

# *"The Enemy Nearly All 'Round Us"*

In June 1812, the United States went to war after years of simmering tensions with Great Britain. The war gave Americans a generation of military heroes and stunning victories like the Battle of New Orleans. Most famously, the nation gained an anthem, inspired by the defense of Baltimore's Fort McHenry.

With the war also came suffering and tragedy, as the United States was thrust into a conflict for which it was barely prepared. Its hastily-organized armies were routed by the British, who had the most powerful army and navy in the world. On August 24, 1814, the county was dealt the ultimate defeat, when its national capital was captured and burned.

For Marylanders, the war came in February 1813, when the British sailed into the Chesapeake Bay and began a campaign to terrorize the coast. In Annapolis, the next two years were a time of anxious watching and waiting.

Annapolis was never attacked during the war, but its residents expected to be at any moment. Contemporary records tell of a city, in the spring and summer of 1814, deserted by its inhabitants, including the governor himself. The British fleet was clearly visible out in the Bay and was closely watched by people like William Barney, standing on the dome with his "excellent glass."

While the residents of the town watched the activities of the fleet with anxiety, the local enslaved population saw an opportunity for escape. Twenty-one slaves, including 20 belonging to Henrietta M. Ogle, rowed out to HMS *Menelaus* and other ships anchored off of Annapolis. In the end, some 700 Maryland slaves escaped to freedom, including 21 from Annapolis.

## Acknowledgments

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Please visit the Archives' website at [msa.maryland.gov](http://msa.maryland.gov) for further information and images relating to Annapolis and the War of 1812. This website also includes extensive research on the fate of Marylanders who were imprisoned in Dartmoor Prison in England and on slaves who were settled by the British in Nova Scotia and other British colonies.

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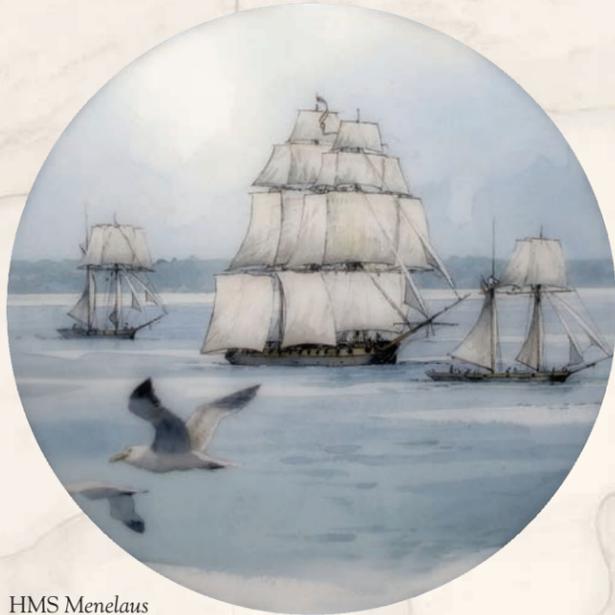


# The British in the Chesapeake During the War of 1812

“...their country is just defenceless”

Five months after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the British navy turned its focus towards the Chesapeake Bay. Rear Admiral Pulteney Malcolm, on HMS *Royal Oak*, wrote to his wife: “The Americans must make Peace their country is just defenceless [sic] and if we pleased we might destroy as much as was conceived necessary.”

On August 20, 1814, HMS *Menelaus* arrived in the Chesapeake and anchored six miles from Annapolis. Captain Sir Peter Parker and his officers observed the city closely through their spy glasses. Annapolis, “is very pretty,” wrote Royal Marine Lt. Benjamin G. Beynon in his diary, “the finest building is the state House which is in the centre of the Town, its built of brick, on the top of it is a large dome . . .”



HMS *Menelaus*

But the British navy had come to Annapolis not to invade but to stir up trouble and keep a close watch on their enemy. The constant fear of attack, and the offer of freedom made to slaves who sought refuge on British ships, ensured that local eyes were on the Bay.



British navy captain and commanders' coat button, 1795-1812  
The Lost Towns Project of Anne Arundel County

Rough plan of the defences of the harbour of Annapolis in Maryland, [1814], by William Tatham. Library of Congress



# Maryland's Government and the War of 1812

“...the defenseless situation of this city”

Defending Maryland against the British required all Marylanders to take on new roles. Ordinary citizens became soldiers, politicians became military strategists, and houses became depots of military supplies and public records. The war disrupted the ordinary functions of government and over-burdened the state's finances, as Maryland incurred enormous debts organizing its defenses.

Mobilization for the war was neither painless nor flawless. The federal government declared itself unable to protect Maryland, leaving the state to defend its extensive coastline on its own. While many private citizens and government officials sought to prepare the state for a British attack, the threat of invasion still took a terrible toll. In much of the state, effective defenses were never built.

In Annapolis, ringed by a network of forts, government planners privately had concerns about the forts' designs and the abilities of the men who guarded them. Exactly how much Maryland's government did to protect the state—and how much it realistically could have done—was a contentious subject, one debated loudly in the highly partisan newspapers of the day.

## African Americans and the War of 1812

“...thanks be to God I arrived in this safe place..”

During the war, many of Maryland's enslaved people attempted to escape to British ships. Some of the early fugitives were captured and placed back into bondage, while others made it aboard to face an uncertain future. To encourage further unrest, on April 2, 1814 Admiral Alexander Cochrane of the British forces issued a proclamation offering immediate emancipation to any person willing to take up arms and join the colonial marines and settle in the British colonies.

**MARYLAND GAZETTE.**  
ANNAPOLIS, THURSDAY, DEC. 22, 1814.  
Upon the return of the British frigate *Menelaus* down the Bay on Sunday last, she came to anchor nearly opposite this city, where she continued for the night. While at anchor negroes to the amount of between twenty and thirty, the property of different individuals in this city and neighbourhood, went off to her and were taken down the Bay.

579  
1155

By the Honorable Sir ALEXANDER COCHRANE, K. B. Vice Admiral of the Red, and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels, upon the North American Station, &c. &c. &c.

**A PROCLAMATION.**

WHEREAS it has been represented to me, that many Persons now resident in the UNITED STATES, have expressed a desire to withdraw therefrom, with a view of entering into His Majesty's Service, or of being received as Free Settlers into some of His Majesty's Colonies.

*This is therefore to Give Notice,*

That all those who may be disposed to emigrate from the UNITED STATES will, with their Families, be received on board of His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War, or at the Military Posts that may be established, upon or near the Coast of the UNITED STATES, when they will have their choice of either entering into His Majesty's Sea or Land Forces, or of being sent as FREE Settlers to the British Possessions in North America or the West Indies, where they will meet with all due encouragement.

GIVEN under my Hand at Bermuda, this 2nd day of April, 1814.

**ALEXANDER COCHRANE.**

By Command of the Vice Admiral,  
WILLIAM BALHETCHET.

GOD SAVE THE KING.

Proclamation by The Honorable Sir Alexander Cochrane, April 2, 1814

Upwards of 700 slaves from Maryland took this opportunity to seek freedom, including a group of 21 slaves that left from Annapolis. Twenty of those enslaved people consisting of men, women, and children fled from Henrietta M. Ogle, the widow of Governor Benjamin Ogle. Following the war, Maryland slave owners submitted claims for compensation for the loss of their slaves and other property. The claim for the 20 slaves belonging to Mrs. Ogle, deceased by the end of the war, was submitted by her son Benjamin Ogle.



Gabriel Hall. The only known photograph of an African American refugee from Maryland who settled in Halifax following the War of 1812. Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management

## Victory!

“Who would not be an American? Long live the republic!  
Peace is signed in the arms of victory!”

**Glorious News!**  
*Orleans saved and peace concluded.*  
“The star spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
“O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Niles Weekly Register,  
February 18, 1815

*Who would not be an American? Long live the republic! All hail! last asylum of oppressed humanity! Peace is signed in the arms of victory!*



U.S. Corps of Artillery coat button, c. 1812  
The Lost Towns Project of Anne Arundel County

The British fleet remained in the Chesapeake even after the Battle of Baltimore and continued to menace the citizens of Maryland. The threat of attack remained until news arrived in February of 1815 that the Treaty of Ghent had been signed and the war was over.

In Annapolis, residents celebrated the peace by illuminating their streets and houses with bonfires. On February 22, another celebration was held marking both the end of the war and George Washington's birthday. The city's cannons were fired and the State House became a “scene of light,” with a full-length portrait of Washington suspended from the dome.

For the enslaved residents of Annapolis, the departure of the British fleet meant the end of a path to freedom. While 21 slaves had escaped from Annapolis to the British ships, doubtless many more would have followed their friends, family and neighbors to a new life had there been an opportunity.