

THE 200th ANNIVERSARY OF THE WAR OF 1812, THE SECOND REVOLUTION

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SPRINGFIELD - Chaos, fear, and anger raged as charred remains, scattered bones, a smoldering cabin, and a missing daughter are all that remained of three shattered families. April 1812 brought terror to the prairie of the Illinois territory and gave settlers a front-row seat to the carnage that led to the War of 1812. June 18 marks the 200th anniversary of the U.S. declaration of war against Great Britain and the service of territorial militia in defending Illinois settlers.

Life in Illinois during this period was extremely precarious and scary for the average farming family. Chores and farming had to be done, but one never knew what lurked in the wilderness. Isaac Hutson (of present day Crawford County) returned home April 11 to find his farm's hired hand dead, his heart cut out and impaled on a stick. The charred remains of Mrs. Hutson and their four children were found inside the smoldering ruin of the family cabin.

April 22, the Harriman family was gunned down, stabbed, and mutilated while trying to escape across the Wabash River. Mr. and Mrs. Harriman, girls age 7 and 9, 3-year-old twin boys and a baby still in its mother's arms were all dead. Their farmhand managed to escape and run two miles to warn the other neighbors, including a pregnant woman in active labor. The murderers repeated heinous acts yet a third time on the Hinton family.

Some historians refer to the War of 1812 as the second revolution. Even though the Treaty of Paris ended the American Revolution in 1783, Americans had not seen the last of their British enemies and their allies. The British Navy, war weary and thinned from years of fighting in the Napoleonic War and the American and French Revolutions, began to impress (kidnap and press into service) American seamen. Meanwhile, the Native Americans were not satisfied with the yearly payments and gifts received in exchange for the shady treaties signed with the American government granting rights to their land.

In an effort to block westward expansion and end commercial interest in America, the British allied with some Native American tribes, including the Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Sauk, and the Fox. The British lavished gifts on the natives and talked up the injustices of the American treaties and incited them to attack against settlers. When war began, Ninian Edwards' appointment as Illinois territorial governor was ready to expire June 21, 1812. With no word from the White House on his reappointment, he continued to lead with or without authority, often paying the salaries of the militia and rangers out of his own pocket. Edwards operated out of Fort Russell with four regiments of militia and a few additional militia ranger companies.

Every white male between 18 and 45 served in a company of militia by law. They elected officers and were required to arm themselves and provide supplies. During war, they suffered financially as most of the men were farmers; plus military pay ran late if they received any at all. However, they also knew that defense against the natives met success only in numbers.

In a letter quoted from *Illinois in the War of 1812* by Gillum Ferguson, Edwards wrote of his desperation to Secretary of War William Eustis, "I have been extremely reluctant to send my family away, but unless I hear shortly of more assistance than a few rangers, I shall bury my papers in the ground, send my family off, and stand my ground as long as possible."

Left to his own devices for the defense of the territory, Edwards' plan entailed a string of block houses and forts no more than 20 miles from each other to serve as a safe haven for the settlements. Militiamen were ordered to scout between them daily.

Forts and blockhouse were erected across Illinois territory, including Fort Russell in Madison county, Forts Foot and La Motte in Crawford County, Fort Clark in Peoria County and Fort Dearborn in Chicago. While at least 94 forts and blockhouses blanketed the territory, the ones previously mentioned have historical markers at the sites placed by the Illinois State Historical Society. Battles were fought across Illinois, from Fort Dearborn in Chicago to Rock

Island to Peoria to Metropolis. War ended with the Treaty of Ghent Dec. 24, 1814. Four years later, Illinois became the 21st state.