

INSIDE:

Treasures from the
Norfolk History Museum

Calendar
of Events

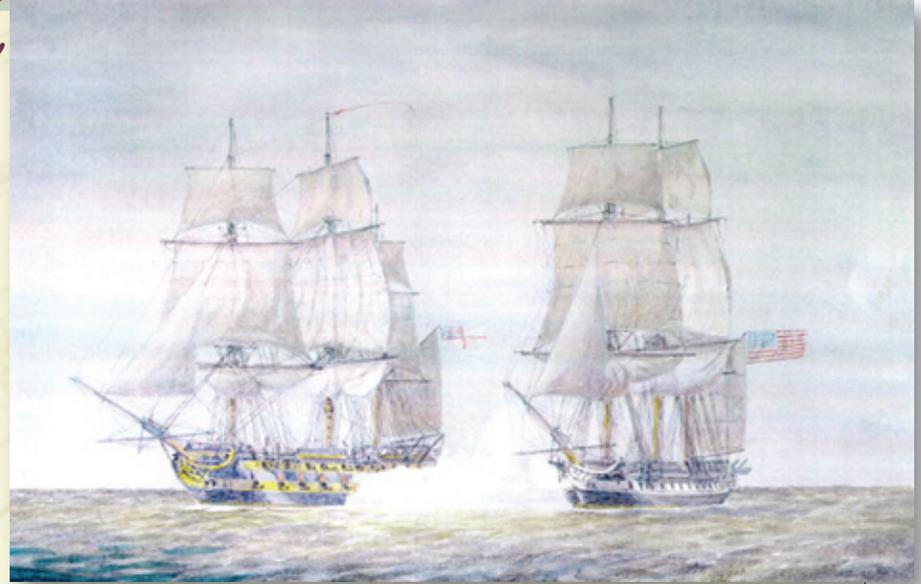
Courier

The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair of 1807

Concord Massachusetts may lay claim to the shot heard 'round the world, but the shot fired across the bow of the United States frigate *Chesapeake* on the morning of Monday, June 22, 1807 resonated locally loud and clear and rocked Norfolk's world for more than a decade.

It began as an ordinary day for the nearly 400 men and officers aboard the *Chesapeake*. The ship, under the command of Commodore James Barron, set sail from Norfolk bound for the Mediterranean, where she was to relieve the USS *Constitution* as flagship of the third Mediterranean squadron. It was a peace-keeping mission – its sole purpose was to maintain the peace treaty signed with Tripoli and Tunis two years earlier. The nature of the mission may account for the air of apparent nonchalance aboard the *Chesapeake*. Her guns were not manned; the crew was poorly trained and had not taken time to stow their gear before setting sail, but had left it strewn about on deck. An ordinary day for a ship ill-prepared for the extraordinary circumstances that would ensue just a few miles off-shore.

Out in open waters, the British frigate HMS *Leopard* sent word to Barron requesting the release of four alleged deserters from the British Navy. Barron refused. The *Leopard* opened fire on the *Chesapeake*,



Visit our web site

to read an account of the Chesapeake-Leopard affair from George Tucker's Norfolk Highlights.

www.norfolkhistorical.org/highlights/30.html



Commodore
James Barron, USN
1769-1851

killing three Americans and wounding 18 others, one of whom later died. The poorly prepared *Chesapeake* managed to fire just one shot. Barron struck his colors and offered to surrender; the English seized the purported deserters, three of whom were American-born, and allowed the *Chesapeake* to return to port.

Word of the effrontery reached Norfolk before the *Chesapeake* did, and a large party of citizens lined the shore when the American frigate limped into view. With the New Year's Day bombardment by British vessels in 1776 still fresh in many minds, Norfolk prepared for the worst, quickly forming a committee to see to the re-fortification of Fort Norfolk. The oldest buildings at the fort today

date from this time period, as does the masonry wall.

While many cried for war, President Thomas Jefferson's Congress countered with the Embargo Act of December 1807, which effectively kept American ships in port and was disastrous to trade. The Non-Intercourse Act of March 1809 re-opened trade with all nations except England and France and all but crippled Norfolk's economy, which was supported almost entirely by maritime-related activity and relied heavily on trade with the British West Indies. Congress declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812.

Barron was court-martialed in early 1808 and found guilty of "neglecting, on the probability of an engagement, to clear ship for action." He was suspended from duty for five years without pay. He traveled to Europe, where he would remain until 1818. Returning to America, he found



Commodore
Stephen Decatur, Jr
1779-1820

himself shunned by the Navy and the subject of derogatory remarks made by Commodore Stephen Decatur, a one-time friend. More than a dozen angry letters were exchanged between the two men, resulting in a duel initiated

Join us at Fort Norfolk on Saturday June 23 at an event commemorating the 200th anniversary of the battle (see Calendar of Events on page 3)

by Barron at Bladensburg, Maryland on the morning of Wednesday March 22 1820. Both men were wounded.

Decatur would later die. The pistols used in the duel are in the Moses Myers collection and are on display at the Norfolk History Museum.

Treasures from the Norfolk History Museum



At the head of the stairs on the second floor of the Norfolk History Museum at the Willoughby-Baylor House, the smallest room in the house is dedicated to one of Norfolk's great historians of the 20th century. The George Holbert Tucker Room currently houses an exhibit devoted to the Yellow Fever epidemic of the summer of 1855, in which one third of Norfolk's resident population died. Among the items on display here are a gold medal given to US Navy Surgeon Lewis W. Minor by the Town of Portsmouth for his service to military and civilian patients at the Naval Hospital; and the elaborate iron gate from the Howard Association lot at Elmwood Cemetery. Please visit the Norfolk History Museum to see these treasures and more.

<http://www.chrysler.org/houses.asp>



THE GEORGE HOLBERT
TUCKER ROOM IS
HOME TO MANY
RARE AND EXCITING
FINDS.



The Norfolk History Museum is in need of volunteer greeters.

Volunteer hours are Wednesday through Sunday - especially needed are folks for Saturday and Sunday.

No special skills are required, just a smile. If meeting new people isn't "your thing" many other volunteer opportunities are available for working in the gardens or helping out at special events. Volunteers of all ages accepted. Contact Jeanne Bollendorf at 333-1086 or jbollendorf@chrysler.org for more information.

Calendar of Events



June

Friday June 8 – Parade of Sail

Viewing of Parade of Sail at Fort Norfolk

Saturday June 9 – Sail VA

Display of memorabilia from 1907 Exposition and basement wine tasting at NHS headquarters at the Taylor-Whittle House

Saturday June 9 2:00 PM – “A Scene of Splendor: Dinner with Theodore Roosevelt”

Commemoration of dinner held at Moses Myers House for President Theodore Roosevelt in April 1907.

Wednesday June 13 7:00 PM – Norfolk History Museum Lecture Series: “Clarence A. Neff and the Beaux-Arts in Virginia”

Robert Wojtowicz, Associate Professor of Art History at Old Dominion University, will highlight the work of architect Clarence Amos Neff in Norfolk during the first half of the twentieth century. Location: Kaufman Theatre, Chrysler Museum.

Saturday June 23 – The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair

War of 1812 encampment, rifle demonstrations and a presentation by Spencer C. Tucker, author of *Injured Honor: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair* June 22, 1807. Location: Fort Norfolk. Time: Encampment 10:00 to 4:00; Tucker presentation 1:00, with light refreshments following.

Sunday June 24 – War of 1812 encampment

continues 10:00 to 4:00.

July

Wednesday July 11 7:00 PM – Norfolk History Museum Series

Old Soldiers Never Die:

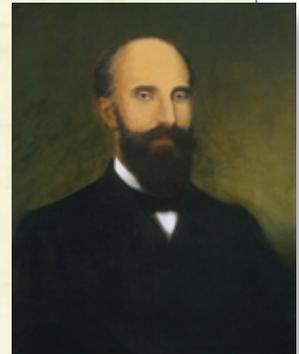
An Evening with Douglas MacArthur

Norfolk's own five-star General, Douglas MacArthur, will share his values and beliefs in “Listen, O Listen,” an account in the General's own words by Virginia Patriots interpreter Bill Young. The presentation will include passages from some of MacArthur's best known speeches. Location: Kaufman Theatre. Free and open to the public. Light refreshments.

August

Wednesday August 8, 7:00 PM – Norfolk History Museum Series: Barton Myers: Norfolk Visionary

Barton Myers served as Norfolk Mayor and was on the board of the 1907 Jamestown Exposition. Historic Houses Educator John Christiansen will speak on the life and service of this remarkable man. Location: Kaufman Theatre. Free and open to the public. Light refreshments.



Saturday and Sunday August 4-5 – Civil War Encampment

Re-enactors in period attire will portray soldiers and sailors from the Civil War. Location: Fort Norfolk. Time: 10:00 to 4:00. Picture ID required.

Sunday August 5 – A Visit From President Lincoln

To commemorate the 10 May 1862 Union Capture of Norfolk, nationally-known Lincoln interpreter George Buss will hold a press conference to answer questions about the occupation of Norfolk and Mr. Lincoln's views on the war. Cosponsored by NHS and Citizens for a Fort Monroe National Park. Location: Fort Norfolk. Time: 1:00. Free and open to the public. Picture ID required.

Norfolk in Summers Past

June 1, 1741 – The first Masonic lodge in the western world is chartered in Norfolk.

June 7, 1855 – The steamer *Ben Franklin* arrives from the Virgin Islands carrying yellow fever.

June 8, 1680 – A decree authorizing the establishment of Norfolk is passed by the Virginia General Assembly.

June 15, 1917 – President Woodrow Wilson signs a bill creating the Naval Operating Base.

June 22, 1807 – The battle between the US frigate *Chesapeake* and HMS *Leopard*

June 22, 1812 – The Battle of Craney Island

June 27, 1900 – Peter Wright becomes the first Norfolk resident to own an automobile

July 29, 1921 – Virginia Beach Boulevard opens, the first

concrete, hard-surfaced road from Norfolk to Virginia Beach.

July 30, 1875 – General George Edward Pickett dies at St. Vincent de Paul Hospital at Wood and Church Streets.

August 13, 1870 – The Norfolk City Railroad Company begins operating horse-drawn streetcars.

August 16, 1682 – The deed establishing the Town of Norfolk is officially recorded.

August 18, 1870 – The Norfolk Library Association is organized.

August 18, 1879 – A great August storm destroys the Freeman Street Baptist Church steeple and causes roof damage to half of the houses in Norfolk.

August 23, 1933 – A hurricane sets a record high tide for the area, 9.69 feet above mean low water.

Historical Opportunities

The visit of Prince Phillip to Norfolk in May was a reminder of the international importance of Norfolk in history. In this case, the USS *Wisconsin* (which he remembers from Tokyo Bay at the surrender of Japan) was the attraction. Norfolk's significant role now extends well beyond three centuries.

Did you know that in the 1800 U.S. Census, only twenty-five years after its total destruction, Norfolk was the tenth largest city in the country? Soon afterwards its boom was ended (temporarily) by the Jefferson Embargo against trade, in retaliation for the *Chesapeake-Leopard* Affair off the Virginia Capes. The existing masonry structures at Fort Norfolk were built in 1809-10 as defensive measures by a Congress frightened by this British attack on a U.S. warship.

We will recognize the 200th anniversary of that international outrage on Saturday June 23 at Fort Norfolk. Our guest speaker will be VMI Professor Spencer Tucker, co-author of *INJURED HONOR: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair*. Our event is co-sponsored by the Norfolk District, US ARMY Corps of Engineers (owners of Fort Norfolk) and the Hampton Roads Naval Museum. The weekend will feature an "encampment" at Fort Norfolk by War of 1812 re-enactors.

In November 2004, Debi Hacker from South Carolina's

Chicora Foundation, an expert on cemetery preservation, told NHS at our annual meeting that West Point Cemetery is unique in the South and deserves national recognition. We asked NHS Board member Dr. Tommy Bogger to lead an effort to achieve its designation on both the Virginia and National Register of Historic Places. It is a grueling procedure but he succeeded. West Point Cemetery was placed on the state register in March 2007 and on the national register on May 3, thanks to Dr. Bogger's hard work.

Harbor's Edge, the retirement high-rise adjoining Fort Norfolk is now more than half occupied. The residents are very interested in the old fort, and many have participated in walking tours conducted by NHS. They have formed a Fort Norfolk committee to work with the NHS Fort Norfolk Committee. NHS is welcoming them as neighbors for the Parade of Sail viewing on June 8, on the edge of the Elizabeth River at Fort Norfolk. All NHS members are welcome.

Attendance is growing at our Norfolk History Museum Series, every 2nd Wednesday evening at the Kaufman Theatre in the Chrysler Museum. Bring your friends. *We are looking for more active members on our several committees and task forces. Let us hear from you all.*

— **Louis Guy**, *President*

Visit our website for membership benefits and news of upcoming events.

www.NorfolkHistorical.Org

The
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HISTORICAL
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