

Society Participates in honoring War of 1812 Virginia Governor. James Barbour

The Society of the War of 1812 in the Commonwealth of Virginia participated in the unveiling of a Virginia Historical Highway Marker on April 17, 2015, as Stuart L. Butler, Councilor of the Society, was the main speaker. Butler, the author of, *Defending the Old Dominion: Virginia and Its Militia in the War of 1812* and *A Guide to Virginia Militia Units in the War of 1812* is probably the most knowledgeable person about War of 1812 Virginia Governor, James Barbour. Below this is the announcement of the event by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the text of Butler's speech and a photograph taken at the event

Department of Historic Resources

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**STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER
"GOVERNOR JAMES BARBOUR"
TO BE DEDICATED**

—Orange County marker in Barboursville recalls Gov. James Barbour's military leadership during the War of 1812—

—The marker's text is reproduced below—

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources highlighting the War of 1812 and the military leadership of Governor James Barbour will be dedicated in Barboursville in Orange County this month.

The dedication ceremony begins at 3 p.m., Friday, April 17, at the marker's location along state route 678 (Governor Barbour Street), approximately a quarter-mile east of its intersection with Route 20 (Constitution Highway).

Speakers during the dedication will include Virginia Secretary of Agriculture Todd Haymore; Lee Frame, chairman of the Orange County Board of Supervisors; historian Stuart Butler, author of *Defending the Old Dominion: Virginia and its Militia in the War of 1812*; James Hare of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and Luca Paschina of the Barboursville Winery who will emcee the event.

After the dedication, a reception will be held on the grounds of Barboursville Winery, which includes the ruins of the one-time family home of Governor Barbour.

The “Governor James Barbour” sign marks another stop on a War of 1812 heritage highway route linked by historical markers created to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the war. The signs—numbering 19 approved, with 12 erected—result from collaboration between the Department of Historic Resources and the Virginia Bicentennial of the American War of 1812 Commission.

The War of 1812, fought between the U.S. and Great Britain, is called by some historians the nation’s second war of independence.

The marker recalls that Barbour served as Governor and commander of Virginia’s militia forces during the war. “Barbour planned, organized, and directed the defense of Virginia from January 1812 until December 1814,” in the marker’s words.

“Known for his oratorical skills and organizing talents, he inspired his fellow Virginians to defend the Commonwealth from relentless British incursions in Hampton Roads and the Northern Neck,” the marker states.

Barbour, who commanded militia in the field on a few occasions, later served as a U.S. Senator from Virginia and U.S. Secretary of War.

Each of the bicentennial signs commemorating the War of 1812 features on one side general information about the causes of the war and its impact on Virginia, especially the Chesapeake Bay and Tidewater regions. The signs also note that “more than 2,000 enslaved African Americans in Virginia had gained their freedom aboard British ships.”

According to the legislation enacted by the General Assembly to establish the bicentennial commission, “An estimated 70,000 Virginians served during the War of 1812. There were some 73 armed encounters with the British that took place in Virginia during the war.” The 2008 legislation also states, “The nation’s capitol, strategically located off the Chesapeake Bay, was a prime target for the British, and the coast of Virginia figured prominently in the Atlantic theatre of operations.”

The Orange County Historical Society and the Barboursville Winery have assisted in the placement of the marker and in arranging for its dedication.

A 12-page booklet that lists all the historical markers in Virginia relating to the War of 1812, including each sign's text, is available online for downloading (as a PDF) from the Department of Historic Resources' Website ([www.dhr.virginia](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov)). The direct link to the publication is http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/pdf_files/War%20of%201812%20Markers%20publicationFINAL.pdf

Virginia's historical highway marker program, which began in 1927 with the installation of the first historical markers along U.S. Route 1, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,400 official state markers, most maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation, as well as by local partners in jurisdictions outside of VDOT's authority.

Texts of the marker:

Governor James Barbour JJ-28

Here at Barboursville lie the ruins of the family home of James Barbour, Virginia's governor during the War of 1812. As commander of Virginia's militia forces, Barbour planned, organized, and directed the defense of Virginia from January 1812 until December 1814. Known for his oratorical skills and organizing talents, he inspired his fellow Virginians to defend the Commonwealth from relentless British incursions in Hampton Roads and the Northern Neck. On a few occasions, he took command of the militia while in the field. He later served as U.S. Senator from Virginia and U.S. Secretary of War.

Obverse side:

The War of 1812 V-53

Impressment of Americans into British service and the violation of American ships were among the causes of America's War of 1812 with the British, which lasted until 1815. Beginning in 1813, Virginians suffered from a British naval blockade of the Chesapeake Bay and from British troops plundering the countryside by the Bay and along the James, Rappahannock, and Potomac Rivers. The Virginia militia deflected a British attempt to take Norfolk in 1813 and engaged British forces throughout the war. By the end of the war, more than 2,000 enslaved African Americans in Virginia had gained their freedom aboard British ships.

The text of Butlers speech follows:

As Good a Wartime Governor as Virginia Ever Had

James Barbour was as good a wartime governor as Virginia ever had. He was a man of matchless integrity, high moral character, conscientious almost to a fault in applying the law, and an indefatigable defender of the Commonwealth during wartime. For the next few minutes, I would like to explain and defend these statements and I hope to your satisfaction.

James Barbour came from a remarkable Orange County family that took service to state and country very seriously. His father, Thomas, served in the Virginia House of Burgesses 1769-1776 and in the first four Revolutionary War Conventions and was a justice of the peace for fifty-seven years. James' brother, Philip Pendleton Barbour (1783-1841) served in the Virginia House of Delegates, elected as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, president of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829, and was a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. A half dozen members of James' extended family included those who served in the Virginia state government, and the U.S. Congress.

James Barbour was born on June 10, 1775, in Orange County. He did not receive a college or formal education due to family financial problems, but obtained a classical education from a local academy, James Waddell's in Gordonsville. He took avidly to a law career at the age of eighteen. He quickly built a very successful law practice in Orange County and entered politics when he was elected to the House of Delegates in 1798. He continued to represent Orange County in the House through 1811. From 1809 to 1811 he served as Speaker of the House of

Delegates. He narrowly lost the governor's election to William Smith in 1811, but was elected later to that office when Smith died in the tragic theater fire in Richmond in December 1811.

Throughout the war years, Governor Barbour proved to be a vigilant and tireless supporter of the Madison's Administration reasons for going to war against Great Britain. He was a fervent Jeffersonian and states rights adherent, although his views would change in the coming years. He struck Virginians as intelligent, extremely conscientious, and possessing an oratorical style that some would call Ciceronian, as flamboyant and flowery as any speaker at the time.

Barbour's inspiring prose was a perfect fit for those who needed a chief executive to sound the clarion call, and to explain and justify what responsibilities, deprivations, and hardships that many Virginians felt lay ahead.

In March of 1812, he quickly saw that war with Great Britain was more likely to occur than not, and addressed the General Assembly on the defense of the Commonwealth. He quickly outlined a plan for a defense of eastern Virginia. He described the precarious situation of the lack of arms and ordnance among the counties that would be the most likely targets of any British assault, and recommended remedies to rectify the condition. He issued a written circular to all the militia brigades instructing them that they should be animated by the spirit and action of their Revolutionary War forefathers whose sacrifices had given them a nation. "We must Act...Do more...rouse a military ardour. Invite your Regiment to volunteer musters. If practical,

attend them yourself. Impress upon their minds that we know not the day or the hour when they will be called upon to act.”

And act he did. From April 21 until mid-May 1812, the governor conducted a fact-finding inspection of Tidewater Virginia from Richmond to Norfolk, noting the strong and weak points of the area, and conferring with militia officers of the Hampton Roads area. Shortly after his inspection trip, Governor Barbour requested from the War Department more Federal regiments to defend Virginia. When such requests went unheeded, the governor sent his own representatives to Washington to make the case for more aid. In the meantime, Governor Barbour sent five hundred militia to Norfolk in the summer of 1812 as a show of some force for the Norfolk area.

In September 1812 he responded to the War Department’s request for up to fifteen hundred Virginia militia to help Gen. William Henry Harrison expel the British and its Indian allies from Michigan which they had taken in August 1812. The request came as a complete surprise for Barbour, busy with plans for the defense of eastern Virginia. He quickly reordered his priorities and organized a tent-making and canteen manufactory at the state capitol to supply the needs for the new brigade of militia. He appointed Brig. Gen. Joel Leftwich to command a brigade of militia from the western parts of Virginia (now West Virginia) and issued orders for its organization.

Because the General Assembly felt that the federal government had not responded to Virginia's defense needs, the General Assembly—with the governor's strong backing— created a distinct Virginia army, exclusive of the militia and not answerable to the U.S. Army. The army, however, was never fielded. Through the help of James Monroe, then Secretary of State, the federal government promised Virginia two new U.S. Army regiments which would make the new Virginia army superfluous. Because the law remained on the books, Governor Barbour felt that he had little choice but to carry out its provisions. So conscientious was Barbour in this opinion to uphold the law, he saw that he had but one option to avoid calling it into operation, and that was to call a special session of the General Assembly to repeal the law. This he did in May 1813, and the legislature repealed the law.

When the British squadrons made their first appearance in Hampton Roads on February 4, 1813, Governor Barbour called an emergency meeting of his Council on February 6 and immediately ordered elements of the Virginia militia to Norfolk. He not only ordered the militia to act, but he, himself, arrived in Norfolk on March 10 to take command and oversee the organization of some 2000 militia and appoint its commanders before leaving.

A sure sign of a successful leader lies in the selection of outstanding individuals to execute one's orders. In this regard, James Barbour was not lacking. Barbour called out for active service those militia officers whom he felt would be the most successful in pursuing victory, regardless of political views or seniority. An example of Barbour's selection regardless of party or militia

seniority is his selection of Robert B. Taylor as commanding general of the Norfolk area. Taylor was a talented militia officer who was also a Federalist and who opposed the war. He likewise called into service other Federalists like James Breckinridge and Charles Porterfield to command brigades during the war, also to much grumbling from the ranks.

When the federal government refused to reimburse Virginia for militia disbursements, Barbour dispatched Federalists Charles Fenton Mercer and John Campbell (both Federalists) to inquire into the War Department's rejection of Virginia's claims for the Ohio expedition and other military payments. In his view, they were the best men for the job. Governor Barbour continued to pursue Virginia's claims against the U.S. government whenever he saw the opportunity to do so. When the General Assembly composed a strongly worded criticism of the U.S. government's refusal to settle the claims, Governor Barbour stepped in and sent the resolution to Virginia's delegation with the order that the resolution not be distributed to the U.S. Congress as a whole, but have the Virginia delegation work out amongst them the method of achieving it quietly. He likewise softened the Assembly's strongly worded resolution criticizing the War Department's refusal to reinforce Fort Powhatan on the James, and managed to obtain the President's promise to send more engineer officers to reevaluate the defense of that fort. President Madison followed through with his promise.

The relationship between Governor Barbour and the General Assembly could not have been more harmonious. Barbour also supported with alacrity demands for additional militia drafts

made upon the Commonwealth by the commanding generals of the Fifth Military District (the Norfolk area). His relationship was especially close with General Taylor, but he also maintained a cordial relationship with Taylor's successor, Gen. Moses Porter, until the end of the war. Barbour's whole hearted support in responding to additional calls for militia was vital for Virginia's defense. Barbour was tireless in responding to his militia's commanders in the field, especially in the summer of 1814 when the British launched heavy incursions on the Northern neck and Eastern Shore.

After the invasion of Washington but before the Baltimore campaigns, Governor Barbour immediately called in his Council to devise plans to defend the Commonwealth should the enemy's increased forces be used against Norfolk and Richmond. In his August 26, 1814, proclamation to the state, he roused Virginia's citizenry to rally and come forth to save the state from invasion. He warned his fellow countrymen of the enemy's "intention to lay waste, with fire and sword every part of the country which may fall under is power."

Governor Barbour, as he had done in March 1813, took to the field himself and maintained his presence among his troops until they were finally organized. After Baltimore's valiant defense, the British withdrew to their ships. Governor Barbour and then acting Secretary of War Monroe engaged in close consultation on Virginia's defense needs as well as what part Virginia could play in the future defense of Washington and Baltimore should the British return. When Monroe asked Barbour for more regiments to defend the national capital area, Barbour quickly

responded by reassigning two brigades then marching to Norfolk. They would remain in Maryland until December 1814.

James Barbour was elected governor a third time in 1814. There was little opposition in each of his elections. On October 10, 1814, Governor Barbour addressed the General Assembly for the last time. While he confessed that while he had not accomplished all that he had hoped to as governor, he told the Assembly, that nevertheless,

As far as intention was concerned, [I] have been invariably directed to the best interest of my country. I shall carry with me into retirement an indelible impression of the favors I have experienced and unceasingly pray that a good Providence may perpetually have in His holy keeping those to whom the destinies of my country may be confided, and that the legislature of Virginia may continue to be the sleepless guardian of the liberty and honor of their country.

But Virginia was not through with James Barbour. He was overwhelmingly elected by the Virginia legislature as U.S. Senator in 1815 to fill out the vacancy left by Robert Brent, who died in December 1814. He would serve from 1815 to 1825. John Quincy Adams appointed Barbour as his Secretary of War from 1825 to 1828 and as Minister to Great Britain from 1828 to 1829.

James Barbour died on June 7, 1842, and is buried within a few hundred yards of us. But it is, perhaps, the James Barbour as wartime governor that his fellow Virginians remembered him best by. He was, indeed, by all accounts, as good a wartime governor that Virginia ever had.

A photo taken after the ceremony shows Butler by the unveiled marker.



