

Chasing Perry's Victory-No Time To Rest

By the end of November 1812, as the war with the British staggered on, our 4th US president, James Madison, had been re-elected. The American fleet and our militia had suffered numerous defeats to British and Canadian forces. To make matters worse several strategic ports in South Carolina and Georgia were being successfully blockaded by the British Fleet. By December of 1812 Madison's Secretary of War, William Eustis, was forced to resign in disgrace.

Oliver Hazard Perry was still on a leave of absence after being exonerated in his 1811 court martial case for the sinking of the USS Revenge. According to Wikipedia "On May 5, 1811, he [Perry] married Elizabeth Mason of Newport, Rhode Island, whom he had met at a dance in 1807. They enjoyed an extended honeymoon touring New England."

I am certain that news of the various American Fleet setbacks reached very patriotic Perry and motivated him to finally end his extended honeymoon and ask for a return to active duty. In March of 1813 Perry was given his new command and he was sent to Presque Isle to build a fleet to challenge the British control of Lake Erie. And as we know that important decision changed the course of US history. The summer of 2012 was the start of a three-year observance of the War of 1812 and especially the Battle of Lake Erie. For us this was a chance to create a buzz for things to come.

Here in Put-in-Bay our summer of 2012 was one of great hope and success. The National Park Service staff got things rolling here on the island in June with the "Declaration of War" observance. Shortly after that the Perry Group got underway with building Commodore Perry's iconic "Long Boat". The longboat, which is now fully planked, is slowly working it's way through the final stages of its' completion.

On August 30th beautiful weather made the excursion from Put-in-bay to Cleveland's Navy week a huge success. The "transfer of command" from The Brig Niagara to Perry Class Frigate USS DeWert capped off the day's festivities at the Navy's kick off event for the Battle of Lake Erie Celebration. The summer ended with Historic Weekend hosted by Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial, and included re-enactors, carronades, marching bands and parades. Historic weekend would not be complete without music and included an outstanding performance by the Toledo Symphony. Saturday evening ended with the "Lights of Peace" Harbor Illumination. On Sunday morning a solemn ceremony was held at the placement of the permanent "Battle of Lake Erie" buoy by the US Coast Guard at the battle site.

The upcoming 2013 Battle of Lake Erie Bicentennial celebration planning is well underway.

The Perry Group and the National Park Service are preparing for a summer of memorable events here in Put-in-Bay and the Western Basin of Lake Erie from August 30th through September 10th. We have 19 tall ships scheduled to make their way to our area next August 29th. Eleven ports have signed on to be hosts, including Put-in-Bay, Middle Bass Island, Kelley's Island, Pelee Island, Catawba Island, Port Clinton, Monroe, Windsor, Leamington, Kingsville, and Amherstburg. Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial, The Perry Group and the eleven host ports cities will host Twelve days of activities, both on the water and on land.

But we can't rest yet. Get out your calendars, because on Martin Luther King weekend January 17-21st, the Lake Erie Maritime Association has invited The Perry Group along with the NPS to host a weekend Battle of Lake Erie Celebration preview at the Cleveland Boat Show. We will have the newly completed Perry's Longboat on site, re-enactors, authors and period musical performers gathered together to help raise the awareness level of our 2013 roster of summer's event one more notch. Stay tuned!