Brave Little Lewes:
The Bombardment on the Delaware Bay

A curriculum-based program
for students in grades 8-12
The British Navy begins to impress, or force American sailors to sail on British ships. This is the spark that begins to ignite problems between the British and the Americans.

The American ship Chesapeake is fired upon by the British, causing an international incident. Thomas Jefferson imposes a trade embargo with Great Britain.

Embargo with the British ends.

James Madison is inaugurated as the 4th president of the United States of America.

The Battle of Tippecanoe, considered the first battle of the War of 1812, takes place between Tecumseh’s brother, “The Prophet” and William Henry Harrison’s army.

The United States of America declares war on Great Britain in June of 1812.

Riots begin to break out in Baltimore in protest against the war.

General William Hull enters Canada. This is the first of three failed attempts by the Americans to try and invade Canada.

War of 1812
A British flotilla enters the mouth of the Delaware Bay at Lewes in March, demanding supplies. The citizens of Lewes do not comply.

The British begin a bombardment of Lewes on April 6-7, leaving some damage. Citizens of Lewes reclaimed cannon shots and fired them back at the British from the area now known as 1812 Memorial Park.

U.S. Troops capture and burn the City of York (present day Toronto).

Capt. Perry defeats the British at the Battle of Lake Erie.

Peace negotiations between the British and the Americans begin in Ghent, Belgium.

The British burn Washington D.C. in retaliation of the American forces burning York. President James Madison is forced to flee the capitol.

The Battle of Plattsburg is a major American victory, securing the northern border of the United States.

The Battle of Baltimore takes place at Fort McHenry. Francis Scott Key writes the words to The Star Spangled Banner after his experience watching the Congreve rockets burst over the fort.

Andrew Jackson defeats the British at the Battle of New Orleans.

The peace treaty is signed by President Madison and the war is declared over.
Lewes and The War of 1812

Often called our “forgotten war” the War of 1812 is also considered our second war for independence. While the American Revolution granted America its political independence, the War of 1812 secured America’s commercial independence and helped propel the nation’s westward expansion.

The Mid-Atlantic region was an important theater of the war and the Delmarva peninsula was at the epicenter of events along the Atlantic coast. With access to Washington, D.C. and Baltimore at the southern end of peninsula and access to Philadelphia here at Lewes, our region saw a tremendous amount of naval activity and troop movement during the conflict. With Philadelphia still at that time the most populous and most economically important city in the country, the Delaware River and Bay was a critical asset the British sought desperately to control.

Vital economic activity in Philadelphia coupled with the then-newly established DuPont powder mills on the Brandywine River near Wilmington, Del. only added to Delaware’s strategic importance. With its commanding strategic position at the mouth of the Delaware Bay inside Cape Henlopen, Lewes was destined to play an important role in the defense of the river and bay during the conflict.

In March 1813, nearly a year after the U.S. Congress declared war, a small flotilla of British naval ships sailed from the Chesapeake to the mouth of Delaware Bay, hoping to cut off access to the Delaware River ports and choke the American economy to a point where surrender might occur. Arriving off Cape Henlopen, the British found a small battery at the foot of Pilottown Road, west of Lewes (near the University of Delaware’s College of Earth, Ocean and Environment) that previously had seen duty during the Revolution and a hastily constructed fort at the center of town constructed of “rough logs and brush, filled in with earth, sand, and gravel, each having… a log watch house” and running along the south side of what was then known as Lewes Creek.

While British forces were at anchor, a small party was sent ashore to seek fresh provisions for the ships. Their efforts were rebuked by the volunteer and state militia that had begun to assemble at Lewes as well as federal troops whose presence at Lewes was a welcome sight for the local population. After several other thwarted attempts, the British commander, Commodore John P. Beresford, sent a letter to “the first magistrate at Lewistown.” It read: “As soon as you read this, I must request you will send twenty live bullocks, with a proportionate quantity of vegetables and hay, to the Poitiers (one of the British ships comprising the blockade), for
the use of His British Majesty’s squadron, now at this anchorage, which shall be immediately paid for at Philadelphia prices. If you refuse this request, I shall be under the necessity of destroying your town.” This letter ultimately ended up in the hand of Governor David Haslet who had made his way from Dover to Lewes upon news of the escalating situation. Haslet’s lengthy reply concluded, “a compliance [with Beresford’s request] would be an immediate violation of the laws of my country and eternal stigma on the nation of which I am citizen; a compliance therefore cannot be acceded to.” Needless to say, the beef and hay never made it to the British squadron.

This line of communication stayed open for a several more days with Beresford becoming increasingly agitated at the ornery Americans here at Lewes.

Finally, on April 6, Beresford lost his patience and an initial firing of 32-pounders rained down on Lewes. During a lull in the bombardment, Beresford sent a letter to Lewes received by Col. Samuel Boyer Davis – a Lewes native whose father died aboard a British prison ship during the American Revolution, and who, upon hearing about the British ships off Cape Henlopen, returned to defend his hometown – noting his grief “for the distress the women and children are reduced to by your conduct, and earnestly desire they be instantly removed.” Davis gallantly responded he had already taken care of the ladies.

Ultimately, damage was done to both sides during the bombardment which lasted about 22 hours over the course of April 6 & 7, 1813. Cannonballs and rockets lit up the sky; many missed their marks, however, several did not and damage can still be seen today at the famous Cannonball House where a cracked foundation bears testimony to those dramatic events. Despite being short supplied, the American forces at Lewes were able to gather enemy cannonballs and effectively reply fire at the British squadron, causing at least one gunboat to catch fire and “retreat to the Jersey Cape.” The rockets fired at Lewes those days were the Congreve rocket – the first use of that device in war – and would provide the “rockets’ red glare” that so inspired Francis Scott Key the following year in Baltimore. The episode at Lewes was national news, appearing in newspapers up and down the country.

Following the bombardment, the fort stood and defended Lewes and lower Delaware Bay for the next two years until news of Jackson’s victory at New Orleans reached Lewes on March 15, 1815. While the British navy did advance a little further up Delaware Bay, George Read Jr.’s account that “the affair at Lewes will increase their caution” proved correct. Ultimately, the forts were abandoned and dismantled but the memory of April 1813 would linger.

Many 19th century travelers who visited Lewes remarked how old timers would sit on their porches and retell how Lewes had withstood the mighty British navy. Today, 200 years later, we still commemorate and honor the men who defended Lewes, knowing that, in the words of Samuel Boyer Davis, “the honor of the State has not been tarnished.”
The Second War for Independence–
Introduction to the War of 1812

Pre-Visit Activity- Timeline

Objective:

Students will clearly identify the countries involved with the War of 1812 and several key events or battles. Students will complete a reference timeline to use throughout the unit.

Activity and Discussion:

Invite students to take several minutes to think about what they already know about the War of 1812. Have them share their knowledge with the class.

Once students have had the opportunity to share, begin a discussion about the key players and the key battles of the war. You may want to also introduce students to the new vocabulary words so that they may use them in their discussion. Encourage students to think critically about the causes of the war and what it meant for The United States to again be at war with Great Britain.

As you progress through the discussion of the war, hand out the Timeline of the War of 1812 worksheet and encourage students to take notes and fill in the bubbles as a reference sheet for further classroom discussions. The worksheet corresponds with the enclosed timeline and highlights some of the major events of the war, the cause of the war and some post war results.

After students have had the opportunity to complete the timeline, invite students to think about what life would have been like in Delaware during the war. Create a classroom-generated list of how students respond. This list will aid students in the next classroom-based activity.

Standards

Common core standards
C.C.9-12.S.L.1
C.C.9-12.S.L.4
C.C.9-12.R.H.5
C.C.9-12.W.H.S.T.2

Delaware State History Standards
Geography 1.9-12a
Economics 4.9-12a
History 4.9-12b

Vocabulary

Bombardment
Congreve Rocket
Embargo
Impressment
Treaty
Timeline of the War of 1812
Continual Alarm

Pre-Visit Activity 2

Objective:

Students will read civilian correspondence from the War of 1812 and put the information in a local context. Students will be able to discuss what it may have been like to be a citizen of Lewes and the implications of denying the request of one of the world's greatest navies.

Activity and Discussion:

Invite students to take a few moments to think about what life would have been like in Lewes when the British flotilla arrived at the mouth of the Delaware River. Would they suggest immediate action against the British? Would they contact local authorities? Would they comply with a request from a national enemy or would they deny the request because it breaks the law of their newly established nation?

Explain to students that in March of 1813, this exact scenario came to life in Lewes. Commodore J.P. Beresford demanded 25 head of cattle, supplies and fresh water from the people of Lewes, and the people of Lewes did not comply, risking the fate of their town.

Distribute copies of the letters exchanged between Robert and Richard West. The West family was a prominent Lewes family, especially from the late 18th century into the beginning of the 20th century. Members of the family went on to supervise construction at the Delaware Breakwater and members in the middle 1800s found fortune and adventure in China, taking part in the large import business that developed in the second half of the 19th century. (West family photographs, documents and other personal items are found in the Society's collections.)

Once students have had time to read both letters, encourage them to create a classroom list of how this may have effected life in Lewes. Once the list is complete, share the letter written by Commodore Beresford, stating that destruction of the town was the next course of action. This will lead into the trip to The Lewes Historical Society.

Standards

Common core standards
C.C.9-12.S.L.1
C.C.9-12.S.L.4
C.C.9-12.R.H.2
C.C.9-12.R.H.6

Delaware State History Standards
Civics 3.9-12a
History 1.9-12a
History 4.9-12b

Note:
The original hand written letters between Robert and Richard West are a part of The Lewes Historical Society’s permanent collection and are available in digital form. For more information on how to obtain digital scans of these letters, please email info@lewes.org.
My Dear Son

I Just take pen in hand to write you a line informing you of our State, Health & iteration- for Several days we have Been in Continual Allarm Night and Day. Since the Threat to destroy the Town sent in by a Flag of Truce all hath been Bryttle nearly all the Inhabitants have moved their goods More or Less and many of the houses Occupied By the Troops that have come in There has been a general Turn out of the Militia some Regiments stope on their March not being able to supply them with Provisions. to tell you what Number of Men are in I cannot they are at the moment of writing this on parade for Review. The governor is in Lr. But Rations are issued for About 1300 some brod their Rations for 2 days, which have not drawn there is but One Company in Except a small Troop of Horse but belongs to Sussex of those men there may be 1000 Completely Armed. And if an attack was made this day the Cannon would Supply a Considerable Number as they have have up a Breast Work for 100 and 12 pieces. We drove away the number of Men were too great and One Regiment went off with Major Long It was a Very Agreeable Retreat to those who went & little grief to those who Remained Our Governor sent a flag onboard Tuesday Evening- they still insist that 25 bullocks are a Reasonable Demand but it is Rejected They have sent a few of their Rockets but no Damage Done this was a Night on 2 ago from what I shall date my letter All Kenshaws Men have moved off and the Troops stationed here are say about 300. The Draft will send in a few more. When Made if wanted- this after noon the Men of War left us or other troops French leave. they have Left a small schooner and their Beacons to Blockade us and permitted somehow to left a poor Spaniard Run on shore with a load of sugar & coffee, 4 cannons & some arms all which will be acceptable her Cargo will be savedI had thought To have things in more Detail but cannot Do it well at present. Thursday your sister was poorly. The rest of us Generally Well in health.
Lewes March 18th, 1813

My Dear Son

When I wrote you last we appeared to be in safety - but the times are much altered we are Blockaded by one 74 and one Frigate and some Small Tenders. The Boat of the ships are daily out they have Burnt John Smiths sloop this week. Also a schooner at the Creeks Mouth from Charles Town. There was a warm contest from the militia- we have had no person hurt- we are in continued allarm Night and Day. more from our Disorganized state than from the attempts of the Enemy to Land. - The People in Lewes generaly moving a part of their goods, and some their Person. I have sent some articles away which had no Immediate use for. the People here seem to be united in the main front but Little Organized but I hope our Danger will Cement a Union. The burning, of Vessels has roused many of the languid-

We are now fortifying we have an addition of Two Cannon from the schooner that was Burnt the Militia is ordered in We are in Reasonable Health and hope this will find you in the same all Communication is cut of by water and we can make no Remittances till times some what alter I trust we shall be able to pay all our Philad." Debt shortly and if we loose all here we shall be as we begun.

I trust a Kind Providence will protect us I feel a Reason-able confidence.

Your Affectionate Father.
Sir

In reply to your letter rec’d this day by a flag of truce in Answer to mine of 16th Ins’t I have to observe that the demands I have made upon Lewis Town is in my opinion, neither ungenerous not wanting in that magnanimity which one nation ought to observe to another with which it is at war. It is in my power to destroy your Town and the request I have made upon it is neither distressing or unusual. I must therefore persist and whatever sufferings may fall upon the inhabitants of Lewis may be attributed to your-selves for not complying with a request so easily accrued.

I have the honor to be

J.P. BERESFORD
The Bombardment of Lewes, April 6-7, 1813

Trip to The Lewes Historical Society Complex, Ryves Holt House and the Cannonball House

Students will explore the rich history of the War of 1812 through a docent-facilitated tour through Lewes. Students will be able to discuss notable locations such as the Ryves Holt House, 1812 Memorial Park, and Lewes’s famous Cannonball House Maritime Museum. Students will also be introduced to pivotal citizens of Lewes who greatly impacted the results of the Bombardment of Lewes and the War of 1812.

Students will have the opportunity for in-depth discussion and conversation about each segment of the tour, allowing students to gain a greater understanding of the events of April 1812 as well as the impact that these events had both in Lewes and the region.

At the Ryves Holt House, students will learn about local hero Jacob Jones who lived in Lewes during the Revolutionary War. He was so inspired by his time in Lewes he joined the navy to become one of the unsung heroes of the War of 1812.

In 1812 Memorial Park, students will be able to see cannons that were used to protect the city as well as engage in an important discussion about how geography played a major role in the results of the bombardment as well as the strategic location of the British Arrival. Students will also have a chance to discuss the changing technology of war and the introduction of the Congreve Rocket which was what inspired the line “And the rockets’ red glare” in the National Anthem. As the tour progresses, students will gain a deeper understanding of the important role that Lewes played in keeping the British from entering the Delaware Bay, protecting important port cities such as Wilmington and Philadelphia.

The final stop of the tour will be the Cannonball House. There, students will have the opportunity to see the visible scar left in the foundation of the building by the cannon fire during that fateful 22 hours. When they enter the museum, students will have the opportunity see and read the original letter sent by British Commodore Beresford stating his intentions to destroy the town when the citizens denied his request for food and supplies. Students will also have time to explore the remainder of the exhibits and see just how critical Lewes was in keeping the British out of the Delaware River.
Left: Born in Lewes in 1765 at his family’s home on Second Street, Samuel Boyer Davis would go on to join the Navy and become Commander of The American Defenses for the Bombardment of Lewes.

Below: Jacob Jones lived in the Ryves Holt House on Second Street during the American Revolution. He was so inspired by his experiences in Lewes, he joined the Navy and became a hero in the War of 1812.

Standards

Common core standards
C.C.9-12.S.L.3
C.C.9-12.R.H.1
C.C.9-12.R.H.3
C.C.9-12.R.H.5

Delaware State History Standards
Geography 3.9-12a
Civics 1.9-12a
History 2.9-12b
The Lewes Historical Society

Around 1960, a local newspaper columnist named Marjorie Virden wrote several articles for the local papers lamenting the fact that many of Lewes' fine eighteenth century buildings were rapidly disappearing. Particular attention was called to the plight of the David Rowland House on Front Street, which carries in its foundation a cannonball memento of the War of 1812 and the Bombardment of Lewes in April of 1813. Over the years, the house had been so neglected that the interior brick nogging was visible through missing shingles.

One day in 1961, a group of concerned citizens including Robert Orr, Ginnie Orr, and Sarah Chambers were sailing down the canal towards Roosevelt Inlet. As they passed the Rowland House, someone remarked that despite much talk, no action had been taken to save Lewes' historic architecture. That same evening, Mrs. Orr held a meeting at her house for dozens of concerned citizens. Soon after, a general meeting was held to organize the Lewes Historical Society. Temporary officers were selected, invitations sent - with excellent results - to prospective members, and the Lewes Historical Society was officially founded on January 19, 1962.

Later that year, a lot at the corner of Third and Shipcarpenter Streets was purchased and named the Lewes Historic Complex. Gradually, the Burton-Ingram House, Thompson Country Store, Rabbits' Ferry House, Creamery, Necessary, Early Plank House, Blacksmith Shop, and Ellegood House were moved to the Complex and restored. Conservation efforts continue today. The neglected house of David Rowland was eventually bought by the Society and restored. Today it sits on its original site at the corner of Front and Bank Streets and serves as the popular Cannonball House Maritime Museum.

In 1989, the John Farrace Bequest enabled the Society to purchase 110 Shipcarpenter Street, then known as the Watts property, and renamed as the Hiram Rodney Burton House to honor a local physician and Delaware's Congressman from 1901-1904. This structure houses the Society's library, archives as well as the administrative offices of the organization. In 1991, Freddie's Barn, the Society's maintenance facility, was built to honor long-time historic preservationist and restoration specialist, Fred Hudson, who worked for the society from 1962-2008. The Doctor's Office, previously located on Second Street, was moved to the Complex to consolidate Society properties and in 2000, it was joined by Midway School #178.

With the cooperation of the City of Lewes, the Society received a lease to the waterfront property on the canal at the foot of Shipcarpenter Street, where the Society berthed the lightship Overfalls and where the boathouse of the Lewes Life Saving Station sits. Since 1997, the Society has leased the Ryves Holt House at the corner of Second and Mulberry Streets from the Episcopal Diocese of Delaware. Located in the heart of Lewes' thriving business district, the Ryves Holt House serves as the Society's Visitors Center.

The Society continues to offer a rich and exciting array of activities that engage our visitors and promote Lewes' unique heritage to an ever-increasing number of seasonal guests and year-round residents of the area. From our Winter Meeting Series to the summer Antique Shows and Craft Fairs the Society offers annual programs that have become signature events of the Society. The Society has sponsored several conferences of Lewes and Delaware History, has invited numerous local, national and international scholars and dignitaries to speak at its events, and promoted the arts and cultural exploration and appreciation in Southern Delaware. As Lewes continues to grow, the Society will strive to maintain a record of the past of this special and ancient town by the sea.
Booking your Trip

Thank you for your interest in The Lewes Historical Society’s educational programming!

To book a trip for your students, visit our website at www.historiclewes.org.

We offer a variety of educational programs ranging from traditional historical complex walking tours to in-depth multi-disciplinary curriculum unit programs. Each of our programs meets the latest Common Core, Next Gen Science, and Delaware State History Standards.

The fee for our programs are $1.00 per child, due no later than the scheduled date of your tour.

Once the form is complete and submitted, you will receive an email receipt of your reservation. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to email education@historiclewes.org or call 302-645-7670.

Resources and References

Print Resources:

Online Resources
The Lewes Historical Society
www.historiclewes.org
Bicentennial of the War of 1812
www.ourflagwasstillthere.org
PBS presents The War of 1812
http://www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812/

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Page 5: Old Fort Lewes, from Postcard. LHS Collections. Object Number: ph.swa276.
Page 8: Cannon Ball House, LHS Collection. Object Number: ph.lhs.291. 2
Page 12: Photograph from the late 1800s of cannon used in defense of Lewes during the Revolution and the War of 1812. from Lantern on Lewes: Where The Past is Present. By Hazel Brittingham
Page 14: Cannonball House, modern day. LHS Collections, found on www.historiclewes.org
Professional Affiliations
American Alliance of Museums, American Association for State and Local History, Delaware Museum Association, Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Delaware, Small Museum Association, United States Life-Saving Service Heritage Association