The War of 1812

Growing Pains of a Nation

As of 1798 both British and French were harassing American shipping. On June 18, 1812 that came to a head when Congress declared war on Great Britain.
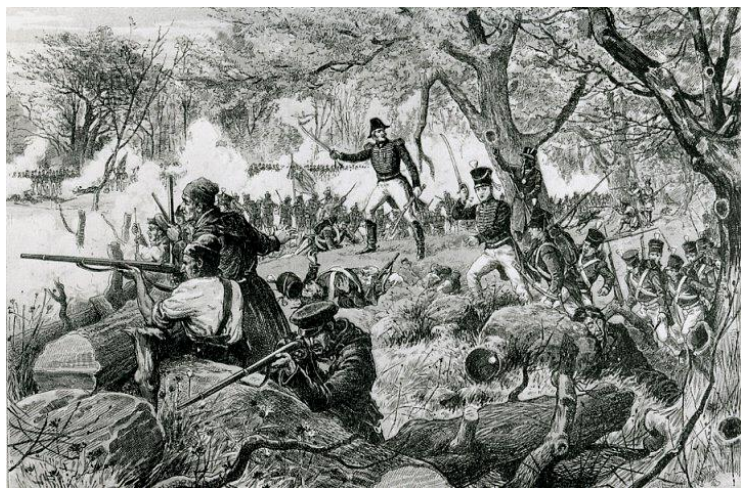
That same day Midshipman Joshua Sands joined the navy. He reported to Sackett's Harbor and Lake Ontario on Sept. 7 and served under Commodore Isaac Chauncey aboard the 16-gun brig *Oneida*.

In April of 1813 a British Squadron blockaded the state and foreign commerce came to a halt.
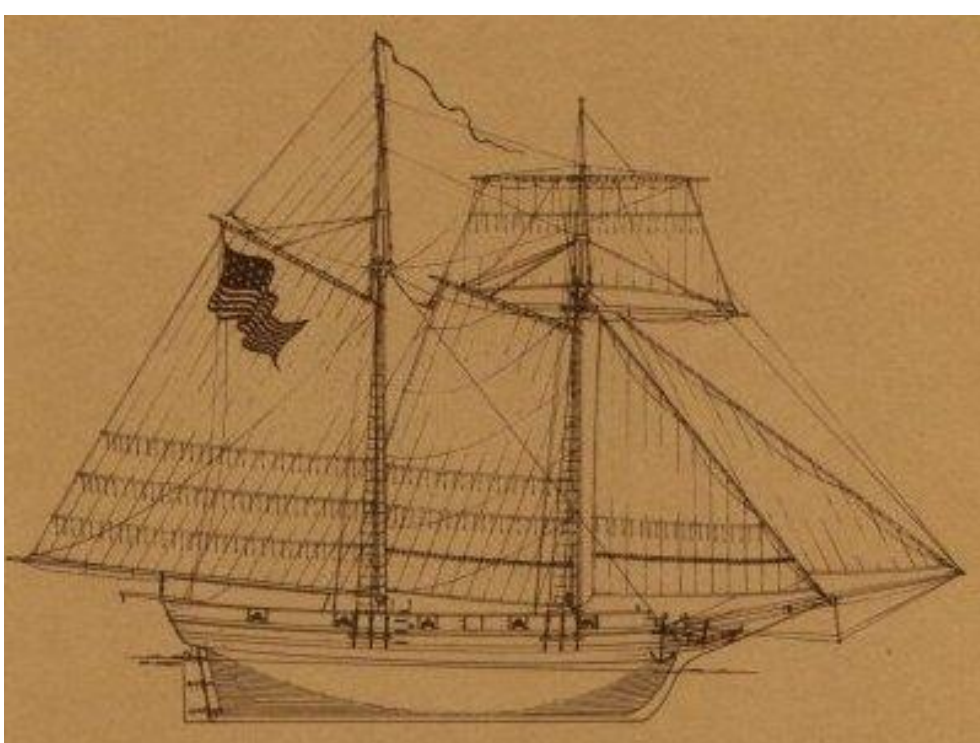

The 4th Brigade of the state militia was assigned to protect Fairfield County. Its commander, General Enoch Foote, had three companies in Stratford. Every able-bodied man from 17 to 50 was enrolled. Capt. Stephen Porter drilled his company on the old parade ground at Academy Hill and his men lived within a few blocks of the assembly point. Capt. Elijah Booth trained his men on the North Parade, south of the present town hall.

In 1814, a gun battery located in Bridgeport spotted a British ship chasing two small sailing craft trying to reach the harbor. In April 1814 a messenger rode into Stratford to report a British frigate and a sloop of war anchored off Bridgeport. The Stratford militia companies marched to Bridgeport. General Foote had more than 400 men on hand. Boats in the harbor were moved past the bridge for protection. The next day the British ships upped anchor and left.

A Scourge to British Shipping

In April 1813, Samuel Nicoll sailed from New York in the 15-gun schooner, *Scourge*, headed for the North Sea and the coast of England. On July 19, off Norway, Nicoll spoke with Commodore Rodgers in the U.S. frigate *President*. Later the Scourge fell in with the privateer *Rattlesnake* in the English Channel, and the two cruised together for the rest of the season preying on Britain's Baltic trade. One of Capt. Nicoll's trophies was an elegant chandelier that he sent home to Stratford to hang in the Episcopal church. He also sent other prizes to the United States and Norway to be sold.