



BRISTOL HISTORICAL AND PRESERVATION SOCIETY
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January 23, 2025

To the Bristol Town Council Members:

The Bristol Historical & Preservation Society (BH&PS) and the Battle of Rhode Island Association (BoRIA) are organizing a series of events in May 2025 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of two events known together as the Bristol Raids (The Bombardment of Bristol, October 7, 1775 and the Burning of Bristol, May 25, 1778). These events will feature the tall ship *Oliver Hazard Perry* and include a reenactment of the Burning of Bristol, tours, school programming, and more.

Preliminary Schedule:

Friday, May 16: *Oliver Hazard Perry* arrives in Bristol and docks at the Herreshoff Marine Museum

Saturday, May 17: Living history reenactment: The British "bombard" Bristol and then "attack" and "raid" its citizens, starting at the *Oliver Hazard Perry* and then moving to the streets to "burn" buildings throughout town.

Sunday, May 18: Paid public tours


Monday, May 19: Sail-out tours for BWRSD's 9th graders

Tuesday, May 20 On-board school tours for BWRSD students; OHP departs this evening or following morning.

The weekend of events is intended to coordinate with efforts of the Bristol 250 committee, to commemorate an important moment in the American Revolution (see attached history), and to bring the town together in an immersive and fun event that fosters engagement with Bristol's Revolutionary-era history. Preliminary estimate for all costs: \$60,000.

The Bristol Historical & Preservation Society is seeking funding from the Town of Bristol for the living history presentation only; the balance will be raised through other grants, fundraising efforts, and sponsorship opportunities. The sole purpose of this grant request is to ensure compensation at the rate of \$200/day for the reenactors who are needed to bring this event to life and who will have costs (insurance; gunpower; etc.) associated with their participation. This request for \$5000 guarantees the participation of 25 reenactors. Should the event require more, the BH&PS is prepared to pay the additional costs.

Operating in tandem with the personnel of the tall ship *Oliver Hazard Perry*, in the morning, approximately 25 reenactors will "sail" into Bristol and stage an "attack" following the timeline of the British Bombardment in 1775. Then, that afternoon, a British raiding party will land north of the town to parade south through Bristol and "raid" it, per the timeline of the burning in 1778. (Note: Bristol plans to reenact both events in 2025 so as not to compete with the BoRIA's plans to reenact the Battle of Rhode Island in 2028.)



Brief History of the Bristol Raids

During the Revolutionary War, the coastal towns of Warren, Bristol, RI, and Fall River, MA, were raided by the British in an attempt to disrupt American supply lines, gather provisions, and intimidate the local population. Bristol, in particular, was a significant port and heavily involved in the colonial resistance efforts against British rule.

On October 7, 1775, Captain James Wallace, who led a fleet of five ships, arrived in Bristol harbor and, in the name of King George III, demanded to meet with a delegation from Bristol on his ship, HMS Rose, to require that they surrender 200 sheep and 30 cattle. After the townspeople declined to meet with him, at about 8:00pm, Wallace ordered his ships to fire on Bristol, which they did for roughly an hour and a half. Several buildings were damaged or destroyed, and the town suffered considerable disruption. Colonel Simeon Potter then rowed out to the HMS Rose, met with Wallace, and reached an agreement to provide 40 sheep. Wallace and his fleet returned to Newport, but not before raiding the outskirts of the town for anything of value (including more sheep). The bombardment of Bristol is remembered as one of the early acts of aggression by the British against civilians in the American colonies, contributing to the escalation of hostilities during the War.

Three years later, on May 25, 1778, British forces under Major Richard H. Brown raided Bristol and Warren, capturing livestock and supplies, and burning several vessels in the harbor. British forces landed on Bristol Neck (the area between Bristol and Warren) and divided the force in two, sending one detachment into Warren, and the other to the Kickemuit River where boats and other supplies were cached. The Kickemuit River force destroyed 58 of 70 small boats that were stored there, along with other military supplies and a corn mill. They also burned down a bridge that crossed the river and set fire to a sloop. The Warren detachment destroyed military supplies, set fire to the local powder magazine and, in the ensuing explosion, destroyed six homes and the town's meeting house.

As the British turned to march south from Warren, the first signs of organized resistance began to appear. Word of the British landing had reached Providence and Colonel Barton immediately sprang into action. Recruiting about 200 volunteers, he rushed south and caught up with the British shortly after they left Warren, heading for Bristol. The two forces skirmished as the British marched southward, with both sides incurring minor casualties. The British reached Bristol in good order despite the ongoing skirmishes and engaged in a destructive rampage that lasted for several hours. Continuing to move south, the British engaged in one last skirmish with Colonial troops and then retreated in their ships to Newport. All told, in addition to military supplies and cannon, the British destroyed 19 dwellings, the Church of England, and several outbuildings (about 30 buildings in total), and looted everywhere, making, according to one account, "no distinction between their Friends and Foes."

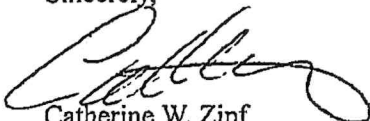
Reenactors will represent three groups; the British attackers, the Patriot defenders, and Bristol's citizens, whose actions influenced the course of the day's events. We plan to pay particular attention to stories like that of Mrs. Woodbury, who doused a housefire with her pan of milk, Moses, Governor Bradford's enslaved man, who had the presence of mind to take his dinner with him as he fled to the East Burial Ground to escape the bombing, and Reverend Hezekiah Usher, who was captured and held on a ship by the British and whose house was burned even though he was a loyalist. Because the reenactors will need to develop their characters and read a considerable amount of background material, in addition to providing their own period costumes, gunpowder, and insurance, it is important they be compensated for their time and expertise. We are working with members of the Bristol Train of Artillery, the Second Rhode Island Regiment, the 54th Regiment of Foot (a Colonial reenacting group) and His Majesty's Tenth Regiment of Foot (a British reenacting group) to identify the reenactors.

While the details are still being determined, we have a general outline of the day's events. The day will begin at approximately 10am with British forces "attacking" and "bombarding" Bristol. We expect this to happen dockside adjacent to the tall ship *Oliver Hazard Perry*. If possible, we will cast a Simeon Potter to negotiate with the British and conclude the event by surrendering 40 (pretend) sheep. In the afternoon at approximately 1pm, we plan to transport (ideally by sea, but possibly on land) the British forces north of the town and have them march through the town. As they move through the town, they will "burn" various sites along the way; the particular houses that were burned by the British are known and have been mapped, and thus, the troops can be accurate in the properties they "burn". Along the way, they will encounter Colonists, such as Mrs. Woodbury, who will resist their efforts. When they reach the southern part of town, the British forces will meet the Patriot defenders, who will force them to retreat to their ships. At that point, the British will reboard the tall ship *Oliver Hazard Perry*.

This day of events will be free and open to the public, occurring in full public view. While a schedule will be circulated in advance, we hope to "surprise" the public, in the same way that Bristol's citizens were surprised by the British 250 years ago. While we expect "history nerds of all stripes" to have a lot of fun, we also hope to engage the casual visitor, who is likely to know very little about these important, Revolutionary-era events.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present this plan to you. I hope the Council will consider offering its support to our event.

Sincerely,



Catherine W. Zipf
Executive Director