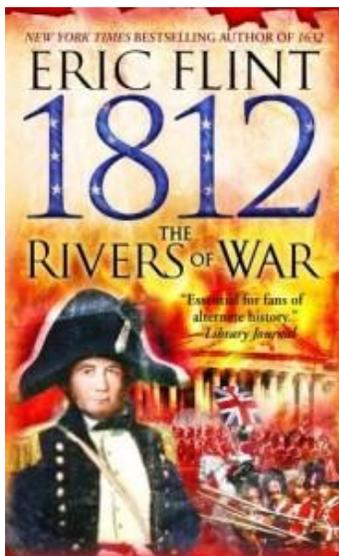


The Obscure War: HF and the War of 1812, Part Two

Cindy Vallar



1812: The Rivers of War by Eric Flint

Cindy Vallar continues the look at historical novels set during the War of 1812 she began in Part One of *The Obscure War*.

History doesn't live in a vacuum. Events occur around a central theme in any story, such as novels set during the War of 1812. Although this conflict was between the United States and Britain, it affected the lives of Americans, Canadians, and Native Americans far more than it affected the lives of the British, except for those who fought in the battles. One reason for this was that Britain had been engaged in the struggle against Napoleon for nearly two decades and was more concerned with her own survival.

Many historical novels spotlight the war's impact on the lives of ordinary people. For young readers, Lisa Papp's *The Town that Fooled the British* (Sleeping Bear Press, 2011)¹ explores how Henry Middle uses two lanterns to help the shipbuilding town of St. Michaels, Maryland outsmart the British during the summer of 1813.

Oh Say Can You See? (Walnut Springs, 2010), the fourth volume in L. C. Lewis's Free Men and Dreamers series, has several subplots that deal with freed slaves and the prejudice encountered when Abel and his son enlist in the Army, but it also focuses on Admiral Cockburn and Major-General Ross' attack on and burning of Washington and the bombardment of Fort McHenry in 1814. In her review, Jennie Hansen writes, "this volume goes far toward enlightening the reader to the terrible injustices and backroom greed that launched the war. It points up the legal inequities between races, nations, and genders ... [and] highlights the terrible losses that occur when good people do nothing and when wealth, prestige, greed, or any other personal interest is placed before freedom."²

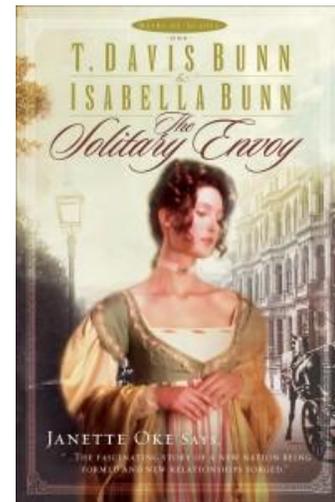
In Sara Donati's *Fire Along the Sky* (Dell, 2005), the war provides a backdrop for the everyday lives of the Bonners, a multi-ethnic family drawn into the conflict in Canada when two characters become prisoners of war. *Queen of Swords* (Bantam, 2007), the fifth book in the Wilderness series, continues this family saga, transporting the characters and readers to New Orleans and the Caribbean during the final year of the war.

After a British attack threatens the family business, Erica Langston sails to London to collect outstanding debts. Her arrival embroils her in a secret mission where she encounters her worst enemy in T. Davis and Isabella Bunn's *The Solitary Envoy* (Bethany House, 2004). One of the historical characters who appears in this novel is William Wilberforce, an English abolitionist. Dana Cohlmeier, in her review, writes, "This is an inspirational novel, and therefore the book is heavy on prayer, soul-searching and doing the right thing. However, this doesn't detract from the story ... It is always nice to see a strong female character fighting accept[ed] beliefs ... [F]or readers searching for something heartwarming, this is certainly one to pick up."³

Civilians aided in the war effort in numerous ways. Roseanna M. White's *Whispers from the Shadows* (Harvest House, 2013) involves spying and is the second book in her Culper Ring series. When treachery leads to the death of her father, a British general, Gwyneth Fairchild escapes to America and seeks a safe haven with the Lanes, who are spies.

Hardship, uncertainty, and the British invasion of Mackinac Island imperil twelve-year-old Mary O'Shea and her siblings in Gloria Whelan's *Once on This Island* (HarperCollins, 1992). After their father's enlistment in the American army, Mary's older brother struggles to take care of the farm and his sisters, while her older sister flirts with an English officer. One subplot concerns an Indian boy adopted by a white family and the dilemma he faces when he must choose between them and his native tribe.

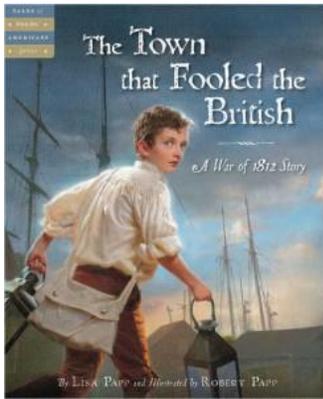
Another children's book is *Whispers of War* by Kit Pearson (Scholastic Canada, 2002). It depicts the dilemma – loyalty to King George or President Madison – that many Americans, living in Canada, faced at the onset of hostilities. Susanna encounters General Isaac Brock during the Battle of Queenston Heights, and comes to realize that war is devastating and confusing. Eleven-year-old Emma E. of New Brunswick gives it high marks. "I love this book!!! I keep reading it over and over."⁴ Gail de Vos's review notes that this book "highlights a different perspective on the War of 1812 in Niagara before it was destroyed in 1813."⁵



The Solitary Envoy by T. Davis and Isabella Bunn

Elizabeth Alder's *Crossing the Panther's Path* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002) is based on the life of fifteen-year-old Billy Calder (half Irish, half Mohawk), who served as translator and aide to Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief. Andrew Medlar writes in his *School Library Journal* review: "The valuable Native American perspective is important: William Henry Harrison is cast in an extremely negative light that rarely is illuminated in textbooks, and the generalized American ambition is shown to do what it indeed did ... destroy the homeland and much of the culture of the native peoples."⁶

When his sister disappears after the death of her fur trader husband, Alan Mackenzie travels with French-Indian voyageurs to find her in Margaret Elphinstone's *Voyageurs* (Canongate, 2003). His encounters and the war cause him to struggle with his Quaker upbringing and faith. *Kirkus Reviews* (6 January 2004) says "[t]he illusion of a past time is beautifully sustained by Elphinstone's detailed recreations of. . . period detail and by her narrator's reserved and wondering voice." London's *The Friend* (4 December 2004) calls it "... an extraordinary story told at various levels. History, travel, adventure, [and] love ... flow together in a seemingly effortless and natural manner so that all the research and meticulous attention to detail are woven into an authentic whole without being obtrusive."⁷



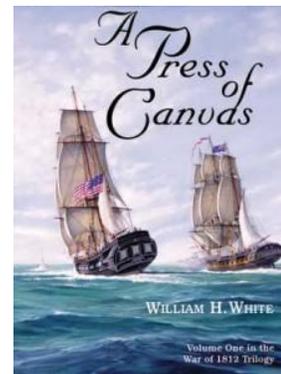
The Town that Fooled the British

Many nautical novels focus on particular engagements at sea or on the Great Lakes. Although the American navy was in its infancy, its successes against the mighty Royal Navy resulted in the British Admiralty warning its ships not to engage in single-ship battles. The success and daring of the American privateers drove insurance costs up and heavily affected merchant shipping. Their audaciousness knew few bounds, such as when Thomas Boyle, captain of *Chasseur*, blockaded the entire British coast.⁸ Hope Marston's *Sackets Harbor Powder Monkey* (Amazon, 2012) provides a fictional example. Eleven-year-old Rankin McMullin serves aboard the *Oneida*, which patrols Lake Ontario, until July 1812, when she and Rankin defend Sackets Harbor against five British warships.

A Press of Canvas (Tiller, 2000), the first book in William H. White's War of 1812 trilogy, tackles the issue of impressment, one factor which led to the war. Isaac Biggs of Marblehead, Massachusetts, and several of his mates are pressed into the Royal Navy after HMS *Orpheus* stops their vessel. This tale focuses on life in the British navy from the point of view of the fo'c'sle, rather than that of an officer. Donald Petrie, who wrote *The Prize Game* (Naval Institute Press, 1999), says "[i]t is a worthy effort, well executed, and thoroughly engaging, and all of us who love the subject matter are in his debt." Managing editor of *Motorboating and Sailing* John Woolridge writes, "A great read . . . taught me a lot about this period of history."⁹ The other titles in this series are *A Fine Tops' Breeze* and *The Evening Gun* (Tiller, 2001).

Another story that details the brutal life aboard a British warship is Cheryl Cooper's *Come Looking for Me* (Dundurn, 2010). The mysterious Emily craves adventure and sails for Canada, but Captain Trevelyan kidnaps her during the voyage. When his American frigate engages HMS *Isabelle*, Emily risks her life to escape his clutches and is rescued by British crewmen. This is a tale of courage, treachery, and mystery, for Emily isn't who she claims to be, and includes an interesting array of characters, including Commander Frances "Fly" Austen, Jane Austen's brother. The story continues in *Second Summer of War* (Dundurn, January 2014).

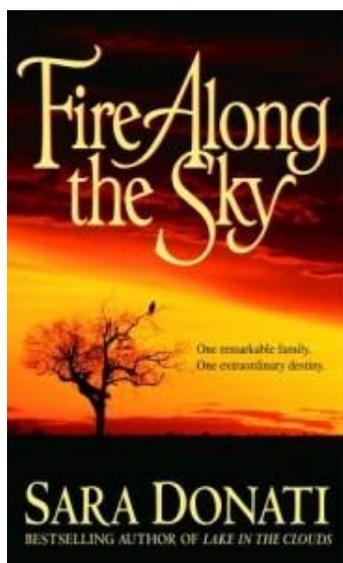
Other books concern the men who fought in the various battles on land. These inevitably point out the bumbling ineptitude that was a hallmark of many of the engagements, yet they also provide historical novels with tantalizing alternative history scenarios. D. K. Midkiff's *New Orleans Besieged* (Margaret Media, 2011) explores the "what if" consequences had the Americans not won the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815. His tale is populated with many historical personages, including Jean Laffite, Edward Livingston, Andrew Jackson, and Padre Antonio Sedella. Dr. Jessica Dorman of The Historic New Orleans Collection calls it "well crafted, well paced and thoroughly engaging . . . a masterwork of historical fiction . . . a study of political maneuvering, cross-cultural alliances, betrayal and altruism."¹⁰



A Press of Canvas by William H. White

Another "what if" – what if the Duke of Wellington had come to North America following Napoleon's defeat? Drawing on his thirty-year experience in the US Army and his definitive history, *The Final Invasion: Plattsburg 1814*, winner of the Distinguished Writing Prize from the Army Historical Foundation Col. David Fitz-Enz explores this premise in *Redcoats' Revenge* (Potomac Books,

2008). Jackie Cassada's review in *Library Journal* says, "Using a combination of narratives and correspondence to give a sense of verisimilitude to his story, the author succeeds in answering the perennial question of alternate history fans: 'What if?'"¹¹



Fire Along the Sky by Sara Donati

Another stellar alternative historical novel is Eric Flint's *1812: The Rivers of War* (Ballantine Books, 2006). The idea came from a request for the author to write a tale that answers the question of what if the Trail of Tears never occurred, and the resulting saga is a captivating, action-packed account of the final year of the war. It spans the breadth of the continent from Winfield Scott's exploits along the Canadian border, to the British invasion of Washington, to Andrew Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans. The characters are memorable, and Flint depicts a number of controversial topics from a variety of perspectives. *New York Times* bestselling author David Weber writes, "Eric Flint [drops] his readers into another time and place, where cultures collide, the action is hot and heavy, and we get to experience the best of the human spirit." I loved reading this book and getting to know the compelling characters, and while I've read numerous historical accounts of the war during the past two years, I missed the break point – the point where the story deviates from history – because it's a minor change that is expertly woven into the fabric of this tale. Yet every subsequent event that occurs connects seamlessly and logically to that single modification.

These remain but a sampling of the historical novels depicting the War of 1812 that have been published for children and adults. They aren't always easy to find, but they all delve beneath the surface to provide readers with a greater understanding of this obscure and often forgotten war.

Notes:

1. A seventeen-page teaching guide for *The Town that Fooled the British* can be downloaded from http://sleepingbearpress.com/products/11467/teaching_guides.
2. Jennie Hansen, "LDS Fiction: Oh, Say Can You See? By L. C. Lewis," *Meridian Magazine*, 20 January 2011, accessed 25 October 2013, <http://www.ldsmag.com/article/7366/1>.
3. Cohlmeier's review appeared in the May 2004 issue of *Historical Novels Review* (issue 28) and can be read online at <http://historicalnovelsociety.org/reviews/the-solitary-envoy/>.
4. Emma's review can be found at <http://www.scholastic.ca/dearcanada/books/whispersofwar.htm#titlereviews>.
5. Vos's review appeared in the 31 January 2003 issue (IX:11) of *CM: Canadian Review of Materials* and can be found at <http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/cm/vol9/no11/whispers.html>.
6. This review is at <http://www.amazon.com/Crossing-Panthers-Path-Elizabeth-Alder/dp/0374316627>.
7. These and other review snippets are at Margaret Elphinstone's website <http://www.margaretelphinstone.co.uk/phdi/p1.nsf/supppages/0994?opendocument&part=4>.
8. Learn more about Boyle and the privateers in my article "Fells Point and the Baltimore Privateers" at <http://www.cindyvallar.com/chasseur.html>.
9. Historical Sea Stories written by William H. White at <http://www.seafiction.net/reviews.html>.
10. Octavia Books at <http://www.octaviabooks.com/book/9780982455135>.
11. The review is at <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/redcoats-revenge-col-david-fitz-enz-usa-ret-col-david/1111669253?ean=9781574889871>. Readers can view a video of the author and his book on C-Span2's BookTV <http://www.booktv.org/Watch/10927/Redcoats+Revenge+An+Alternate+History+of+the+War+of+1812.aspx>

About the contributor: CINDY VALLAR writes The Red Pencil column. Her historical fantasy story, "Rumble the Dragon," appears in Dark Oak Press's forthcoming anthology *A Tall Ship, a Star, and Plunder*.