

Friends Good Will Timeline

1774 - Oliver Williams is born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, a village near Boston.

1787 - The United States passes the Northwest Ordinance, providing that Territories east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio Rivers could be admitted to the Union as soon as their population growth could justify their administration as sovereign states. The Ordinance encouraged growth in the Michigan Territory.

1797 - The United States builds six heavy frigates for its newly formed navy. The *USS Constitution*, one of these six original frigates, later nicknamed "Old Ironsides," is launched in Boston, at the Charlestown Navy yard. *USS President* and *Chesapeake* are also among the original six frigates.

1799 - Napoleon Bonaparte, now dictator of France, goes to war with Britain sparking a prolonged period of world war between competing empires: the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). A great deal of the conflict plays out across the oceans of the world as the empires compete for secure trade routes and strategic positions. The United States attempts to remain neutral and trade normally with both Britain and France.

1803 - President Thomas Jefferson, amid partisan criticism, purchases land from cash-starved France. Napoleon sells the Louisiana Territory to the United States, more than doubling the size of our young nation.

1804 – Meriwether Lewis and Captain Clark, authorized by President Jefferson, lead an expedition to view first-hand the extent of the purchase.

1805 - With British men-of-war ships strung across the globe, forming England's wooden walls and staving off invasion from a continental Europe within Napoleon's grip, Lord Admiral Horatio Nelson defeats a combined French and Spanish Fleet off Cape Trafalgar. Lord Nelson is struck down on the quarterdeck of *Victory* by rifle fire. The battle is the last of the large fleet action in the Great Age of Sail. The French invasion is no longer a threat although Britain mourns the death of its greatest hero. Robert Barclay, a young British officer is present at Trafalgar.

1806 - Lewis and Clark return and begin to speak and write about their discoveries.

1807 - Published accounts of the Lewis and Clark expedition fuel the dreams of an American population eager to move westward.

1807 - Britain enacts the Orders in Council, severely restricting neutral trade with Europe as a means to economically strangle Napoleon's empire. British blockades and the impressments of American sailors upon the high seas interfere with American rights of

free trade and attempts to maintain a policy of neutrality. The Orders in Council is cited as one cause of the War of 1812.

1807 - President Thomas Jefferson's Embargo Act is passed, rendering trade with Britain illegal in retaliation for Britain's interference with American shipping upon the high seas. In combination with the Orders in Council, the Embargo Act reduces American shipping to only coastal trade. Unfortunately, the United States needs trade with Britain. The measure is unpopular and ineffective, only encouraging further development of fast sloops for smuggling, and equally fast government sloops to catch the smugglers. On the Great Lakes, government vessels spend more time seizing smugglers and their vessels than protecting American trade routes from British interference along the eastern seaboard.

1808 - Oliver Williams moves to Detroit, Michigan Territory, and opens a dry-goods store. Later, his son, Ephriam, recalls his father used to make two long trips overland each year from Buffalo, with supplies and inventory.

1809 - Jefferson's Embargo Act, generally viewed to have damaged American economic interests, is repealed in the closing days of his administration.

1809 - United States custom records from Detroit and Mackinac reveal that by this date two Masters already active in maritime commerce upon the upper lakes. They were Daniel Dobbins, owner and Master of *Salina*, a schooner, and another mariner, William Lee, Master of *Contractor*, a sloop.

1810 - Oliver Williams determines to build a square topsail sloop. The keel is laid on the banks of the River Rouge, just south of Detroit.

1811 - As the result of heightened tensions upon the high seas between Britain and the United States, the *USS President*, finding a warship under its lee at dawn refusing to identify herself, fires upon the smaller vessel. The unidentified vessel is British. *HMS Little Belt* (not related to *Friends Good Will/Little Belt*) is severely mauled, numerous British seamen are killed and the incident brings both nations closer to war.

1811 - Oliver Williams launches his new sloop, christening her "*Friends Good Will*." He hires, William Lee, as Master. At 47 "tonnes burthen", *Friends Good Will* works on Lakes Erie and Huron, supplying Williams' store in Detroit and accepting cargoes for any other purposes as well.

1812 - In June, Oliver Williams charts *Friends Good Will* to the United States government for the task of taking military stores and supplies to Fort Dearborn at what is now Chicago.

1812 - On June 18, the United States declares war on Britain. A popular slogan, "Free Trade and Sailors Rights" develops summarizing the reasons for the conflict from the

American perspective. Persons at Detroit and Mackinac Island are unaware of the Declaration of War. British soldiers on St. Joseph Island, however, near the entrance to the St. Mary's River, hear news of the conflict before their American counterparts.

1812 - On June 19, *Friends Good Will* leaves Detroit with 304 items as cargo bound for Mackinac Island. Oliver Williams is on board for this voyage. Her manifest, signed by her Master, William Lee, has survived to this day.

1812 - On June 27, *Friends Good Will* arrives at Mackinac Island, off-loads her cargo and takes on the military supplies bound for Fort Dearborn. She departs for Fort Dearborn on June 29.

1812 – In early July, *Friends Good Will* arrives at Fort Dearborn and completes her business. She takes on furs for her return voyage to Detroit, leaving on July 11.

1812 – Early on July 17, 1812, British soldiers from St. Joseph Island get off their ship under the cover of darkness on the north shore of Mackinac Island and haul cannon to a hill overlooking the fort. The American garrison awakens to find itself an indefensible situation. Fort Mackinac surrenders without a shot.

1812 – On July 17, in the late afternoon, *Friends Good Will*, not knowing about the declaration of war, stops at Mackinac Island on her return trip to Detroit. Oliver Williams later recalled that she put in "with American colours, supposing the port to be in our possession...Captain Roberts, the British Officer, ordered the crew on shore and took inventory of property... for a prize of war." Oliver Williams, William Lee, and all of the crew were held as prisoners. Also captured were Daniel Dobbins and his schooner, *Salina* and another sloop, *Erie*. Prisoners are taken back to Detroit on the captured schooner, *Salina*.

1812 - July. *Friends Good Will* is taken into the Royal Navy as a part of the North American Squadron under a British officer, Commodore Robert Barclay. Her name is changed to *Little Belt*; she is armed with three canons, including one on a pivot.

1812 - In August, the commander at Fort Dearborn is ordered to evacuate the post's military personnel, women and children to Fort Wayne in Indiana. The party is ambushed by Native Americans allied to the British on August 16. *Friends Good Will* may have been the last ship to put in at the garrison before the tragedy.

1812 - On August 18, Detroit falls to the British without firing a shot. The United States no longer has any credible claim to the vast Northwest Territory. Oliver Williams is present at Detroit at the time of the capitulation. According to family history, Williams is held by the British aboard a prisoner ship in the Detroit River. He escapes by killing his jailer and swimming to shore.

1813 - The American frigate, *Chesapeake*, engages *HMS Shannon* in battle. *Chesapeake's* Captain Lawrence urges his shipmates in his dying gasp from the quarterdeck, "Don't Give the Ship". Unfortunately, after perhaps as little as 15 minutes, the *Chesapeake* strikes having incurred heavy casualties.

1813 – Summer - Britain controls Lakes Erie, Huron, Superior and Michigan. Lake Ontario is yet contested. Lieutenant John Bream of the *Provincial Marine* is in command of *Little Belt* on Lake Erie. Most of the summer is spent tacking back and forth, blockading the entrance of Presque Isle harbor at Erie, Pennsylvania. Daniel Dobbins assists in forming a squadron at Erie and is now being assisted by Noah Brown, a shipbuilder from New York. Oliver Hazard Perry, a young Master Commandant from Newport, Rhode Island, is in command.

1813 – On Sept. 13, is the Battle of Lake Erie between an American squadron commanded by Oliver Perry and a British squadron under Captain Robert Barclay. Perry's forces prevail and *Little Belt* becomes part of the American Great Lakes navy.

1813 – On Dec. 31, *Little Belt*, marooned on the shore of Lake Erie near Buffalo, New York, for the past two months, is set ablaze and burned by a British raiding party.

1834 – Oliver Williams dies in Waterford, Oakland County, Michigan.

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