.

The End of the War of 1812
The War of 1812 ended with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent by President Madison on February 17, 1815. Though the winner of the war was inconclusive, it created a sense of unity and nationalism among Americans. Many of the symbols and songs most commonly associated with the United States, such as the bald-headed eagle, Uncle Sam, and the Star-Spangled Banner, originated during the conflict. Most importantly, the War of 1812 created a feeling of patriotism in the newly-founded United States, a feeling that has become part of the cultural identity of America.

War of 1812 Walking Tour created by Alex Bulova
Troop 1865 Eagle Scout project, 2014.