

Bicentennial Cruise Highlights the Watery Grave of a British Gunboat in the Rouge River

July 9, 2012 – Detroit, Michigan.

A special cruise by the Great Lakes Maritime Institute on Sunday July 8 paid homage to the first American victory of the War of 1812 on the western frontier. On board were a number of historians who sailed from Wyandotte, Michigan on a four hour tour of the Detroit River. The M. V. Friendship departed the Portofino Restaurant dock and proceeded to the riverfront town of Sandwich, Ontario where the open ground gently sloped to the river road. 200 years American artillery bombarded these grounds across the mile wide Detroit River, and the forces under General Hull crossed the Detroit River to plant the American Standard in Canada,

The Detroit River was the highway by which the commerce of the United States and Canada moved on sailing vessels 200 years ago. While diaries and historical documents chronicled the past events, the riverbank shows little of the past military encounters. Nature areas with water fowl exist, while grain silos, salt loading conveyors and other commercial facilities line both sides of the Detroit River. A windmill still stands on the Sandwich skyline as testament to the pioneer commercial ventures along the riverfront. Grain was brought to this small port by sailing vessels, turned into flour, and then re-shipped across the Great Lakes.

The cruise was to honor the first American victory of the War of 1812 on the frontier. In early July 1812 spies reported that a British gunboat had entered the River Rouge. This armed vessel was attempting to transit the narrow winding river to the American shipyard where the American warship the Brig Adams lay. It was Captain Antoine Dequindre who rushed from the fort at Detroit down the river road with troops and artillery to thwart the British invasion.

An eyewitness to the event, Mr. A. D. Bodeneau was interviewed in 1877 and reported that Captain Dequindre's sixty men and artillery were hidden in a wooded ravine. When the gunboat was sheering to make a turn in the winding river, the report of a cannon was heard. It was soon followed by three or four more shots which punched in the gunboat's hull near the water line. The surprise was complete and the gunboat was not able to return fire from any of her four cannon on board. A few musket shots were fired by those on board, and the crew quickly rushed to the lifeboats. They rowed back down the Rouge and then crossed the Detroit River to the Canadian shore.

At the approximate spot where the British gunboat was fired upon and sunk some 200 years ago a salute was fired by Ralph Naveaux with a flintlock musket. Mr. Naveaux is a member of the War of 1812 reenactors group from Monroe, Michigan on board. Then Mr. Ross Ward stepped forward to chronicle the work of his great Uncle Ward. It was his distant relative, Mr. Eber Ward who salvaged the vessel in the 1820's. At that time the vessel was partially raised while two cannon and anything else of value were recovered from the wreck.

After the short ceremony the cruise transited the River Rouge to where the American shipyard was located. The shipyard was part of a 114 acre military reservation that built the Brig Adams in 1800 where Baby Creek enters the River Rouge. Unfortunately only an outfall and retaining wall exists at the

riverfront, and the shipyard is located in what is now Woodmere Cemetery. The British gunboat tried to capture the Brig Adams which was being repaired at the shipyard. The Brig was put in service but was turned over to the British forces when General Hull surrendered Detroit on August 16. The Brig Adams became the British vessel HMS Detroit and was lost near Buffalo, New York at the end of 1812.

The Great Lakes Maritime Institute is hosting another War of 1812 cruise on August 5 at 12:00 noon. This three hour cruise will go down the Detroit River around Bob-Lo Island and then sail past Amherstburg, Ontario where the Schooner Cuyahoga was captured on July 2, 1812. Tickets for this August 5 cruise are \$60.00 and includes a lunch, beverages and a cash bar. Reservations should be sent in by August 2 and the order form is located at the website www.glmi.org.





