flume (via French from Latin flumen, river), 1748.
French Canadian, 1775.
French Indian, 1696.
portage (French from porter, to carry), 1698.
rapids (Canadian French rapides), 1765.
voyageur (Canadian French), originally a boatsman employed by the Hudson Bay Company to carry men and supplies between trading posts, but by 1809 Americans were calling any Canadian fur trader or boatsman a voyageur. When Americans, such as Zebulon Pike in 1806–07 or John Frémont in 1841, engaged such men to help guide or transport their expeditions they called them engagés.

As they moved westward these French trappers and fur traders gave us many terms we associate with The Prairie. They also were the first to contact various Indian tribes, passing on to us such Indian words as toboggan, caribou, Sioux, Iroquois, Illinois, and Nez Percé, which we still spell and pronounce in the French way. In addition, they also used some French words for Indian things, such as brave, calumet, and lodge (see The Indians).

The War of 1812 lasted from 1812 to 1815. It included famous naval battles from the New England coast to the Great Lakes to the South Atlantic and bloody land battles with the British and their Indian allies from Canada to New Orleans. The 7 1/2 million Americans talked about the battles of Detroit and Lake Erie, our invasion of Canada, our burning of Toronto (then called York), and the British burning of Buffalo and Washington, D.C. We also talked about two new military heroes, General William Henry Harrison and Andrew Jackson, “the hero of New Orleans,” both of whom were to become presidents. The war also gave us Uncle Sam, The Star-Spangled Banner, and such terms as “Don’t give up the ship,” leatherneck, and war harrow.

New England Federalists opposed the war: some New England governors and militia refused to fight at all, while others refused to fight outside their own state borders. Such New Englanders called the war the War of Iniquity or Mr. Madison’s War, a bitter reference to President Madison who had previously been called “the Father of the Constitution.” Historians have called it “the unnecessary war” and “the war of faulty communications,” because (1) two days before the U.S. declared war, Britain said she would repeal the offending laws that caused it, but the U.S. didn’t receive this news in time, and (2) the greatest battle of the war, the Battle of New Orleans, January 8, 1815, also called the “unnecessary battle,” was fought 15 days after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed.

It all began with the war between England and France, 1793–
The mortally wounded Captain James Lawrence (1781–1813) is said to have shouted his famous command as he was being carried below deck. The Americans were defeated in spite of Lawrence’s order.

Don’t give up the ship.
Commander James Lawrence, June 1, 1813. The dying Commander is said to have screamed these words aboard his badly damaged U.S. frigate Chesapeake when he saw his crew lowering the flag in surrender to the British frigate Shannon, off the coast near Boston. Commander Lawrence actually said “Tell the men to fire faster and do not give up the ship; fight her till she sinks.”

Dear Gen’l: We have met the enemy and they are ours, two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop.

Yours with great respect and esteem,
O. H. Perry

“We have met the enemy and they are ours” comes from this message 28-year-old Captain Oliver Hazard Perry sent General William Henry Harrison, commander of the American Army of the Northwest, after winning the Battle of Lake Erie, September 10, 1813. This cleared the lakes of the British “Lake Squadron,” making possible the recapture of Detroit. Perry’s flagship, the Lawrence, flew James Lawrence’s famous words “Don’t give up the ship,” from the mizzenmast.

1815, with the U.S. desperately trying to remain neutral in order to maintain its foreign trade and its shipping industry. Things got bad during President Jefferson’s administration, 1801–09, especially in 1806 when Britain declared a general blockade of all European ports and Napoleon retaliated by declaring a blockade of the British Isles. Terms leading up to the war include:

the paper blockade, the contemptuous American term for the British and French blockades preventing U.S. ships from trading with either country. Congress first used this term in 1803, claiming such blockades only existed on paper and could not be enforced. Congress was wrong: the British navy enforced it and goods piled up and rotted in American warehouses; the French navy enforced it and seized $10 million of U.S. cargoes and vessels in 1808–09. We went to war with Britain after Napoleon pretended to lift the French blockade.

impressment, 1787, was the word that aroused our anger in the 1800s. The British navy claimed British merchant sailors serving on American ships were rightfully theirs, stopping our ships to remove them and often taking American seamen “by mistake,” then impressing them into British service. This was one of Britain’s ways of being a bad loser after the Revolutionary War.

free ships, free goods, the American rallying cry, meaning that all goods carried on neutral ships should be free from being captured.

the O-grab-me Acts. To prevent hostilities, Congress passed the Embargo Acts of 1807, authorizing President Jefferson to restrict the departures of American ships. This caused more hardships for New England shipowners and exporting southern planters than it did the British or French. Since the embargo had an effect which was the reverse of the one intended, some Americans spelled “embargo” backwards to get “o-grab-me” and called the acts “the o-grab-me acts.”
The main term to be popularized by the War of 1812, however, was *War Hawks*. It had been coined by Jefferson in 1798 to refer to those Federalists who wanted war with France, but as 1812 approached *war hawks*, *war birds*, and *war dogs* were what easterners called “war Republicans,” Congressmen from the South and West who had *war fever* (1812) and wanted war with Britain, such as South Carolina’s John C. Calhoun and Kentucky’s Henry Clay. The South wanted war so its cotton and other products could again be sold and shipped to Europe and so the rest of Florida could be seized from Britain’s ally Spain (we had annexed part of Florida’s panhandle in 1810). The West wanted war to make the frontier safe from British-inspired Indian attacks, to discourage the British from preventing our westward expansion, and to capture Canada and its fur trade. These western *war hawks* kept their name after the war: in the 1840s the term was applied to the Democrats who wanted the U.S. to claim the entire Oregon region up to Alaska (see 54-40 or FIGHT!—MANIFEST DESTINY). Generations later, during the Cuban Missile Crisis of President Kennedy’s administration and during The Vietnam War, supporters of a belligerent national stance were still to be called *war hawks*, though by then the term was usually shortened to *hawks*.

The War of 1812 also popularized the terms:

*artillery, infantry.* Artillery had been in the English language since 1386 (Old French *artillerie*, to fortify) and *infantry* since 1579 (Italian *infanteria*, foot soldiery, related to *infant*, a youth, especially a knight’s page). However, the words first saw widespread American use during the War of 1812, when we first began to develop separate, specialized military units.

*blue lights*, New England Federalists who opposed the war, so called from Commodore Decatur’s claim that on December 12, 1813, pro-British Americans had used blue lights as a signal to warn British ships that his two frigates were about to sail out of New London, Connecticut, the British then preventing the American frigates from doing so. Until the 1850s *blue lights* continued in general use to mean traitors.

*gunboat.* President Jefferson had preferred the local *gunboat system*, as defense for American harbors, that is using small armed craft manned by local seamen. The New England Federalist shipowners and shipbuilders mocked this system, favoring a strong navy. Fortunately, we had both a regular navy and local gunboats during the War of 1812, the latter delaying the British from attacking New Orleans in full force until Andrew Jackson arrived.

*leathernecks, sailor collars, and shakos.* Leatherneck wasn’t recorded to mean a U.S. Marine until 1830, but the War of 1812 was the first in which Marines wore a black leather stock at the neck of their uniforms, which gives us the word. This Marine uniform, adopted in 1804, included a “claw-hammered” *coatee* (1757, a short, close-fitting military coat) with a black leather neck stock for the men and a black silk one for officers. This war was also
A British depiction of the taking of Washington, D.C., August 24, 1814. Because American forces had destroyed cities in Canada, the British burned the Capitol, the White House, and many other buildings. The next day they withdrew toward Baltimore where Fort McHenry came under British bombardment. See The Star-Spangled Banner. Though Americans had been bitterly divided over “Mr. Madison’s war,” they were more united by the war’s end than ever before, becoming for the first time a strongly knit nation.

Watergate

the first in which U.S. seamen wore sailor collars and a black neckerchief. The army now introduced its plumed, visored, cylindrical dress hat called a shako (via the British army word, from German Zachen, peak, showy headdress).

Old Ironsides, 1815. The Frigate Constitution earned this nickname in the War of 1812. She was “Old” merely as a familiar nickname (she was launched October 21, 1797, and was one of six new American naval ships with heavy guns used in the war); she was “Ironsides” because of her indestructible performance in the war, being said a seaman first called her that when he saw an enemy shot rebound from her oak sides. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote his poem “Old Ironsides” in 1830 when he read of plans to scrap the ship; it aroused public opinion and she was rebuilt, saw Civil War service, was rebuilt again by public subscription in 1925, and is now preserved as a national monument in Boston harbor.

the U.S. Military Academy at West Point had opened in 1802, but the War of 1812 was the first in which its graduates saw action. The academy was not generally called West Point until the 1820s. WARRANT OFFICER, 1815, was a new American military rank of the War of 1812.

Watergate (the word means “gateway to the water” as well as floodgate) was only the name of a modern apartment building and office complex overlooking the Potomac in Washington, D.C., until the summer of 1972. Then it became the name of the biggest American political scandal since TEAPOT DOME, resulting in impeachment proceedings against President Richard M. Nixon and in his subsequent resignation, the first resignation of a president in the history of the United States.

It all began the night of June 17, 1972, a presidential election year, when five burglars were arrested at the Watergate offices

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