



Women in the War of 1812

Primary Sources

DIRECTIONS

Read the following texts to gain an understanding of the sources, and answer questions in the Activity Sheet.



DOCUMENT A

Letter from Dolley Madison to Lucy Todd

DESCRIPTION

In this letter First Lady, Dolley Madison, explains to her sister, Lucy Todd, her plan for evacuating the white house, as the British were approaching Washington D.C..



Portrait of Dolley Madison

Tuesday Augt. 23d. 1814.

Dear Sister.

—My husband left me yesterday mornng. to join Gen. Winder. He **enquired (questioned)** anxiously whether I had courage, or firmness to remain in the President's house until his return, on the morrow, or succeeding day, and on my assurance that I had no fear but for him and the success of our army, he left me, **beseeching (begging)** me to take care of myself, and of the cabinet papers, public and private. I have since recd. two **despatches (letters)** from him, written with a pencil; the last is alarming, because he desires I should be ready at a moment's warning to enter my carriage and leave the city; that the enemy seemed stronger than had been reported and that it might happen that they would reach the city, with intention to destroy it. X X X

X X X I am accordingly ready; I have pressed as many cabinet papers into trunks as to fill one carriage; our private property must be sacrificed, as it is impossible to procure wagons for its transportation. I am determined not to go myself until I see Mr. Madison safe, and he can accompany me, as I hear of much hostility towards him, X X X disaffection stalks around us.

X X X X X My friends and acquaintances are all gone; Even Col. C— with his hundred men, who were stationed as a guard in the enclosure.

X X French John (a faithful domestic,) with his usual activity and resolution, offers to spike the cannon at the gate, and to lay a train of powder which would blow up the British, should they enter the house. To the last proposition I positively object, without being able, however, to make him understand why all advantages in war may not be taken.



DOCUMENT A | CONTINUED

Letter from Dolley Madison to Lucy Todd

Wednesday mornng., twelve O'clock. Since sunrise I have been turning my spy glass in every direction and watching with unwearied anxiety, hoping to discern (figure out) the approach of my dear husband and his friends; but, alas, I can descry (see) only groups of military wandering in all directions, as if there was a lack of arms, or of spirit to fight for their own firesides!

Three O'clock. Will you believe it, my Sister? We have had a battle or skirmish near Bladensburg, and I am still here within sound of the cannon! Mr. Madison comes not; may God protect him! Two messengers covered with dust come to bid me **fly (leave)**; but I wait for him. X X X At this late hour a wagon has been **procured (obtained)**, I have had it filled with the plate and most valuable portable articles belonging to the house; whether it will reach its destination; the Bank of Maryland, or fall into the hands of British soldiery, events must determine.

Our kind friend, Mr. Carroll has come to **hasten (quicken)** my departure, and is in a very bad mood with me because I insist on waiting until the large picture of Gen. Washington is secured, and it requires to be unscrewed from the wall. This process was found too **tedious (difficult)** for these **perilous (dangerous)** moments; I have ordered the frame to be broken, and the canvas taken out, and the precious portrait placed in the hands of two gentlemen of New York, for safe keeping. And now, dear sister, I must leave this house, or the retreating army will make me a prisoner in it, by filling up the road I am directed to take. When I shall write to you, or where I shall be tomorrow, I cannot tell!!

SOURCE

Dolley Madison. Letter to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, August 23, 1814. James Madison Papers, 1723–1859. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. James Madison Papers Collection



DOCUMENT B

Journal Excerpt from Margaret Bayard Smith's Journal

DESCRIPTION

Margaret Bayard Smith's journals and letters recount how Washington D.C. women navigated the War of 1812. Here is a passage from when the British invaded Washington D.C..



Portrait of Margaret Bayard Smith

August 24, 1814.

The **consternation (feelings of anxiety)** of the people was excessive. The streets were filled with women & children flying with their clothes & furniture. I found our quiet little neighborhood had become a scene of terror and confusion. Mrs. Thornton, Mrs. Tayloe & many others were packing up their valuables to fly to the country. Poor women! How little did they think of the scenes they were to witness! Our troops are flying in every direction... What a night of terror was the succeeding one!

Our city was taken, the bridges and public buildings burnt... We looked at the public buildings, but none were so thoroughly destroyed as the President's House... [When hearing of the attack], I wrote to my sister: As for our enemy at home [enslaved people], I have no doubt that they will if possible join the British; here we are, I believe firmly in no danger, as the aim of those in the country would be as quickly as possible to join those in the city... Mr. S. has procured pistols &c &c sufficient for our defence, and we make use of every precaution...

SOURCE

Smith, Margaret Bayard. Commonplace Books, 1799–1843. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



DOCUMENT C

Newspaper Excerpt Announcing the Death of Elizabeth Sands

DESCRIPTION

On Saturday, August 9, 1890, a newspaper in Lancaster, Pennsylvania—The Semi-Weekly New Era—printed the following obituary of a woman who supported American troops during the defense of Baltimore in September 1814 during the War of 1812.



Illustration of people helping wounded soldiers outside a house.

Death of Baltimore's Centennarian.

Mrs. Elizabeth Sands, the last link that bound the present generation with the gallant band of heroes who defended Baltimore against Great Britain in 1812, died in Baltimore Sunday morning at the advanced age of 101. The immediate cause of death was an attack of cholera morbus, but the extremely warm weather hastened the end. Two of the best physicians in the city attended her, and her wonderful **vitality (strong energy)** attracted the attention of all the medical men in the State.

She was born at Darlington, Harford county, her father being Cuthbert Warner, one of the first clockmakers in Maryland. She was married twice and had been a widow for over sixty years. While her first husband was sick with fever at Annapolis she nursed him, and when he died she remained with the army during the entire campaign. She was at the Battle of North Point, and her services as a nurse were **invaluable (extremely helpful)**. She saved many wounded soldiers. Following the battle of North Point, Elizabeth and others accompanied Dr. James H. McCulloch, U.S. Army surgeon at Fort McHenry behind British lines to tend to the wounded and dying around the nearby Old Methodist Meeting House, which was utilized as a field hospital. Among the fallen were three of Elizabeth's brothers and her nephew.

SOURCE

"Death of Baltimore's Centennarian." The Semi-Weekly New Era (Lancaster, PA), August 9, 1890, page 3. Accessed through the American Battlefield Trust.

On September 12, 1889, on the 75th anniversary of Patapsco Neck, Elizabeth was formally recognized for her service by making her an honorary member of the Association of the Old Defenders of Baltimore in 1814. She could be seen every Defenders' Day waving a star-spangled banner as the parade passed by her home at Eutaw and Madison Streets.