

1812 - Setting The Stage

by Lynne Belluscio

Two hundred years ago, the settlers in the Ganson Settlement were anxious to establish a new town that would be separate from Caledonia. It was necessary for the New York State Legislature to approve the creation of the new town, and that would take place on June 8, 1812. The town would be known as Bellona, named for the Roman goddess of war. Probably at the time that made sense. It certainly seemed that the young nation was headed for a war with Great Britain.

There had been a number of incidents that foreshadowed what was to come. England was at war with France, and it needed to replenish its navy. In June 1807, a British ship stopped the Chesapeake, an American warship off the coast of Virginia, claiming there were four British sailors aboard. The American commander refused to surrender the men and the British ship opened fire, killing three American sailors and wounding 18. The four men in question were forcibly removed. President Jefferson protested vehemently, but the British responded in October that it would not change its policy about impressing seaman on American ships.

Congress passed the first Embargo Act on December 22, 1807, with the intention of showing England and France that American goods were necessary. The Embargo was continued on January 9, 1808 and again in March, but it did nothing to force the English to the bargaining



table. The embargoes did little to stop the trade to Canada, yet commerce from East Coast ports such as New York and Boston were at a standstill. It was written that ships were rotting at the docks and trade goods were piling up in warehouses with nowhere to go. In the meantime, James Madison, who had served as Jefferson's Secretary of State was elected President in the fall of 1808. Madison was not in favor of war with Great Britain. The economic crisis caused by the Embargo Acts

had taken a huge toll on American industry. In March 1809, Madison repealed the Embargo Acts, only to reinstate them in August.

In 1811 there were two more incidents at sea and any hope of negotiating with the English vanished. In Congress, the War Hawks which included Henry Clay from Kentucky, tried to push Madison into war. Clay was joined by the Congressman from Buffalo, Yale educated, Peter Buell Porter. In 1809, Porter

had moved from Canandaigua to Black Rock, near Buffalo. He was ready to fight the British and was serving as the quartermaster of the New York militia and had a vested interest in the economic development of Western New York, serving on a committee that was investigating the building of the Erie Canal. Porter was willing and able to bring the United States into a war with Great Britain.

And on the edge - -poised to be witnesses to the tragedy and terror of the War of 1812, were the small group of settlers who were to call Bellona home. Most of the men were farmers, who had cleared a few acres of land and brought their young families to the log cabins to survive the hardships of the frontier with hopes and dreams of making an honest living growing wheat and corn, raising sheep and cattle to pay for the land that they settled. They had built a bridge across the creek and a grist mill and saw mill. They erected log schools and kept the Sabbath. They dutifully reported to militia training with their guns slung across their shoulders.

Ten days after the State Legislature in Albany declared that Bellona was to be created, President Madison declared war on Great Britain. His choice for the confrontation would be on the Canadian border at the Niagara Frontier, within earshot of Peter Porter's house.

(To be continued)

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Bicentennial
Committee Meeting

Saturday, January 21st
11:00 am

LeRoy House

Anyone welcome to come.

Questions - call
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