

# Lewiston Teens Fire First Shot in War of 1812

## The Mudballers: 14 year old Alexander Millar of River Road organizes local gang to shoot mud balls from homemade log cannons at passing British warship in 1810.

Excerpts from the book, *The War of 1812* by Everett Tomlinson, published 1906, about this true story:

A dozen boys at Lewiston organized themselves into a military company. At the head was young Alexander Millar, whose father kept the only store in the little village. The lad possessed certain other qualities of leadership. Mounted upon his sorrel pony, Studgel, he rode in advance of his "men," and issued his orders in his broad Scotch dialect. Behind him followed the boys, equipped with shotguns, no two of which were alike. Thus this young military company went through their evolutions to the delight of their sturdy fathers.

There soon came a time, however, when the marching ceased to satisfy the demands of the young patriots, and they decided to build a fort near the river. Into the woods marched the sturdy band, every one with an ax upon his shoulder in place of the shotgun he had been accustomed to carry. At the word of command, they fell furiously to cutting down the maple trees. These were then cut into pieces about two and a half feet long, and a two-inch auger bored into them. Then on each end a beetle ring was placed, the "cannon" were mounted on blocks of wood, and after receiving a dark stain were put in place on the battery. Just as the battery had demanded cannon, so the cannon

demanded balls. All of them had been at various times in the forts and had seen the piles of balls near the guns. They, too, would arrange the defenses of their battery after the plan used in the forts.

Barrels of clay were brought up from the river, and under the busy hands of the boys were soon rolled into the proper shape, dried in the sun, and then piled up alongside each gun. As there were ten of these guns, the appearance from the river of each weapon, with its pile of apparently deadly missiles beside it, was quite imposing, and might easily in the dusk have deceived a stranger into believing that a formidable battery, well equipped with cannon and cannon balls, guarded the shore.

Soon that terrible desire of the young Alexander for other worlds to conquer seemed to take possession of his mind. As the embrasures had demanded cannon, and the cannon had demanded balls, so now the balls demanded a target.

The youthful captain and his warriors wanted to "hit" something. Not far away he discovered a British schooner coming up the river under full sail. Her flag was flying, she was a loaded vessel, and to avoid the swifter current farther out in the stream was keeping close in toward the American side. As Alexander glanced at her, a sudden inspiration

seized him, and turning to his companions, forgetful for the instant of the demands of military etiquette, he shouted: "Boys, there comes a schooner under full sail! Let's give her a salute!" The boys all looked up at the word of their leader, and steadily watched the on-coming vessel.

"She doesn't belong to our side," said one of the boys after a brief silence. "She's British, you can tell that from her flag. Probably she's bound for Queenston, and is only hugging this shore to keep out of the current."

"British? Of course she's British, but we can salute her for all that, can't we?" replied the young leader. "Perhaps she'll dip her colors for us."

"Oh, don't salute her," called out one of the other boys. "Let's give her a scare. Let's tell her she's got to surrender! Let's give her a charge!"

A charge of powder was measured out, a mud ball was carefully rammed home, the priming was looked to, and then they all stood to wait for the unsuspecting schooner to draw near. The moment for action had arrived. Alexander turning to the schooner, and waving his sword in the air as he spoke, shouted: "Surrender, there! Stop your boat! Heave to! Surrender!"

He waited a moment for a reply to be made, but as apparently no attention was

paid to his hail, the youthful soldier shouted again: "Surrender or I'll order my men to fire. Strike your colors!"

The schooner held steadily to her course and soon was passing by. Instantly Alexander turned to his comrades and with all the seriousness of a veteran leader shouted, "Fire!"

The reports of the ten wooden guns rang out together. It is true two of the cannon were split asunder by the discharge and two more "kicked," so that they fell from their mounts, but no one in the confusion heeded the loss. The eyes of all the boys were upon the schooner. All about her the mud balls were falling, creating a splash in the river greater than any iron missiles could ever have made. The boys were standing ready to unite in a cheer for the vessel which they never dreamed would heed their summons.

Suddenly, and to their consternation, the schooner turned about and with all the speed she could summon began to run swiftly down the river. For a moment the boys were almost unable to credit the sight. It did not seem possible that the schooner could have taken seriously what was only meant for a good-natured boyish prank. But she held to her course, and just as she disappeared from sight, the boys mustered up sufficient courage to give a faint cheer and then started swiftly for home.



### It's True!

It's one of the most interesting legends from the War of 1812. Except, the legend is true! A group of young Lewiston teenagers made some homemade cannons and started firing on a passing British war ship, sailing on the Niagara River.

### British Officers Visit Lewiston to Protest Aggression

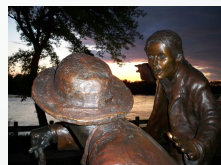
After the shooting, British officers came to Lewiston to warn about "serious consequences."

Alexander's father told them, "There are the troops that fired on your schooner. We have no soldiers here. These boys made some maple cannon and fired mud balls as a salute. Your schooner ran away from them, that is all," as he pointed to the troubled lads.

"What? I don't understand," said the British commander.

"It's just as I tell you," replied the father.

The British left, embarrassed their powerful ship has been pranked by a group of young teenagers.



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Historic Lewiston placemats written and designed by volunteer, Lee Simonson



### Tuscarora Heroes

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