

A Man Ignored and Maligned Through History:
Tracing the Formation of the Memory of Dr. William Eustis,
Secretary of War

By

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Introduction

To the honored and beloved memory of a Revolutionary Patriot, a servant of his country in its highest trusts, a friend of his country in its darkest hours, an eloquent orator, a practical statesman, a dutiful son, an affectionate husband.¹

Dr. William Eustis was an important, yet often overlooked figure in the development of the United States. Too young to be a Founding Father, he served admirably in the Revolutionary War as a physician and surgeon. He spent his days at Dr. Joseph Warren's house, listening to patriotic rhetoric and supporting the drive towards independence. He was a witness to historic events, including the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the Battle of Bunker Hill, and the capture of Benedict Arnold and John Andre. During the war, Eustis became interested in politics and later joined the Democratic-Republican Party in Massachusetts. He pursued Republican values, but remained open to compromise and cooperation by working with members of the Federalist Party. However, his reputation suffers because of his role as Secretary of War during the War of 1812. His enemies of the time cast him in a bad light by declaring him an incompetent fool who wasted his time on petty matters, and many historians have uncritically accepted these views. The research undertaken for this project has revealed that historians have harshly misjudged Eustis and that he was instead a trusted politician and a competent administrator who faced the grueling chore of planning a war in conditions that no man could have overcome.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate Eustis' life, his role in the War of 1812, and the development of his historical collective memory. This thesis project is based on the seminar paper written for the public history course offered at Simmons College. During that course, Patricia Violette, the Executive Director of the Shirley-Eustis House, was a guest lecturer. The

¹ G. W. Porter, "A Sketch of the Life and Character of the Late William Eustis," in *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis Printer, 1889), 101.

Shirley-Eustis House Association, founded in 1913 by noted preservationist William Sumner Appleton, is responsible for preserving and maintaining the house as well as providing visitors with the history of the house, its owners, and inhabitants. The Royal Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, William Shirley, originally built the house, situated in Roxbury, Massachusetts, from the year 1747 until 1751. Dr. Eustis and his wife Caroline Langdon Eustis bought the house in 1819 and resided there until his death in 1825, while Caroline continued to reside there until her death in 1865. In addition to Royal Governor Shirley and Eustis, the house had been the residence of a French couple that fled the Haitian Slave Revolt, a seaman, and a tenement building.

After her presentation, Patricia posed several questions about Eustis. Since Eustis is often overlooked in history books or treated as a minor character, the Shirley-Eustis House does not know much about him besides the basic information of his life and service to the country. The Executive Director had been very interested in knowing more about Eustis' life and political career, specifically his tenures as Secretary of War, Minister to the Netherlands, and Governor of Massachusetts. The Shirley-Eustis House Association had specific and complex questions they wanted investigated.

In my initial paper, I attempted to begin answering the complex questions posed by the Shirley-Eustis House Executive Director and to show that Eustis had a blemished reputation, which was not wholly earned. Specifically, the Association wanted to know why the President removed Eustis from his Cabinet in 1813. The Association believed the President fired Eustis, possibly for inept decision-making, and they wanted to know if that was true. Why did President Madison decide not to renew Eustis' cabinet position? What were some of the activities Eustis was involved with during his appointment as Secretary of War? How did Eustis and his wife

Caroline really feel about the situation - were they upset about leaving the post? What was their lifestyle like in the Netherlands? Did they hob-nob with society? What did Eustis accomplish in the Netherlands? Did the demotion influence his decision to run for Governor of Massachusetts? What were some of his accomplishments while in office? These questions were difficult to answer and Eustis did not leave many clues to his feelings about his life and career. Eustis, as well as the Shirley-Eustis House Association, deserves to have his life researched to a larger magnitude in order to present the public with as much information as possible.

Another basis for this project came from the Historical Methods class at Simmons College. During this course, students were given a footnote chase assignment. The instructions were to find a citation in a history book and follow the citation back to the source. After finding the original primary source, students examined whether or not the resulting interpretations were correct. While researching this topic, first for the seminar class, and now for the thesis project, it became apparent that this exercise would be very useful to determine the veracity of claims against Eustis in this study of memory. For example, historian J.C.A. Stagg claimed in his 1983 book *Mr. Madison's War* that Eustis was the first to admit his inadequacies, yet did not offer any supporting citation or evidence.² However, in my research of the James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress, I did find a letter that Eustis wrote to President Madison. In this letter, Eustis wrote that he accepted the position of Secretary of War that Madison nominated him for and hoped that the "inadequacy of [his] own powers" would not limit his success in fulfilling the

² J. C. A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 155. Stagg is also the editor of the James Madison Papers.

duties.³ If researchers only read that sentence, they might conclude that Eustis realized he was incompetent and not fit for the role. However, if researchers read this letter, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4, they would realize that this sentence was part of a humble reply in which he thanked President Madison for believing in him.

Incompetence is a challenging concept to evaluate. According to Stagg, incompetence “is an inescapable feature of almost any war and any army, either in the form of military imbecility or stupidity or in more generalized forms of failure that result from the interaction of a multitude of factors, ranging from the errors of individuals to systemic flaws in military institutions.”⁴ Stagg’s statement will be used to show how the failures of the War of 1812 cannot be blamed on one person, but was a result of many challenges that the young nation faced. This thesis will use the Merriam-Webster definition of incompetent: “inadequate to or unsuitable for a particular purpose; lacking the qualities needed for effective action.”⁵ It will evaluate incompetence in terms of whether or not the failures of the war were directly Eustis’ fault, as many of Eustis’ contemporaries and historians of the War of 1812 have claimed. It is important to evaluate Eustis in terms of incompetence because it will change the way historians will think of the War of 1812. For example, if Eustis wasn’t incompetent like historians believe, then what caused the breakdown of the U.S. army in the war? Subsequent chapters will detail how the government as a whole was the main cause of the failures of the war.

³ William Eustis to James Madison, March 18, 1809, microfilm 11, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington D.C. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.11_0072_0073 (hereafter cited as LOC, MD).

⁴ J.C.A. Stagg, “United States Army Officers in the War of 1812: A Statistical and Behavioral Portrait,” *The Journal of Military History* 76 (2012): 1002.

⁵ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Incompetent,” accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/incompetent>.

The collective memory of an event or individual is shaped both by what society remembers and by records found in archival repositories. Collective memory is greatly influenced by archives because they “contribute to a group or nation’s ability to revisit, understand and attribute meaning to the past, thereby constructing collective memory.”⁶ Laura Millar considers memory a process and recollection is composed out of memory fragments.⁷ Millar states that records found in archives, as fragments of memory, form a society’s collective memory.⁸ This statement complements the scope of this thesis because the archival records found in repositories were pieced together to form a more accurate collective memory of Eustis. Professor Jeannette Bastian examined the collective memory of the Homestead Strike of 1892.⁹ In the case study Bastian discussed a web page, “Flowers for Homestead,” that wanted to not only correct the historical record about a key player in the strike, but to pose broader questions about who is remembered and “who gets erased from history.”¹⁰ Collective memory is defined as a “group’s recollection of the past in the present,” thus allowing for a constantly changing collective memory.¹¹ The collective memory of an event or person is thus continuously evolving as new information is discovered by researchers and additionally as each new generation interacts with the memory.

Most information on Eustis’ life and career comes from reading histories of the War of 1812. There are four main themes about Eustis in these histories: that Eustis was widely

⁶ Meirian Jump, “The Role of Archives in the Movement for the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain. La Rioja: A Regional Case Study,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 33 (2012): 150.

⁷ Laura Millar, “Touchstones: Considering the Relationship between Memory and Archives,” *Archivaria* 61 (2006): 112.

⁸ Millar, “Touchstones,” 113.

⁹ Jeannette A. Bastian, “Flowers for Homestead: A Case Study in Archives and Collective Memory,” *The American Archivist* 72 (2009): 113-132.

¹⁰ Bastian, “Flowers for Homestead,” 114.

¹¹ Bastian, “Flowers for Homestead,” 116.

recognized by both his contemporaries and historians as being incompetent; that Eustis was at fault for early failures of the war before resigning in December 1812; that Eustis did his best, but did not have the aptitude for the position; and finally that the position of Secretary of War was overwhelmed by duties and issues that one person could not handle alone. These themes are not completely separate from one another and scholars sometimes deploy multiple themes.

First, contemporaries of Eustis, as well as historians, have widely recognized him as being incompetent in performing his duties. One description from that period is from John Graham, who was the chief clerk of the Department of State under Monroe. Graham stated that:

Great as is the popularity of the President, it is barely able to resist the torrent of public opinion against the Secretary of War, who, so far as I can judge, is universally considered by the people of this country as incompetent to his present situation.¹²

Graham asserted that Eustis was thought of as being unable to handle the duties of the Department, specifically while planning a war. Yet, Graham does not give specific examples of Eustis' supposed incompetence. Albert Gallatin, who had been the Secretary of the Treasury, also provided some insight into what other politicians thought of Eustis. After the defeat sustained at Detroit, historian Henry Adams explained that Gallatin did not believe that Eustis could be held solely responsible for the disaster. However, Gallatin wrote to former President Thomas Jefferson that Eustis' "incapacity and the total want of confidence in him were felt through every ramification of the public service."¹³ Gallatin did not explain further what complaints were made against Eustis. These contemporary accounts do not fully explain why Eustis was believed to be incompetent. Furthermore, historians use these accounts as proof that Eustis was incompetent.

¹² Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the First Administration of James Madison*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 570.

¹³ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 573.

Historians of the War of 1812 overwhelmingly accept this view of Eustis and do not question further his role or duties. Historian Henry Adams was a prolific writer whose works include *The History of the United States* series (1889-1891) and *The Life of Albert Gallatin* (1879). He was a member of the prominent Boston-based and Federalist Adams family and was the grandson of John Quincy Adams and great-grandson of John Adams. Though he respected Eustis for having recognized that the troops under General James Wilkinson needed to be moved away from swampy areas to stop rampant illnesses, (see Chapters 2 and 4 for more information about Wilkinson's conduct) Adams made several statements against Eustis in his writings.¹⁴ For example, in *The Life of Albert Gallatin*, he contended that Eustis "was unequal to the growing responsibilities of the office," but did not explain what those duties entailed. He also claimed that Eustis "was notoriously incompetent" assertions that Chapters 2 and 4 will explore in more detail.

Former professor of American History William Hassler in his 1982 book, *With Shield and Sword*, called Eustis "a pathetic appointment" who had only been "selected to head the War Department in order to give geographical balance to the ticket. He was totally unfit for the onerous position."¹⁵ Hassler also claims that Eustis was at fault for the reduced numbers of the U.S. Army in the decade before the war.¹⁶ He did not acknowledge that President Thomas Jefferson had reduced the number of troops before Eustis became Secretary of War.

¹⁴ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 172.

¹⁵ William W. Hassler, Jr., *With Shield and Sword: American Military Affairs, Colonial Times to the Present* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982), 73.

¹⁶ Hassler, Jr., *With Shield and Sword*, 76.

Furthermore, Eustis and Madison spent months trying to raise troop numbers and find officers. More information about troop numbers can be found in Chapters 2 and 4.¹⁷

Historian Alan Taylor, who published *The Civil War of 1812* in 2010, also did not completely investigate the causes of Eustis' supposed failings. Taylor simply stated that “to improve military administration, Madison eased out the inept and unpopular secretary of war.”¹⁸ Eustis was not fired, as the director of the Shirley-Eustis House believed, but instead, submitted his resignation for the second time, this time more vehemently. Taylor does not claim that Eustis was fired, but as Chapters 2 and 4 will show, neither was he “eased out” which implies that it was suggested he should leave. Chapter 4 will detail thoughts about Eustis and how he picked his Cabinet members. Taylor did, however, make an important distinction about the state of the department and military operations. He mentioned the need to improve military administration during the war specifically, which other historians and contemporaries had not noted.¹⁹

Historian Donald R. Hickey also did not research further into the causes of wartime failures. He simply assumed that Eustis was inept. “Madison's cautious brand of leadership undermined the nation's war effort. He allowed incompetents like Eustis and Hamilton to hold key positions....”²⁰ Hickey did not explain why he thought Eustis had been incompetent but Hickey did concede that, “the work load of the department, heavy in time of peace, was

¹⁷ Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1879), 468, 470; J.C.A. Stagg, *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 54; Garry Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 291.

¹⁸ Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 200.

¹⁹ Donald R. Hickey, *The Rocket's Red Glare: An Illustrated History of the War of 1812* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 71. Hickey mentions that the office was an administrative nightmare, but did not acknowledge that the department most likely needed the guidance of a military strategist more than an efficient administrator.

²⁰ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 301-302.

staggering in time of war.”²¹ Hickey, as well as other historians such as Eugene M. Wait and George Daughan, gives these dual explanations of Eustis’ character.²² They follow the trend of calling Eustis incompetent, but then acknowledge that the position of Secretary of War was not an easy one. Colonel John R. Elting is another author who did not offer any justifications towards his belief that Eustis was incompetent. Elting, who published *Amateurs, To Arms!* in 1991, described Eustis as “a miserly detail chaser with neither administrative ability nor foresight.”²³ Although he did not blame Eustis for the nation’s unprepared state, Elting did not believe Eustis was a worthy man, describing the situation from going from bad to worse in the War Department after Eustis succeeded Dearborn. None of these historians ventures an opinion as to whether anyone in public service at the time would have been capable of being Secretary of War, especially during a time of war.

The second theme from secondary sources blames Eustis for early military failures of the war against Britain. The War of 1812 was a difficult time for the United States and failures such as the faulty communication of the declaration of war, the loss of Detroit, and the disastrous command of Wilkinson complicate an already complex history, these aspects of the war will be explored in Chapter 2. The reasons for the early military failures including General William Hull’s surrender to the British at Detroit are multifaceted. However, Eustis clearly was at fault for at least one major mishap when he failed to inform Hull in a timely manner about the declaration of war after the U.S. “reluctantly” decided to declare war against Britain in 1812.²⁴

²¹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 301-302.

²² George Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 35; Eugene M. Wait, *America and the War of 1812* (Commack: Kroshka Books, 1999), 151.

²³ John R. Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!: A Military History of the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1991), 3.

²⁴ Patrick Cecil Telfer White, *A Nation on Trial: America and the War of 1812* (New York: Wiley, 1967), 1.

However, historians and others assume that the defeat at Detroit was solely Eustis' fault. For example, historian Robert Malcomson, who wrote *The A to Z of the War of 1812* (2006), claimed that Eustis was responsible for the military disasters at Detroit and Queenston.²⁵ Yet, according to historian Col. David Fitz-Enz, Hull replied to a letter from Eustis, in which the Secretary informed him of the coming vote to declare war, by boasting that he was ““confident the force under [his] command [would] be superior to any which can be opposed to it.””²⁶ The second theme will explore the early failures of the war to examine their causes. This thesis will argue that the surrender at Detroit, and generally all failures, was caused by under preparedness and the overall ineptitude of the American government, not just one man.²⁷

A third theme found in studies of the War of 1812 describes Eustis as a worthy individual who tried his best to perform his duties, but did not possess the aptitude for the difficult position. For example, on June 7, 1813, Monroe wrote to Jefferson and explained how Eustis was a good man, but had not been able to handle the duties of the War Department.²⁸ Several historians, including Hickey, have subsequently adopted this position. Hickey, as noted above, stated that Eustis was incompetent, yet he also concluded that Eustis “was a good politician, but he lacked administrative skills and never mastered his duties.” The third theme is very similar to the first and second themes, but what differentiates them is that the first theme assumes Eustis was overall an incompetent official and the second theme blames him for early wartime failures, while this third theme recognizes that he may have been a good politician and official in other

²⁵ Robert Malcomson, *The A to Z of the War of 1812* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), 177.

²⁶ Col. David Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, and Heroes: Madison's Commanders in the War of 1812* (Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2012), 27-8.

²⁷ President Madison and Secretary Eustis had spent a lot of time choosing officers and trying to raise troop numbers, but Congress, a lack of support for the war, and a lack of experienced officers impeded many of their efforts. See: Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 468, 470; Stagg, *War of 1812*, 54; Wills, *Henry Adams*, 291.

²⁸ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 571.

positions, but he did not have the ability to navigate the difficult office of Secretary of War. This theme is not as reproachful as the first two, yet it does not indicate the reasons why Eustis wasn't able to master his duties.

Historian Garry Wills takes a similar stance in *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, published in 2005. Wills admits that Eustis wasn't able to perform the duties of the office. However, Wills also claims that as long as Wilkinson, who was "under Madison's protection," remained as the army's highest officer, Eustis, or anyone else, would not have had succeeded with the war.²⁹ Chapters 2 and 4 will detail Wilkinson's command and how it contributed to Eustis' memory. Thus, some historians believe that Eustis was a good man, a good politician, and a good administrator, but he wasn't able to handle the duties in the War Department. According to this theme, Eustis therefore resigned so that a man of higher abilities could take over the office.

The War of 1812 was a very complicated, political war for which the entire nation was unprepared. The final theme found in studies of the War of 1812 states that the Secretary of War was overwhelmed by more responsibilities than one person could handle. To understand this fourth theme, it is essential to understand what duties fell to Eustis. As Secretary of War, Eustis had many responsibilities that he needed to fulfill in order for the young nation to fight the British military (duties will be clarified in Chapters 2 and 4). The War Department only

²⁹ Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, 251-259.

consisted of Eustis and a few untrained clerks.³⁰ None of the clerks had “more than a year’s experience.”³¹ The War Department was an administrative nightmare.

Adams was hard to place into themes because at times he would be a harsh critic of Eustis, as shown when discussing the first theme, and yet Adams also acknowledged that Eustis was fighting a losing battle. Adams wrote in *The Life of Albert Gallatin*, that the War Department “had always been a weak branch of our system, for the army was wanting in very nearly every element of success derived from efficient organization” and “both the Navy and Army Departments were wholly unequal to the war.”³² These aren’t charges against Eustis but rather at the nature of the government in which he worked.

The idea that the organization of the War Department and the government, as well as concerns, such as lack of available money, and not any person in charge, was to blame for its ineffectiveness has merit. Daughan, who published *1812: The Navy’s War* in 2011, stated that Eustis was not capable of leading the War Department. However, Daughan admitted, “even a person of greater ability would have had enormous problems managing the department.”³³ Continuing this notion is Wait, who wrote in his study *America and the War of 1812* (1999) that Eustis’ “interest in cheaper operation was imposed upon him by the tight governmental ideas of” the Jeffersonians.³⁴ Wait denies that Eustis was incompetent but asserts that the secretary had to work among great difficulties because of the budget given to him by Gallatin, who had the difficult task of finding money where there wasn’t any, for a war that many did not want. He

³⁰ Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War*, 35. Daughan states that Eustis only had eight clerks. See also: Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 58. Borneman contends that the War Department had eleven junior clerks. After many searches and inquires, I was not able to find why the authors had different numbers.

³¹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 75.

³² Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 462.

³³ Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War*, 35.

³⁴ Wait, *America and the War of 1812*, 151.

tried to tax items, but Congress would not let him. Because of these issues, “Historians generally considered that he was unfit for the job,” but instead, Eustis had inherited a department that had a multitude of failings.³⁵ In a short amount of time, he could not transform it into a competent department that could successfully wage a war against the British. Furthermore, historian Anthony J. Yanik’s *The Fall and Recapture of Detroit in the War of 1812* (2011), stated that Eustis kept in close communication with all of the commanders of the war, so claims that he did not focus on military preparation are exaggerated.³⁶ Additionally, it can be argued that the U.S. never won the War of 1812, thus subsequent secretaries were not successful in the position either.³⁷ Both the third and fourth themes encompass a better view of Eustis than the first two. Historians with this perspective are able to show fully who he was, what he tried to do, and give him fair treatment while detailing the complex history of the War of 1812.

The objective of this thesis is to answer two main sets of questions. The first continues the research into questions originally posed by the Shirley-Eustis House concerning Eustis’ tenure as Secretary of War. Was Eustis incompetent? Why did he hold the position as long as he did if he was incompetent? Why didn’t Madison remove him if he had been as incompetent as Senator William Crawford and Representative John C. Calhoun claimed? The second set of questions has evolved from the original research and will look into the memory of Eustis. Who was Eustis? Why has Eustis been remembered by historians as an incompetent Secretary of

³⁵ Wait, *America and the War of 1812*, 151; Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, 293; Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 462.

³⁶ Anthony J. Yanik, *The Fall and Recapture of Detroit in the War of 1812: In Defense of William Hull* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 36.

³⁷ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 306. Hickey’s conclusion states that historians are still debating who won the war. He further contends that the war “ended in a draw on the battlefield” and that “in a larger sense it represented a failure for American policymakers” because the United States was unable to conquer Canada or achieve any other goals it had set out to do; Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 428. Taylor asserts that the United States lost the war on the Canadian front but won the western war against Indian resistance.

War? Is this reputation deserved? How did this memory develop? Is this memory accurate? Historians and his contemporaries have misjudged Eustis for two hundred years. Although historical remembrance of the War of 1812 often scapegoats Eustis as incompetent, this viewpoint misreads contemporary evidence and misses the broader career of a skilled politician mired in the administrative morass of war. This thesis will show who Eustis really was and what he faced while the Secretary of War. It will confirm that his memory needs to be rebuilt by being based on evidence rather than speculation and argue that Eustis was not incompetent.

In order to show that Eustis has been remembered wrongly, this thesis will illustrate his life-long commitment to this country. Chapter 1 explores his early life, from childhood until he was appointed Secretary of War. Chapter 2 examines the War of 1812 and Eustis' specific role in that conflict. Chapter 3 studies his life after leaving the War Department until his death in 1825. Chapter 4 will examine how Eustis' memory developed and the inaccuracies in that collective remembrance. It will also suggest a new memory, one that shows who this man really was. The conclusions are based on primary source documents, such as personal and professional communication as well as other papers, such as political pamphlets about elections he participated in.

The primary sources consulted for this thesis include the William Eustis Papers, 1779-1829, Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825, David Cobb Papers, 1708-1833, and the Eustis-Landon Papers, 1803-1876, all of which are held at the Massachusetts Historical Society. I also consulted the James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress, which are available online at the Library's website and transcribed versions can be found at "The Papers of James Madison" digital edition website. The documents have been used to investigate what secondary sources have said about Eustis to see if the claims have merit or not. For example, historians have

claimed that Eustis did not concern himself with raising troop numbers, but a compiled list of communication between Eustis and Madison shows that they discussed the matter multiple times a month, from before the war commenced until Eustis resigned. A man who devoted his life to his country, a man who participated in the creation of the country, does not deserve to have his memory tarnished. This thesis should change the way we remember Eustis.

Chapter 1: Early Life and Political Career

Eustis' Early Life

Every circumstance relating to the war of revolution appears to have become interesting at the present day, and may probably become more so in proportion to the distance of time from that memorable era which made us a nation.¹

William Eustis, born on June 10, 1753, was a Harvard-educated doctor and politician, who served his country in the War of Independence as a field and hospital surgeon. Eustis also held other positions, including serving as a member of the Massachusetts legislature, U.S. Congressman, Secretary of War, Minister to the Netherlands, and the 12th Governor of Massachusetts. He had been a student of the prominent doctor Joseph Warren, who died at the Battle of Bunker Hill, as well as friends in his youth with prominent doctors Samuel Adams, Jr., David Townsend, and John Warren. Unlike other key players in the War of 1812, such as President James Madison, Secretary of State James Monroe, General James Wilkinson, and Major General Andrew Jackson, Eustis is not well known. There are not many primary or secondary sources that detail Eustis' early life. Sibley's *Harvard Graduates* provides much information about his early life while letters, other primary sources, and secondary sources supply other insights. This chapter will cover Eustis' life up until being nominated as Secretary of War by President Madison. During this time period, Eustis served as a surgeon during the Revolution, was elected to the Massachusetts state legislature from 1788 until 1794 and the U.S. Congress from 1800-1804, and joined the Freemasons on December 12, 1793. William Eustis was a true patriot who worked hard to help his country secure its independence and served his home state of Massachusetts and the nation as a politician.

¹ William Eustis to Dr. Mitchell, January 10, 1819, "Eustis-Langdon Papers, 1803- 1876," Box 1, Folder: 1819-1822, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston (hereafter cited as MHS, Boston).

William was the son of Benjamin and Elizabeth Eustis, who was thought to be a well-known doctor or a house wright.² However, according to the thorough research of Oliver Ayer Roberts, who went through town records for his book *History of the Military Company of Massachusetts* and Sibley's *Harvard Graduates* it is most likely that Benjamin Eustis was a house wright and not a doctor.³ Other sources, such as Robert Sobel who published the *Biographical Directory of the United States Executive Branch: 1774-1989* in 1990, did not offer any primary source evidence to back up their claims that Benjamin was a well-known doctor.⁴ The Lexington Historical Society described his parents in 1889 as "persons of high respectability and sterling worth. They were types of the best grade of New England character. They early espoused the cause of American independence, and were its earnest and stanch advocates and defenders in the painful struggle that issued in its establishment."⁵ His mother died several days before the Battles of Lexington and Concord. His father was a member of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts.⁶ The Company, formed to

² David Coles, "Eustis, William, 1753-1825, U.S. secretary of war," in *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*, ed. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 175. Some sources claim that Benjamin was a well-known doctor, while others claim he was a house wright.

³ Conrad Edick Wright and Edward W. Hanson, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates: Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College...with bibliographical and other notes* Vol. 18 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999), 70; Henry Lawrence Eustis, *Genealogy of the Eustis Family* (Boston: David Clapp and Son, 1878), 7; Oliver Ayer Roberts, *History of the Military Company of Massachusetts: Now Called The Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts 1637-1888* Vol. 2 (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son Printers, 1897), 117-118.

⁴ Robert Sobel, *Biographical Directory of the United States Executive Branch: 1774-1989* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 117.

⁵ Porter, "A Sketch of the Life," 106.

⁶ Eustis, *Genealogy of the Eustis Family*, 7.

provide protection to early settlements, was chartered in 1638 to train officers to serve in the Massachusetts militias.⁷

Eustis had experiences while at Harvard and soon after which shaped his course of life. First, Eustis was a member of the Harvard military troop, called the Martimercurian Company, where he was elected captain.⁸ Eustis would lead the militia, which numbered more than sixty students, in drills.⁹ This experience, along with his patriotism, led him to join the militia at Lexington. Second, after graduating from Harvard in 1772, Eustis trained to be a doctor under Dr. Joseph Warren. He was a member of the Spunkers club, a group of medical students under Warren who would clandestinely find bodies for anatomic study.¹⁰ Medical training during this period was based on training in Great Britain. During the later half of the eighteenth century, there was a movement towards practical training and few doctors actually earned medical degrees, but rather spent time in an apprenticeship with a doctor.¹¹

When the War of Independence broke out against the British, the twenty-two year old Eustis eagerly supported the cause. His first action in the war came as a militiaman at Lexington.¹² However, on the afternoon of the battles of Lexington and Concord, Eustis found ““full demand for all the surgical skill he possessed” and secured a military surgeon’s position

⁷ “About Us,” Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts, accessed March 18, 2013, <http://www.ahac.us.com/aboutus.htm>.

⁸ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 71.

⁹ Conrad Edick Wright, *Revolutionary Generation: Harvard Men and the Consequences of Independence* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 51.

¹⁰ “After Laying Him Out in Mode and Figure Buried Him God Knows Where,” Dr. Joseph Warren on the Web, accessed October 20, 2012, <http://www.drjosephwarren.com/2012/11/after-laying-him-out-in-mode-and-figure-buried-him-god-knows-where/>. This site contains transcribed letters to Dr. Joseph Warren. This particular letter refers to the Spunkers and their search for a body to study in secret.

¹¹ Thomas Neville Bonner, *Becoming a Physician: Medical Education in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States, 1750-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14, 44.

¹² Coles, “Eustis, William,” 175.

through Dr. Warren.¹³ According to Daughan, Eustis later joined his mentor at the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775 and “had bravely tended the wounded during that famous fight placing his own life in danger.”¹⁴ General Henry Knox then offered Eustis a commission as a lieutenant colonel of artillery, however, Eustis refused because he preferred to remain a surgeon.¹⁵ As a doctor, Eustis served as a senior camp surgeon during the Siege of Boston and at various hospitals throughout the war.¹⁶ Eustis became extremely interested in politics during the Revolutionary Era. In Warren’s biography in Sibley’s *Harvard Graduates*, author Clifford K. Shipton wrote that Eustis had been at Warren’s house when Paul Revere was sent to warn the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in Concord about the British.¹⁷

During the Revolutionary War, Eustis was given letters from the Director General and Physician in Chief of the Continental Army, John Morgan, as well as Isaac Foster, who was the Director of Military Hospitals in the East Department. The purpose of the letters was to confirm that Eustis was a surgeon for the Continental Army and as letters of introduction when he was sent to different hospitals. The first of these letters found at the Massachusetts Historical Society, from Foster, confirms that Eustis was a doctor and that he “entered service April 19, 1775 at the request of the late Dr. Warren,” who died at the Battle of Bunker Hill.¹⁸ On March 4, 1776, Morgan presented Eustis with a letter that stated “William Eustis of Col.

¹³ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 71; Isaac Foster to [?], Dec. 14, 1775, microfilm P-94 (one reel), “Letters Received by William Eustis, 1775-1825,” MHS, Boston.

¹⁴ Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War*, 35. Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 71.

¹⁵ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 72.

¹⁶ Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, Vol. 9 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1956), 506; Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, Vol. 10 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1958), 335; Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 72.

¹⁷ Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, Vol. 14 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1968), 521.

¹⁸ Isaac Foster to [?], Dec. 14, 1775, microfilm P-94 (one reel), “Letters Received by William Eustis, 1775-1825,” MHS, Boston.

Knox's Regiment of Artillery, having voluntarily offered himself for an Examination at the General Hospital, agreeable to the orders of his Excellency the Commander in Chief, acquitted himself well, and is hereby recommended as duly qualified for the post as surgeon which he holds in said regiment."¹⁹ According to historian David Coles, when the hospital ran out of money Eustis "used his own funds to operate the facility for 'many months,'" this action showed his commitment to both medical care and the fight for independence.²⁰

Eustis was stationed for a time in New York. Although the exact dates are unknown, he was there in early 1777.²¹ At this time, he stayed in the same residence as Benedict Arnold, the house of Beverly Robinson, who was a loyalist who sided with the British.²² Benedict Arnold is one of the most hated figures in American history and "his name is still associated with treason against the people of the United States."²³ However, Arnold had been a military hero before his treasonous activities. According to Canadian journalist Barry Wilson, who published *Benedict Arnold: A Traitor in Our Midst* in 2001, the Continental Congress had denied Arnold military promotions that he believed he deserved.²⁴ The Continental Congress zealously guarded its political control over the army during the war and feared an independent army. This attitude angered many, like Arnold, especially when promotions went to political

¹⁹ John Morgan to [?], March 4, 1776, microfilm P-94 (one reel), "Letters Received by William Eustis, 1775-1825," MHS, Boston.

²⁰ Coles, "Eustis, William," 175; Porter, "A Sketch of the Life," 106. No reference is given for this information, which is disappointing, especially when Eustis served at several hospitals.

²¹ Eustis, *Genealogy of the Eustis Family*, 9.

²² William Eustis to Dr. Mitchell, January 10, 1819, "Eustis-Langdon Papers, 1803- 1876," Box 1, Folder: 1819-1822, MHS, Boston; Eustis, *Genealogy of the Eustis Family*, 9.

²³ Walter L. Powell, *Benedict Arnold: Revolutionary War Hero and Traitor* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2004), 5.

²⁴ Barry Wilson, *Benedict Arnold: A Traitor in Our Midst* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 145.

allies rather than to men who merited them.²⁵ For example, Horatio Gates was a favorite of John Adams who used his influence to advance Gates' career.²⁶ Arnold became very disillusioned and by 1779 he was destitute, even though he had entered the war as a very wealthy man. According to Wilson, he bought supplies for his men and used his fortune to finance the Canadian invasion, but Congress would not pay him back.²⁷ During the Battles of Saratoga in 1777, Arnold was severely injured and sent to Philadelphia to recuperate as military governor of that city.²⁸ According to Wilson, this experience drove Arnold closer to loyalist sympathizers and he began his treasonous activities, including sending British information about troop movements.²⁹

Eustis and Arnold lived in the same house during this period, and Eustis was a witness to different events. On January 10, 1819, Eustis wrote a letter to a Dr. Mitchell that described his time during the war and recounted his experience with Benedict Arnold and John André.³⁰ Eustis, the primary surgery at the house, wrote that he was brought by General Hamilton to examine Andre after his capture and was witness to what occurred when Andre was kept as a prisoner. He also mentions that the men who captured Andre, John Paulding, David Williams, and Isaac Van Wart, were well-known to him and were "brave and adventurous" men. He was familiar with the men because he had "repeatedly gone to the lines and draped their wounds." Eustis also recounts that they earned the epithet of "cow-Boys" because they would capture cows and other cattle from the British and bring them to the American camp.³¹ Eustis' worth

²⁵ Wilson, *Benedict Arnold*, 145.

²⁶ Wilson, *Benedict Arnold*, 145-146. Gate then took credit for victories, such as Saratoga.

²⁷ Wilson, *Benedict Arnold*, 146.

²⁸ Wilson, *Benedict Arnold*, 149.

²⁹ Wilson, *Benedict Arnold*, 149-157.

³⁰ William Eustis to Dr. Mitchell, January 10, 1819, MHS, Boston.

³¹ William Eustis to Dr. Mitchell, January 10, 1819, MHS, Boston.

as a man to study in this particular case is for his first person account of this historical event. Accounts such as Eustis' add more to the overall history of a subject, such as the capture of André and the men who fought.

A history and an overview of the medical profession during the war is needed in order to understand the conditions in which Eustis and other surgeons worked. The medical profession in the United States was largely based on that of Great Britain, especially Edinburgh's medical school.³² Two medical schools were established in the United States in the 1760s, but most doctors gained their knowledge from apprenticeships.³³ Eustis was no exception and he proved to be a highly skilled and competent medical practitioner a fact that was confirmed by letters from Drs. Morgan and Foster.³⁴ During the war, medical care, not just in Boston but also throughout the region, took a turn for the worse. According to Mary C. Gillett's extensive history of the Army Medical Department from 1775-1818, colonial doctors had all been civilians without any military experience.³⁵ Barns were often used as hospitals and people with no medical training aided doctors and surgeons in the care of the wounded and ill.³⁶ Medical supplies were in short supply and soldiers often did not have anything to take for pain, such as opiates.³⁷ Immediately after removing a dead soldier from a bed, another

³² Bonner, *Becoming a Physician*, 43.

³³ Bonner, *Becoming a Physician*, 14, 44.

³⁴ Isaac Foster to [?], Dec. 14, 1775, MHS, Boston; John Morgan to [?], March 4, 1776, MHS, Boston.

³⁵ Mary C. Gillett, *The Army Medical Department, 1775-1818* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 1.

³⁶ Gillett, *Army Medical Department*, 86-88. These pages detail the effort to care for soldiers at Valley Forge.

³⁷ Gillett, *Army Medical Department*, 21.

injured soldier took his place.³⁸ More soldiers died of illnesses such as smallpox, dysentery, and fever than wounds because of such unsanitary conditions.

Smallpox, *viroila major*, raged across North America from 1777-1782 and killed more than 100,000.³⁹ The generals wanted every soldier inoculated for smallpox because of the unsanitary conditions and because General George Washington and other commanders believed that the British used smallpox as a weapon.⁴⁰ Washington changed his mind several times during the war concerning inoculation. During the Siege of Boston, Washington decided against inoculating every soldier in favor of quarantine because inoculation would take many months to complete.⁴¹ However, in 1777, Washington ordered every soldier and new recruit inoculated.⁴² The inoculation plans were considered top secret because the British could “capitalize on the temporary indisposition of thousands of American soldiers.”⁴³ Inoculating soldiers would, it was hoped, stop the spread of the disease and protect the army against biological warfare.

American forces feared that the British would use smallpox as a weapon during the Revolutionary War. Washington knew that an outbreak would be devastating to the Continental Army.⁴⁴ Elizabeth A. Fenn published *Pox Americana* in 2001, and presented conclusive evidence that the British were using smallpox as a weapon against American forces, as Washington and other Americans believed. Inoculating troops was the only recourse and in

³⁸ Gillett, *Army Medical Department*, 59.

³⁹ Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 3.

⁴⁰ Gillett, *Army Medical Department*, 14. See also, “Scenes From Hell,” National Archives and Records Administration, accessed February 18, 2013, <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/eyewitness/html.php?section=4>.

⁴¹ Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 47.

⁴² Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 93.

⁴³ Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 93.

⁴⁴ Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 43.

January 1782, medical personnel began the process in New York, near West Point.⁴⁵ If he had still been stationed in New York at that time, Eustis might have been a part of the doctors and surgeons tasked with identifying which soldiers needed inoculating, perform the inoculations, quarantine the soldiers, and then releasing them back to their companies after confirming they were not going to spread the disease.⁴⁶ However, no definitive information has been found to confirm what duties Eustis performed as surgeon for the Continental Army. He could have been a field surgeon and treated men near the battlefield, he could have treated men for different illnesses that ran rampant throughout the camps, or Eustis could have been part of the inoculation team.

Eustis continued his work during the war, and was officially recognized by the U.S. Congress in 1781 as a “Physician and Surgeon.”⁴⁷ Eustis set up his private medical practice in Boston at the end of the War of Independence, receiving his A.M. from Harvard in 1784 and joining the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1785.⁴⁸ According to Sibley’s, Eustis served as one of the chief physicians in General Benjamin Lincoln’s army to suppress Shay’s Rebellion. The rebellion was the event that “provided Eustis with a transition from medicine to the world of politics.”⁴⁹ After the rebellion, Eustis was referred to as “the fighting doctor” and became more actively involved in politics, beginning at the state level in Massachusetts.⁵⁰ In 1789, Eustis served as a member of the committee to welcome President Washington to Boston and “led the officers of the Continental Army in the official procession carrying a flag of white silk

⁴⁵ Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 133.

⁴⁶ Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 94.

⁴⁷ United States Congress to William Eustis, October 1781, microfilm P-94 (one reel), “Letters Received by William Eustis, 1775-1825,” MHS, Boston.

⁴⁸ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 73.

⁴⁹ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 73.

⁵⁰ Lurton Dunham Ingersoll, *A History of the War Department of the United States. With Biographical Sketches of the Secretaries* (Washington, D.C.: F.B. Mohun, 1879), 440.

with the Union Cockade.”⁵¹ Eustis held a regular position at the Boston Almshouse until 1790. On April 22, 1790 he wrote a letter to the Town of Boston’s Board of Overseers to reappoint him as physician to the Almshouse after his health recovered.⁵² It is unclear if he was reinstated or what health issues he faced. He also was paid for “Doctoring the States poor” in 1791 and for “Inoculating with the Small Pox 87 persons on Castle Island” in 1792.⁵³

Eustis was elected to the Massachusetts General Court, the state’s legislature and served from 1788 until 1794.⁵⁴ There are few sources that detail his time in the legislature. Primary source information, for the purposes of this thesis are letters and other communication, do not mention activities he took part in. Secondary sources do provide an overall picture of the court of which he was a part. For example, *The Quarterly Register* published information about the legislature’s involvement of establishing a college in the District of Maine. According to the account, Eustis was the chairman of the committee to establish the college, Bowdoin College.⁵⁵ Other secondary information includes published accounts of the laws that were passed during that period.⁵⁶ In the sermon read at Eustis’ funeral, it is claimed that he gained a reputation as a great public speaker.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 73-74.

⁵² William Eustis to the Board of Overseers of the Town of Boston, April 22, 1790, “William Eustis Papers, 1779-1829,” MHS, Boston.

⁵³ William Eustis to the Board of Overseers, April 22, 1790, MHS, Boston.

⁵⁴ Coles, “Eustis, William,” 175.

⁵⁵ “Historic Sketch of Bowdoin College,” *The Quarterly Register* 8 (1835): 105-117.

⁵⁶ Massachusetts General Court, *The General Laws of Massachusetts, From the Adoption of the Constitution, to February 1822, Vol. 1* (Boston: Wells & Lilly and Cummings & Hilliard, 1823).

⁵⁷ Daniel Sharp, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of His Excellency William Eustis, ESQ. Late Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in Presence of the Constituted Authorities of the State, February 11, 1825* (Boston: True and Greene, Printers to the State, 1825), 19.

Eustis acted as the spokesman of “the Boston Jacobin mob” which were protests against Jay’s Treaty.⁵⁸ The Treaty of Amity Commerce and Navigation, commonly known as Jay’s Treaty, was signed on November 19, 1794 and approved by the United States in 1796. President George Washington sent John Jay, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the 1780s, to London to negotiate a treaty with Britain after both parties continued to violate the terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1783 that ended the Revolutionary War.⁵⁹ Jay was sent to London with the goals of securing compensation for vessel seizures, clarify rules about seizures, demand the British leave the Northwest territory and other occupied spaces, claim compensation for slaves taken or offered freedom by the British, and neutral commercial rights including access to the British West Indies.⁶⁰ Jay was not able to negotiate many of the goals, including compensation for slaves, but the British left occupied territory and let American merchants have limited access to trade. The opposition to the treaty claimed that the American economy was too closely tied to the British economy and that they were “unable to see themselves as truly liberated” from Britain.⁶¹ On July 13, 1785, the attendees of the Boston Town Meeting, including Eustis, condemned the treaty.⁶²

After 1794, Eustis announced that he was “‘sick of the whole of this kind of life’ and particularly of the fractious nature of politics.”⁶³ Eustis wrote to David Cobb that “Perhaps if

⁵⁸ Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, Vol. 17 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1975).

⁵⁹ James Baird, “The Jay Treaty,” *The Papers of John Jay*, Columbia University Libraries, accessed January 29, 2013, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/jay/jaytreaty.html>.

⁶⁰ Baird, “The Jay Treaty.”

⁶¹ Stanley Elkins, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 375-376.

⁶² Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 75, 234. For the full text of the resolutions condemning the treaty see: *Independent Chronicle*, July 16, 1785.

⁶³ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 74.

we had more charity one for another parties would never rise so high, nor the publick [*sic*] welfare sink so low.”⁶⁴ However, Eustis continued his political career, though at a smaller level, serving on the Boston School Committee even though he was childless. He also served on the Massachusetts Governor’s Council under Governor James Sullivan, the fifth governor of Massachusetts, from May 29, 1807 until December 10, 1808.⁶⁵ The council provided the governor with advice and information about certain matters. On February 11, 1808 Eustis wrote to Nicholas Gilman about politics, including his discontent with Sullivan and the Federalist opposition to the embargo Jefferson enacted.⁶⁶ According to Eustis’ letter, Sullivan veered off a set course that he and the council agreed upon and Eustis left. He told Gilman that he was “almost weaned from public life.”⁶⁷ On March 7, 1808 Eustis received a letter from the other board members, including Daniel Kilham, Levi Lincoln, and Nathan Weston, asking him to return to the council. According to the letters, Eustis was asked to return because his services were “appreciated too highly, to render [Eustis’] attendance a matter of indifference to [the council] or to the Commonwealth.”⁶⁸ However, most letters examined for this time period have not revealed specific information about Eustis’ activities on the school board or governor’s council.

Eustis returned to politics at the federal-level when he successfully ran for Congress in 1800 as a member of the Democratic-Republican Party against Federalist Josiah Quincy.

⁶⁴ William Eustis to David Cobb, November 16, 1794, microfilm P-242 (Reel 1), “David Cobb Papers, 1708-1833,” MHS, Boston.

⁶⁵ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 75; Eustis, *Genealogy of the Eustis Family*, 9.

⁶⁶ William Eustis to Nicholas Gilman, February 11, 1808, “William Eustis Papers, 1779-1829,” MHS, Boston.

⁶⁷ William Eustis to Nicholas Gilman, February 11, 1808, MHS, Boston.

⁶⁸ Nathan Weston, Levi Lincoln, et al to William Eustis, March 7, 1808, “William Eustis Papers, 1779-1829,” MHS, Boston.

Commentators of the time called the election a “triumph of republicanism.”⁶⁹ The political atmosphere in Massachusetts was characterized as being extremely polarizing.⁷⁰ A victory for a Democratic-Republican candidate in a Federalist state was important for the party at the national level. In the 1802 election for Congress, Dr. Eustis defeated Federalist John Quincy Adams, because of his “age, experience, knowledge, and moderation” but lost to J.Q.A. in 1804 by fewer than 100 votes.⁷¹ Eustis’ elections were thus remarkable victories for a Republican in the strongly Federalist state of Massachusetts.

While in Congress, Eustis had a reputation of being “so much feared, so much courted, and so much dreaded,” because he would work with Federalists towards bi-partisan solutions and he was considered by his peers in Congress to be a “socially respectable and a moderate force among the Republicans.”⁷² As a congressman, Eustis voted with many Federalists against the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution. He disagreed with the procedures outlined in it to elect the President and Vice President.⁷³ However, the Amendment was passed by Congress on December 9, 1803 and ratified on June 15, 1804.

William Eustis’ early career as a surgeon shaped his subsequent life and political career. He was a patriot who joined the Continental Army’s hospital service in order to do his part in the fight for freedom. During those years he formed his political opinions and would eventually become a member of a Democratic-Republican in a Federalist state. The purpose of this chapter was to show who Eustis was before becoming Secretary of War. Historians

⁶⁹ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 75.

⁷⁰ Wright, *Revolutionary Generation*, 166.

⁷¹ Coles, “Eustis, William,” 175. Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 75. John Quincy Adams was a Federalist before 1808, but afterwards, supported the Democratic-Republican Party.

⁷² Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 76.

⁷³ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 76; Jeremy D. Bailey, *Thomas Jefferson and Executive Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 211.

accuse him of incompetence and many blame him for the defeats at Detroit and Queenstown Heights, and yet most did not know basic facts about who he was.

Chapter 2: War of 1812

The War of 1812: Causes

The War of 1812 is probably our most obscure war. Although a great deal has been written about the conflict, the average American is only vaguely aware of why we fought or who the enemy was.¹

Dr. William Eustis' life, especially his tenure as Secretary of War during the War of 1812, cannot be understood without background information about the war. This background is broken into two parts. The first section explores the main causes of the war. The second section details Secretary Eustis' precise responsibilities in the War Department to demonstrate that he was not the incompetent Secretary of War as history remembers him.

The War of 1812 lasted from June 18, 1812 when President James Madison signed a declaration of war until February 18, 1815 after the U.S. ratified the Treaty of Ghent. One of the reasons that Hickey called the War of 1812 the most obscure war is because the "causes are shrouded in mystery."² Historians of the war list the main causes as the impressment of American sailors by the British Navy, commercial reasons, such as the freedom to trade, and Indian uprisings supported by the British.³ However, these three causes are connected by another overarching challenge: recognition of an independent American nation. Even after the Revolution, the British did not fully recognize American independence; hence they impressed American sailors and the restricted trade. In many ways, the War of 1812 was a second revolutionary war. Certainly, many supporters of the war called it the second War of Independence, as Madison and the Democratic-Republican Party tried to obtain British and French recognition of American neutrality rights. The desire of the United States for neutrality

¹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 1.

² Hickey, *War of 1812*, 1.

³ In histories of the war, Native Americans are called "Indians" and this thesis will do the same.

and to be recognized as a fully independent nation permeated the varying causes of war. Furthermore, this war had a large political aspect, especially the conflict between the Democratic-Republican and Federalist parties that greatly affected the war's planning and execution.

One reason that the young Republic declared war was Britain's continued impressment of American sailors. Prior to the War of 1812, fighting with France from 1793 until 1815, especially during the Napoleonic Wars from 1803-1815, had stretched the British Navy thin.⁴ The British Navy had for years used press gangs to fill its ranks.⁵ A press gang forcefully recruited sailors into the British Royal Navy when volunteers were not readily available.⁶ American ships were under constant threat of being boarded and searched by British Naval personnel. If the British believed men they found aboard an American ship were British deserters, they took the men in an effort "to reclaim their subjects from foreign ships," even though they could not always prove the men were either British or deserters.⁷ However, Secretary Gallatin calculated that about half of the American merchant force, approximately 9,000 men, were indeed British subjects, thus the prosperity of the country was at stake.⁸ According to historian Gordon S. Wood, who published *Empire of Liberty* in 2009, impressment of American sailors was "the most humiliating grievance for Americans, the one that made them seem still under the thumb of the former mother country."⁹ Furthermore, the

⁴ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 620.

⁵ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2005), 208.

⁶ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 127.

⁷ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 565.

⁸ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 565.

⁹ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 641.

American believed that the British did not respect the sovereignty of the United States because constantly entered American waters to seize, board, and impress American sailors.¹⁰

One of the most famous and contentious impressment cases was the *Chesapeake* Affair.¹¹ On June 22, 1807, the *HMS Leopard* attacked the *USS Chesapeake* off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia. The *Leopard* suspected that the *Chesapeake* harbored British deserters. However, according to historian Sean Wilentz who published *Rise of American Democracy* in 2006, even though international law allowed searches on merchant ships, they were not permissible on warships. Thus the *Chesapeake* refused the request to search the ship.¹² After the refusal, the *Leopard* opened fire on the *Chesapeake* killing three sailors and wounding eighteen. Ultimately the British seized the alleged deserters, all of whom claimed to be American citizens.¹³

The treatment of American sailors provided a source of constant aggravation for Americans and the government. Future president John Quincy Adams called the British practice an “authorized system of kidnapping upon the ocean.”¹⁴ However, at the time, Britain and the United States were at odds on the definition of an American citizen.¹⁵ Americans believed that you could choose to be American, even if not born in the country, while the British claimed “every ‘natural-born subject’ remained so for life.” Until 1949, a British

¹⁰ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 12; Wesley B. Turner, *The War of 1812: The War that Both Sides Won* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2000), 22. British encroachment on American sovereignty is one of the main causes given for the war; however, no specific laws or justification about what sovereignty meant in the early nineteenth-century has been given.

¹¹ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2006), 130.

¹² Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 130.

¹³ Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 130.

¹⁴ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 641.

¹⁵ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 642; Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 3.

natural-born subject was defined as any person who had been born in the dominion.¹⁶

Therefore, conflicting beliefs on the matter of citizenship contributed greatly to the issue of impressment. Furthermore, Wood claimed that British officers also made mistakes because many American and British sailors looked and sounded the same.¹⁷ In an effort to protect Americans from British press gangs, the nation issued certificates of citizenship starting in 1796. However, British seamen could obtain these papers by lying about their birthplace or simply buying them from Americans.¹⁸

The War of 1812 was also caused by commercial disputes. The early U.S. republic wanted to remain neutral in world affairs. The French and English war thus put the U.S. in a precarious position especially because Britain continued harassing the young nation.¹⁹ The British at that point had basically driven the French from the seas, but the United States had picked up much of France's trading routes. This angered the British, who thought the issue a "consideration of how the profit taken from the Enemy is to be divided" and began to seize American ships, which led to overwhelming economic losses for American merchants.²⁰ Thus, the British wanted a share of the former French trade, and their response was to implement policies that gave Britain an advantage over the United States. Although both the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans desired neutrality, the Republican Party, "insisted, to the point of threatening war, on the right of the United States to trade with the European belligerents without restraint or restrictions."²¹ Wood explained that the United States believed that "free

¹⁶ "Who is a British Subject," UK Border Agency, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/britishcitizenship/othernationality/britishsubjects/>.

¹⁷ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 642.

¹⁸ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 11.

¹⁹ White, *A Nation on Trial*, 1.

²⁰ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 10.

²¹ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 622.

ships made free goods, which meant that neutrals had the right to carry non-contraband goods into the ports of a belligerent without their being seized by its opponent.”²² However, after the attack on the *Chesapeake*, the British banned neutral parties from trading with France and any of its colonies.²³ In response, President Thomas Jefferson proposed an embargo in December 1807, which both the House and the Senate later passed, that “would prohibit all oceanic trade with foreign nations.” The act subsequently “extended to cover land and water commerce with Canada.”²⁴ The United States was basically forced to fight in order to achieve trading rights in a world dominated by Britain.

Third, the United States believed that the British instigated Indian uprisings in response to the government’s policy towards the Indian nations. The United States wanted Indian lands and “constant encroachments on Indian lands and their disregard for Indian rights” led to Indian discontentment.²⁵ Tecumseh was a Shawnee chief who, with his brother Tenskwatawa, the Prophet, called for pan-tribal unity to fight against American encroachment on their lands.²⁶ One of his main complaints centered on the sale of Indian land to Americans for a pittance. Tecumseh believed “that Indian land was the common property of all tribes and could not be sold by any one of them.”²⁷ The Battle of Tippecanoe on November 7, 1811 was a result of a long-standing tension and mistrust between the United States and the Indian tribes. The Governor of the Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison believed that the British were

²² Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 622.

²³ Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 130.

²⁴ Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 131. Wilentz states that Jefferson was forced to choose between war and embargo.

²⁵ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, xiv.

²⁶ A. J. Langguth, *Union 1812: The Americans Who Fought The Second War of Independence* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 160.

²⁷ Langguth, *Union 1812*, 158.

supplying and instigating the tribes against the United States and American settlers.²⁸ This belief could be correct because Tecumseh and his warriors went to Fort Malden and met with Major-General Isaac Brock, who led the British at Detroit.²⁹

The political divide between the Federalist Party and the Democratic-Republican Party further contributed to the war with Britain. The Federalist Party was dedicated to an economically strong nation with strong executive and judicial branches of government. They also supported strong ties with Great Britain and were critical of France and the French Revolution.³⁰ The Democratic-Republican Party originally formed as an anti-Federalist organization. It opposed strong ties with Britain and thus did not support the Jay Treaty, which opened American trade with the British Empire. The Democratic-Republicans believed that “American economic dependence on Great Britain should be ended so that the republic might become a truly independent nation.”³¹ Americans believed that the nation needed to stimulate prosperity at home, but the two parties differed in their approach to this end.³²

The discord between the two parties caused historian Alan Taylor to call the conflict the “Civil War of 1812.”³³ According to Taylor, the friction between the two parties was so bad that Americans essentially fought two wars, one between America and Britain and the other between Federalists and Republicans.³⁴ Hickey, in his introduction to *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*, wrote that many historians have claimed that Democratic-Republicans

²⁸ Langguth, *Union 1812*, 160.

²⁹ Langguth, *Union 1812*, 187-188.

³⁰ J.C.A. Stagg, “Revolt Against Virginia: Republican Politics and the Commencement of the War of 1812” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1973), 10.

³¹ Stagg, “Revolt Against Virginia,” 10.

³² Hickey, *War of 1812*, 5.

³³ Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*.

³⁴ Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 9. According to Taylor, there are actually four dimensions to the war because of the family ties between Americans and Canadians.

“embraced the war as a means of forging party unity, maintaining power, and silencing the Federalists.”³⁵ In this regard, the war is also sometimes referred to as “Mr. Madison’s War.”³⁶ Historian J.C.A. Stagg furthermore asserted that the war was “the result of Madison’s simultaneous endeavors to find both an effective foreign policy and to maintain the unity of the Republican Party behind his leadership for the election of 1812.”³⁷ He contends that the coming of the war was not the result of the impressment of sailors and the desire for neutral rights but instead resulted from party politics. Thus, the War of 1812 was undertaken as a political measure to keep Madison, and by extension the Republicans, in power.

The War of 1812 and Eustis

The United States, complained the secretary of war, William Eustis, presented the “rare phenomenon” of a country going to war with an army lacking staff support.³⁸

President James Madison appointed Eustis Secretary of War on March 7, 1809 after his party loyalty was noticed during his years in Congress.³⁹ He wasn’t chosen for vast military knowledge, but because he was a member of the Democratic-Republican Party in a very Federalist state and for his administrative abilities.⁴⁰ In the letter Madison sent to Eustis on March 7, 1809 confirming Eustis’ appointment, he wrote “your Country will have the benefit of your services in the important station.”⁴¹ During his tenure as Secretary, he tried to re-

³⁵ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 1.

³⁶ Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*.

³⁷ Stagg, “Revolt Against Virginia,” vi.

³⁸ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 673; Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 155.

³⁹ John C. Fredriksen, *The United States Army in the War of 1812: Concise Biographies of Commanders and Operational Histories of Regiments, with Bibliographies of Published and Primary Sources* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2009), 15.

⁴⁰ Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 15. See Chapter 4 of this thesis for more information about how Madison chose his cabinet appointments.

⁴¹ James Madison to William Eustis, March 7, 1809, microfilm 11, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.11_0001_0002.

organize the War Department to function more efficiently and took on the arduous task of planning a complex war amid multiple difficulties.

Historians recognize the multifaceted nature of the War of 1812, especially in regards to the peace that followed. There are three different schools of thought about which opponent won the War of 1812. The first set of historians believes that no combatant won, the second believe that the British won, and the third believes that both sides won.⁴² Stagg, though sometimes critical of Eustis, greatly sympathized with his plight.⁴³ One of his books, *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent*, detailed what he believed was the overwhelming failure of the war.⁴⁴ He does not blame Eustis but shows that the government and military as a whole failed. This thesis uses Stagg's theory and also takes the stance that no combatant won because neither the United States nor Britain won a decisive military victory and the war ended in a military stalemate. Furthermore, the reasons that the United States did not win were not the result of Eustis' supposed incompetence.

Eustis' theoretical failings were not the main cause of the apparent ineffectiveness of the War Department. Many issues faced the Secretary of War in planning and undertaking the war effort, especially when there was no commanding general. Eustis and his clerks became "responsible for juggling the manpower, combat, and logistical considerations of nine military

⁴² Hickey, *War of 1812*, 306; Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 428, 437. Taylor suggests that superficially the war was a draw and no combatant won. He however, states that a "wider and deeper perspective reveals an ultimate American victory that secured continental predominance." The differences in views results from how a historian interprets the war. For example, if scholars only take into account military issues or if the war changed British policies, they might believe that the war ended in a stalemate. The differences also stem from which country a person lives in, see: Turner, *War of 1812*, 130-132.

⁴³ The introduction detailed how Stagg called Eustis incompetent, and yet later he would give details about the war, such as finances, officers, and the government, and concluded that Eustis, and any Secretary of War, would not have been able to be more efficient in leading the nation into war.

⁴⁴ Stagg, *War of 1812*; Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 16.

districts.”⁴⁵ The responsibilities of the Secretary of War were numerous, and did not just entail the planning and execution of military strategy. However, many historical studies did not recognize the amount of work the fell to the Secretary of War and his small staff. Even though he only carried the title of “Secretary of War,” Eustis had many other duties.⁴⁶ According to historian Irving Brant, Eustis acted as: Quartermaster General; Commissary General; Army Staff and Supervisor of Pensions; and Indian Affairs and Land Warrants.⁴⁷ As Quartermaster General, Eustis provided the supplies for the military, including weapons and uniforms. As Commissary General, Eustis had to make sure the army was adequately fed. In his duties as Army Staff and Supervisor of Pensions, Eustis controlled the standing army and pension program. While in charge of Indian Affairs and Land Warrants, Secretary Eustis was responsible for the country’s policy towards Native Americans and administered the land bounty program.

Eustis was responsible for several departments and offices during the war and was not immune to human error. In the war, Eustis clearly mishandled one specific issue. When the U.S. declared war against Great Britain, Eustis wrote two letters to General Hull on June 18, 1812. The first letter contained no mention of the declaration. In the second letter, the declaration was “distinctly and officially announced.”⁴⁸ The first letter was sent by a special messenger and received by General Hull on June 24, 1812. The second letter was sent through public mail and did not arrive until July 2, 1812; two days after the British received their declaration of war. This administrative failure could have been avoided, but it is doubtful that

⁴⁵ Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 16.

⁴⁶ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 410.

⁴⁷ Irving Brant, *James Madison* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), 437.

⁴⁸ John Armstrong, *Notices of the War of 1812* (New York: G. Dearborn, 1836), 48.

if Hull received the declaration of war before the British, he would have been more prepared, considering the subsequent devastating defeat sustained at Detroit.

Eustis made grandiose statements while petitioning Congress to support the war. Eustis declared “We can take Canada without soldiers. We have only to send officers into the provinces and the people, disaffected toward their own government, will rally around our standard.”⁴⁹ However, it is unclear if this rhetoric is from Eustis, from pressure from the War Hawks, or for newspaper headlines.⁵⁰ It is clear that Eustis supported the war his party wanted, but it is unclear to what extent. His communication, both official and personal, does not exhibit the same fervor as this statement. Eustis, like other Democratic-Republicans, most likely believed that war was the only option left to the United States as the country tried to establish itself as a fully independent nation, able to defend itself and its economy.

One complaint by historians against Eustis is that he was responsible for Hull’s surrender at Detroit. However, the failure at Detroit was caused by many challenges, included a poor communication channel that was under constant attack, mutinous militiamen, and General Henry Dearborn’s lack of urgency to help his fellow general.⁵¹ Detroit was considered essential to the war effort because of its position in the northwestern frontier.⁵² The fort was to be used as a jumping point for an invasion into Upper Canada. Madison wanted Hull to command the force, though Hull, governor of the Michigan Territory since

⁴⁹ Richard Feltoe, *The Call to Arms: The 1812 Invasions of Upper Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2012), 41.

⁵⁰ Feltoe, *Call to Arms*, 41.

⁵¹ Langguth, *Union 1812*, 181-195.

⁵² Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 24.

1805, refused the commission several times in early 1812.⁵³ After he accepted the commission, Hull had to recruit his own army and build a two hundred mile road.⁵⁴

Hull's defense of his surrender relied on his belief that Madison, Eustis, and Dearborn had abandoned him to his fate. According to professor A. J. Langguth, Hull had met with Dearborn and Eustis in April 1812 to discuss an invasion plan before he left Washington. Their vague plan was that the main United States Army would capture Montreal, Hull's troops would march to Detroit and be joined by other troops, and Dearborn would also bring his company to provide reinforcements.⁵⁵ Hull also asked Madison to send a naval fleet to battle the British Navy, but this request was ignored.⁵⁶ The general took command of his force on May 25, 1812 and found the unit in total chaos because of a lack of supplies and little training. According to Elting, "some of the militia were already semi-mutinous" and Hull was faced with "frontier farm boys, accustomed to independent ways and working no harder than they chose to."⁵⁷ After spending days marching towards Detroit, Hull commissioned the schooner *Cuyahoga* to take supplies, records, and sick men to the fort, but the ship was captured by the British. After his arrival at Detroit, Hull faced attacks from Indians and British with no help in sight.⁵⁸ Hull became "exhausted in mind, body, and spirit, certain that he had been sent on a hopeless mission and then abandoned" and surrendered on August 16, 1812.⁵⁹ Hull was charged with treason and cowardice, but his proof that he was abandoned by the government

⁵³ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 24.

⁵⁴ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 25.

⁵⁵ Langguth, *Union 1812*, 181-182.

⁵⁶ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 25.

⁵⁷ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 26.

⁵⁸ Langguth, *Union 1812*, 182-186.

⁵⁹ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 34.

and other military leaders was lost when the ship transporting his papers burned after being attacked by the British.⁶⁰

The many duties and political challenges overwhelmed the position of Secretary of War. One major issue facing the War Department was the lack of money to finance the war. The Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin wrote to Madison in October 1812 that he could only guarantee \$3 million, and not the \$21 million that he estimated the war effort needed.⁶¹ As a result, Eustis had to run a war on a budget. Historian Eugene M. Wait stated that Eustis had been criticized for cutting the creation of horse drawn light artillery, “which innovation was especially suited for American conditions.”⁶² However, Eustis had to cut the program in its infancy because of its large expense.⁶³ Stagg also acknowledges that supplemental issues, such as finances, hindered Eustis’ ability to successfully run the War Department and to formulate a war plan.⁶⁴ Stories, in both contemporary accounts and historical studies, describe Eustis scouring ads for deals on shirts and hats to supply the army. For example, Senator William H. Crawford declared in a letter to Monroe that Eustis was “A Secretary of War who, instead of forming general and comprehensive arrangements for the organization of his troops and for the successful prosecution of the campaign, consumes his time in reading advertisements of petty retailing merchants to find where he may purchase one hundred shoes or two hundred hats.”⁶⁵ These stories have merit. They underscore the severe financial

⁶⁰ Langguth, *Union 1812*, 195.

⁶¹ Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 469; Wait, *America and the War of 1812*, 151.

⁶² Wait, *America and the War of 1812*, 151. Wait did not specify who the critics were. He stated that Eustis’ critics, those who believed him to be incompetent, were disparaging about this decision.

⁶³ Wait, *America and the War of 1812*, 151; Coles, “Eustis, William,” 176.

⁶⁴ Stagg, *War of 1812*, 54.

⁶⁵ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 395.

constraints under which he operated.⁶⁶ Many contemporaries, including Crawford, did not understand that as the acting Quartermaster General, Eustis had to spend time finding supplies, including clothing, for the U.S. Army.

Congress was slow to approve additional appointments or departments. Another duty that fell to Eustis was that of Inspector General. However, on July 14, 1812, Eustis appointed Brigadier General Alexander Smyth as his Inspector General of the Army after Congressional approval.⁶⁷ Smyth's responsibilities included overseeing the training and organization of army troops from Washington, D.C. However, Smyth detested deskwork and "sought glory on battlefield." His attitude left many troops ill trained for warfare against the British Army.⁶⁸ Additionally, in April 1812, Madison proposed to Congress that the War Department should have two secretaries to manage the workload. However, Congress dismissed that proposal due to the lack of available money.⁶⁹ Therefore, both Congress and the administrative branch of government were culpable for the prosecution of the war.

Another challenge facing the War Department and the overall success of the War of 1812 was creating a military that could take on a world power such as Great Britain. According to David Coles Eustis dealt with disputes with several generals and difficult challenges, such as raising an army and finding supplies. For example, the greatest issue facing Eustis, as head of the War Department, was General James Wilkinson.⁷⁰ Wilkinson served in the Continental Army during the Revolution playing a minor role in the Battle of

⁶⁶ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 395.

⁶⁷ Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 135.

⁶⁸ Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 135. See also: Stagg, *War of 1812*, 72. According to Stagg, Smyth's troops in New York refused to follow him to attack Fort Erie because of their poor training.

⁶⁹ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 673; Brant, *James Madison*, 437.

⁷⁰ Coles, "Eustis, William," 176.

Saratoga, but he and Major General Gates embellished that role to Congress by suggesting that he played a significant part. According to Fitz-Enz, who published *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes* in 2012, Wilkinson and Gates remained in headquarters behind the battle lines while Benedict Arnold commanded the American forces to victory.⁷¹ This lie, in which Gates told John Hancock in a letter that Wilkinson was a brave military hero who was indispensable to the army, led to his appointment as a brigadier general and a position on the Board of War.⁷² Gates compelled Wilkinson to resign in March 1778 for various reasons, including Wilkinson's possible participation in the Conway Cabal, the conspiracy to replace General George Washington with Gates.⁷³ After the Revolution, Wilkinson went to Kentucky where he acquired land and established a store. He then sold the land at high profits, and swindled customers who thought they were buying great land, but they were disappointed when they arrived on their new property because the land wasn't as good as promised. Wilkinson also began to export tobacco. Wilkinson was also a paid Spanish agent who tried to get Kentucky incorporated into Spanish Florida while at the same time commanded American troops against the Wabash Indians.

Wilkinson's plots did not work out as planned and he was in desperate need of money. He thus accepted Washington's commission as a lieutenant colonel in Ohio where he would have command of Fort Washington near Cincinnati and was soon promoted to Brigadier General.⁷⁴ He was put on trial in 1807 on suspicion of being a Spanish agent, but was

⁷¹ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 300.

⁷² Andro Linklater, *An Artist in Treason: The Extraordinary Double Life of General James Wilkinson* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc, 2009), 36-40, 58; Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 64-67; Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 300.

⁷³ Linklater, *Artist in Treason*, 52-59.

⁷⁴ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 302.

acquitted because of lack of evidence.⁷⁵ According to historian Garry Wills, Eustis “could not exert control over the army as long as Wilkinson was retained as its highest officer.”⁷⁶ Eustis’ first encounter with Wilkinson as Secretary of War came soon after he took over the department. In 1809, Wilkinson was sent to New Orleans by then Secretary of War Dearborn. However, many soldiers appeared on the sick list and significant numbers died. As a doctor, the excessive numbers alarmed Eustis. He wrote to General Wilkinson to disregard the previous orders he received from Dearborn, Eustis’ predecessor, to move the troops to New Orleans. Eustis believed that Wilkinson needed to move the troops up river to higher ground in an effort to get away from malaria-ridden areas because he recognized that soldiers were dying needlessly from disease.⁷⁷

Henry Adams asserted that General Wilkinson thought he was above receiving orders from the Secretary of War. In the *History of the United States of America*, Adams details Eustis’ struggle with the general. Eustis wrote a letter to Wilkinson on April 30 that should have arrived in New Orleans by May 25. However, Wilkinson claimed that he had not received any letter by June 8, but “No one believed Wilkinson; his reputation for falsehood warranted suspicion that he suppressed the orders in the belief that he knew best what the troops required.”⁷⁸ Wilkinson did not express any regret, but instead “wrote to Eustis that even had he received the orders of April 30 in time, he should still ‘have not sought the position [Eustis] recommended.’”⁷⁹ Finally, a very angry Eustis wrote to General Wilkinson and ordered him to move the entire force before more soldiers fell sick and died. This time,

⁷⁵ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 306.

⁷⁶ Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, 251.

⁷⁷ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 169-172.

⁷⁸ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 172.

⁷⁹ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 172-173.

Wilkinson followed orders, though slowly. The orders from Eustis arrived on July 19 but no move was made until September 14.⁸⁰ On September 10, 1809, Eustis wrote to Madison to update the president on the situation in New Orleans and in the letter Eustis stated that Wilkinson was recalled the capital to answer for his behavior.⁸¹

During this time, it is estimated that Wilkinson lost approximately half of his original force of 2,000 men.⁸² On November 24, 1809, Eustis wrote to Madison that the army “is in some degree diminished by sickness & other casualties.”⁸³ Unfortunately, the secretary could not remove Wilkinson from his command because, according to Wills, he was under Madison’s protection. The President and Secretary of War put Wilkinson on trial in 1811, but were unable to gain a guilty verdict.⁸⁴ Wilkinson was politically well-connected but not particularly capable at commanding an army. Nor was he very good at taking orders from the War Department. According to historian Andro Linklater, Wilkinson “wanted to teach Eustis, the sixth secretary of war he had dealt with, who was the master in their relationship.”⁸⁵ At his trial, Wilkinson belittled Eustis and others while minimizing his culpability for the disasters of the war.⁸⁶ Wilkinson would be cleared of all charges and given command of the Southern District as brevet major general.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 173-174.

⁸¹ William Eustis to James Madison, September 10, 1809, microfilm 11, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.11_0692_0693.

⁸² Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, 259.

⁸³ William Eustis to James Madison, November 24, 1809, *The Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, J.C.A. Stagg, editor. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010). <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-03-02-02-0106>.

⁸⁴ Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, 259; Linklater, *Artist in Treason*, 294.

⁸⁵ Linklater, *Artist in Treason*, 285.

⁸⁶ Linklater, *Artist in Treason*, 282; Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 67.

⁸⁷ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 306.

Gordon Wood explained that the U.S. Army had been reduced during Jefferson's administration to only three thousand men with just 172 officers. Congress hesitated to increase troops to the levels needed to wage a successful campaign. After the *Chesapeake* Affair, Congress did authorize five new regiments, but recruiting levels did not meet expectations.⁸⁸ Additionally, the Democratic-Republicans planned on relying on militia for much of the fighting, though Gallatin wanted to reduce the calls for militia because of the cost.⁸⁹ However, the militias were under the command of the states' governors and they did not want to share their authority with the government.⁹⁰ The officers were also largely incompetent, chosen by Madison for their party affiliations and political connections rather than skill or military knowledge. Republican Nathaniel Macon believed that the incompetence of the officers had caused so much demoralization in the army that he "suggested that it might as well be disbanded" in 1810.⁹¹ Hickey's conclusion that "the advocates of war appeared to support the conflict more with their heads than their hearts, and more with their hearts than their purses" is accurate.⁹²

The high priority of choosing officers for the war effort was extremely difficult. First, "after thirty years of virtual disarmament," Madison and Eustis had to decide between experienced, yet aging, officers who fought in the War of Independence or younger officers who had no experience in battle yet might possess more energy for a war.⁹³ Second, they had

⁸⁸ Gordon S. Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 247-248; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 8; Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 2. By 1812, the Army had only raised 6,750 men out of the intended 10,000.

⁸⁹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 8; Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 469.

⁹⁰ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 8.

⁹¹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 8.

⁹² Hickey, *War of 1812*, 2.

⁹³ Robert Allen Rutland, *The Presidency of James Madison* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 110; Brant, *James Madison*, 438.

to find officers who would accept their commissions. The War of 1812 was not popular in public sentiment and finding willing soldiers and officers was a hard chore that took up much time. Eustis wrote Madison almost everyday in March 1812 about officer appointments, commissions, and efforts to raise militia.⁹⁴ According to Stagg, by the end of 1812, Madison had offered commissions to more than 1,100 officers but 15% of these men declined to serve, and although there wasn't a staggering amount of refusals, the army needed more men than they could find.⁹⁵

The lack of a true Army and a military school that had only produced seventy-one graduates put the United States at a disadvantage. Elting, did not considered any officers to be proficient for duty. After the Revolution, the army had been greatly reduced to a meager number of men and officers. These repeated "reorganizations and reductions since the Revolution had made the Army an unattractive career; aside from a dedicated handful such as Alexander Macomb, Zebulon M. Pike, Edmund P. Gaines, Winfield Scott, and Henry Atkinson, few able men considered it a rewarding position."⁹⁶ Thus, the United States had to rely on untried officers to lead men into battle and these men had very little military knowledge, especially "as to the effective employment of his artillery and cavalry".⁹⁷ West Point also proved to be a disappointment. Congress authorized the creation of the school in 1802, but no entrance requirements were established until Eustis instituted them in 1810.⁹⁸ Of the seventy-one graduates produced by 1812, twenty-three had either died or resigned and

⁹⁴ J.C.A. Stagg, ed. *The Papers of James Madison Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2010).

⁹⁵ Stagg, *War of 1812*, 55.

⁹⁶ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 4.

⁹⁷ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 10. Elting's analyses very useful because as a commander, he gave insights that other historians cannot.

⁹⁸ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 5.

students were only taught basic artillery and infantry drills and military engineering.⁹⁹ From the outset, the United States Army was not equipped for war against the most powerful nation in the world.

The U.S. was not prepared for the war with Britain, and this blame cannot rest on one man alone. For example, the U.S. bureaucracy hindered the war effort. Congress did not approve the creation of multiple departments until war planning was well underway in March of 1812. According to Elting, Congress would not permit additional secretaries or assistant secretaries in the War Department, but did authorize a Quartermaster General, a Commissary General of Purchases, and a Commissary General of Ordinance, though finding men to fill these roles took some time. Madison and Eustis discussed several candidates for each post, but Madison did not even appoint a Commissary General of Ordinance until a month after war had been declared.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, “even with these additions to the military bureaucracy, it still could not be said that the United States would go into war with a well-organized staff of general officers, comparable to those that had been established by most European armies at the time.”¹⁰¹ The United States entered the war ill-equipped to fight.

It was Eustis’ misfortune to try to prepare for war under a system which he knew did not function adequately, while also trying to introduce a better one...supported only by Madison, who realized that few men in the Republican Party were willing to accept such an intolerable burden.¹⁰²

During the Federalist administrations, the governmental bureaucracy increased to lighten the workload on individuals. However, the Republican Jefferson reduced the bureaucracy because

⁹⁹ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms!*, 5; William Eustis to James Madison, March 27, 1812, *Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-03-02-02-0106>; William Eustis to James Madison, November 24, 1809, *Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-03-04-02-0282>.

¹⁰¹ Stagg, *War of 1812*, 55.

¹⁰² Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 155.

of its expense and, as a result, staff had to take on duties that had once been spread amongst multiple individuals.¹⁰³

Flaws in the War Department were also likely the result of the policies of his predecessors or lack of organization, not Eustis. He could attempt to correct the flaws, but that was a difficult undertaking in any circumstances, but especially during active warfare. When he became secretary of war, Eustis attempted to update the military's field manuals, which dated to the Revolution.¹⁰⁴ He acquired copies of manuals published in 1791 for use by the armies of the French Republic, had them translated, and lobbied the Senate committee on military affairs beginning in 1810 for adoption of these on French tactics.¹⁰⁵ Trials of the new regulations and tactics were successful. Eustis asked Madison to implement them on the battlefield, but the president refused because high-ranking army officers did not want them.¹⁰⁶ Even if these new methods were adopted, it is impossible to conclude that they would have made a great impact, though they were successful in trials at a military camp.

Congress had a large role in the conduct of the war. According to Wood, the U.S. Congress failed to take the war seriously as demonstrated by their reluctance to increase troop numbers and their disinclination to even use the U.S. Navy.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, on the eve of war, Congress recessed, and the war effort had to wait until they returned.¹⁰⁸ According to Stagg, “the incompetence that seemed all-pervasive during the war years was more than simply the failings of so many individuals, rather it was symptomatic of political and administrative

¹⁰³ Wood, *Idea of America*, 247.

¹⁰⁴ Michael A. Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from the War of 1812 to the Outbreak of WWII* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 43. Eustis preferred the French style of warfare to the British style.

¹⁰⁵ Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon*, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁷ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 683.

¹⁰⁸ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 673.

problems deeply rooted in the government of American society.”¹⁰⁹ The incompetence led to bewilderment and on the eve of war, the “British minister in Washington was totally confused about what the Republicans were up to, the signals were so mixed.”¹¹⁰ Depending on the historian, Madison is described as either a President who was eager to go to war or very reluctant to declare war. Yet, he made no attempt “to conceal from the British minister that the United States was in no position to commence hostilities.”¹¹¹ Therefore, it is unfair to blame one man for the failings of an entire government.

After the tumultuous beginning to the War of 1812, Eustis submitted his final resignation to President Madison in a letter dated December 3, 1812.¹¹² According to Stagg, Eustis had tried to resign before the war began because he “took fright at the burdens that military preparations would place upon the War Department,” but Madison refused to accept this position. Stagg referenced a letter from James Madison to William Duane dated September 4, 1812 as his evidence. However, a letter from Eustis to Madison about a possible resignation has not been found.¹¹³ President Madison reluctantly accepted this final resignation, which went into effect on January 13, 1813.¹¹⁴ In the letter, Secretary Eustis acknowledges the great “augmentation of duty” that occurred once the Republican Party insisted on going to war as the main cause of his departure. He also wrote that he hoped

¹⁰⁹ Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, xi.

¹¹⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 673.

¹¹¹ Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 23-24.

¹¹² William Eustis to James Madison, December 3, 1812, “William Eustis Papers, 1779-1829,” Folder: “1800-1812,” MHS, Boston.

¹¹³ Stagg, “Revolt Against Virginia,” 46. Stagg cited the letter from Madison to Duane, but no letter of resignation has been found in archival research. However, this does not mean that Eustis did not try to resign; he might have informally tried to leave the War Department.

¹¹⁴ James Madison to William Eustis, December 4, 1812, MHS, Boston.

somebody with a higher knowledge of military matters could be found to lead the department.¹¹⁵ After retiring from office, Eustis returned to Boston.

Many historians of the War of 1812 believe that Eustis was an incompetent Secretary of War whose shortcomings led to early military disasters during the conflict. However, evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that belief is very superficial. By delving deeper into who Eustis was, what his duties entailed, and the overall difficulties endured by the United States government, it is clear that there is a more complex history. Eustis was faced with an impossible task: prepare the United States Army for a war against the world's most powerful nation that many of its own citizens did not support or want to fight in. This fact should change the way historians treat Eustis in the future.

¹¹⁵ William Eustis to James Madison, December 3, 1812, MHS, Boston.

Chapter 3: Post-War Life and Career

Eustis' Career and Life after Resigning as Secretary of War

After his tenure as Secretary of War, Eustis continued his career in politics. One question that has permeated the research for this project was why, if Eustis was so incompetent as the Secretary of War, was he continuously offered and even elected by the public to more political positions? After leaving Washington, for example, President Madison appointed Eustis Minister to the Netherlands and Massachusetts' voters elected him to Congress and twice elected him Governor of Massachusetts.

In a letter dated December 29, 1814, Eustis accepted the appointment as Minister to the Netherlands, pending confirmation by the Senate.¹ On May 19 1815, Eustis received a letter from Secretary of State James Monroe that outlined his responsibilities while in the Netherlands, which had just gained independence from French rule in 1814. As "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States to the Sovereign Prince of the United Netherlands," he was tasked with negotiating a commercial treaty with the Netherlands on behalf of the government of the United States.² Monroe also wanted Eustis to keep the United States government informed of anything important that he heard while at court and around the city because Monroe considered The Hague to be an important listening post for European politics.³ Eustis set into motion very important negotiations on matters that neither government wanted to rush into, especially the Netherlands, which had just regained

¹ William Eustis to James Madison, December 29, 1814, "William Eustis Papers, 1779-1829", Folder: "1813-1824," MHS, Boston.

² James Monroe to William Eustis, May 19, 1815, microfilm P-94 (one reel), "Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825," MHS, Boston.

³ Cornelis A. van Minnen, *American Diplomats in the Netherlands, 1815-1850* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 23.

independence after Napoleon's defeat.⁴ The new commerce treaty was finalized in 1817 and ratified in 1818.⁵

Madison chose Eustis to occupy what he thought would be a very important diplomatic position and thus he still had faith in Eustis' capabilities. The government in the Netherlands had to follow the royal family from court to court, thus any discussion of politics occurred very slowly.⁶ The appointment as Minister meant that Eustis and his wife were obligated to attend social functions with nobility and the Dutch royalty, even if he found them uncomfortable and physically draining.⁷ Eustis, however, made no mention in his diary if the events he attended made him feel uncomfortable or if they were tiresome. In a letter to her friend and First Lady Dolley Madison, dated October 6, 1816, Caroline Langdon Eustis, Eustis' wife, described the parties that were thrown to celebrate the new Princess of Orange, Anna Pavlovna, and her pregnancy.⁸ There are numerous diary entries by Eustis that list dinners, parties, teas, and other functions they attended. The diary entries do not go into any detail beyond what they did, what correspondence he received, who their dinner guests were, or their general health. For example, on Sunday June 23, 1816, the entry is "Dined at the Palace Grand Gala Large Party."⁹ They also "Attended the Service of the King and Queen by

⁴ For transcribed letters between Eustis and his counterpart at the Hague, the Baron de Nagell, see: Asbury Dickins and James C. Allen, *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States from the First Session of the First Congress to the Second Session of the Thirty-Fifth Congress, Inclusive: Commencing March 4, 1789, and Ending March 3, 1859* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1858), 599–603.

⁵ Raymond Walters, *Albert Gallatin: Jeffersonian Financier and Diplomat* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957), 307-308.

⁶ Minnen, *American Diplomats*, 24.

⁷ Minnen, *American Diplomats*, 24.

⁸ Caroline Langdon Eustis to Dolley Madison, October 6, 1816, "Eustis-Landon Papers, 1803-1876," MHS, Boston.

⁹ Diary of William Eustis, June 23, 1816, "William Eustis Papers, 1779-1829," Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

invitation” a party celebrating the engagement of the Prince of Orange with Anna Pavlovna, sister to the Emperor of Russia on January 18, 1816.¹⁰ This entry is normal for the diary. It is important to note that business and politics were informally conducted at many of these social functions.

Eustis returned to the United States due to health concerns where he immersed himself in local politics.¹¹ For example, in 1819, he served as the chairman of a meeting in Boston that discussed the future of slavery in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.¹² The purpose of the meeting was to “consider the subject of restraining the further extension of Slavery in new States” because “the extirpation of Slavery has never ceased to be regarded as a measure deeply concerning the honor and safety of the United States.”¹³ The men present at this meeting declared that Congress possessed the constitutional power to “make the prohibition of the further extension of slavery, or involuntary servitude, in such new State, a condition of its admission.” They believed that slavery was a “calamity” that new states needed to be protected from.¹⁴ His stance on slavery and the role of blacks was not limited to Massachusetts’s politics.

After his return to the United States, Eustis once more became active in federal politics. He was elected to Congress in 1820 and served until 1823.¹⁵ He won a special election held after Representative Edward Dowse resigned. While serving in Congress, Eustis presided over

¹⁰ Diary of William Eustis, January 18, 1816, MHS, Boston.

¹¹ Yanik, *Fall and Recapture of Detroit in the War of 1812*, 178.

¹² Resolution, “At a numerous meeting of the citizens of Boston...to consider the subject of restraining the further extension of slavery in new states,” December 6, 1819, Box 1819, Printed Materials, MHS, Boston.

¹³ Resolution, “At a numerous meeting of the citizens of Boston,” December 6, 1819, MHS, Boston.

¹⁴ Resolution, “At a numerous meeting of the citizens of Boston,” December 6, 1819, MHS, Boston.

¹⁵ Sobel, *Biographical Directory of the Executive Branch*, 117.

the U.S. House Committee on Military Affairs. He took a leading part in a debate over admitting Missouri as a state, where he “spoke eloquently in defense of free Negro and mulatto rights.”¹⁶ All Democratic-Republicans did not share Eustis’ stance. The party was split among northern and southern members. Northern members, like Eustis, wanted Missouri to be admitted as a free state, while southern members threatened secession if Missouri was not admitted as a slave state.¹⁷ This occurrence is important because it is an example of how Eustis, who was a loyal Democratic-Republican, would vote against his own party in issues he did not agree with. Eustis was recognized as a moderate politician and was respected by both Democratic-Republicans and Federalists. After his death, Mrs. Caroline Langdon Eustis received a letter from former U.S. Senator and soldier William North, a Federalist. In the letter, North praised Eustis for his many virtues, his service to his country, and for the friendship they formed when they met during the war.¹⁸

Eustis received a letter dated February 7, 1822, that informed him that at the Convention of the Republican members of both branches of the Massachusetts state government “unanimously” voted for Dr. Eustis to be their nominee for governor.¹⁹ He also received a letter from his longtime friend, David Townsend. Townsend told Eustis that after returning to Boston, he would find further important services to undertake, and that he had “many, very many friends who are powerful advocates for the genuine Republican Character

¹⁶ Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy: 1819-1821* (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1967), 167. See also Sibley’s, 80, for his speech.

¹⁷ Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class-Structure, Economic Development and Political Conflict, 1620-1877* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publications, 2011), 202.

¹⁸ William North to Caroline Langdon Eustis, February 1825, microfilm P-94 (one reel), “Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825,” MHS, Boston.

¹⁹ Phinehas Allens, John Ruggles and John Wade to William Eustis, February 7, 1822, microfilm P-94 (one reel), “Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825,” MHS, Boston.

of the State.”²⁰ However, Eustis would not win the election for governor until 1823. He lost the governor’s race three times, in 1820, 1821, and 1822, to the popular, moderate Federalist John Brooks. Brooks’ campaign released a broadside that depicted a ship, a fictional U.S.S. Massachusetts, with the slogan “Brooks and Liberty! Away with Eustis and Disgrace.”²¹ The ship’s banners highlight issues that many citizens of Massachusetts were critical of about the War of 1812, including “Peace if possible War before dishonor” and “Sailor’s Rights.”²² This broadside, which is undated but thought to be for one of the elections that Eustis lost, highlighted the reputation Eustis still had in Massachusetts, and the Federalists could exploit, in the early 1820s, approximately eight years after the War of 1812.

Eustis was elected governor twice, first in 1823 and again in 1824. In 1823 Eustis defeated Harrison Gray Otis, an unpopular politician with extreme Federalist views. In his first term as governor, Eustis continued Brook’s moderate policies, ensuring his own popularity and reelection.²³ According to the Lexington Historical Society, Eustis was popular because “his policy was liberal, and his administration was efficient. He was not the scheming, partisan politician, but the broad-minded, thoughtful, and patriotic statesman.”²⁴ In this first term, he appointed his lieutenant governor, Levi Lincoln, Jr., to the state’s high court, and won reelection in 1824 with former Representative Marcus Morton as his lieutenant.²⁵ In his reelection campaign, Eustis’s strategy centered on the accusation that Federalist Caleb Strong,

²⁰ David Townsend to William Eustis, February 22, 1823, microfilm P-94 (one reel), “Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825,” MHS, Boston.

²¹ William Phillips, “Brooks and Liberty! Away with Eustis and Disgrace,” Election Broadside [ca. 1820-1822], Americana Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA, <http://archive.org/details/brookslibertyawa00broo>.

²² Phillips, “Brooks and Liberty!,” Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.

²³ Porter, “A Sketch of the Life,” 106.

²⁴ Porter, “A Sketch of the Life,” 106.

²⁵ Porter, “A Sketch of the Life,” 106.

who served as governor from May 30, 1800 until May 29, 1807 and again from March 4, 1812 until May 30, 1816, stole money from citizens of Massachusetts. During the War of 1812, Governor Strong refused to let the U.S. Army control the Massachusetts militia. The U.S. government declined to fund the defense of Massachusetts and the governor was forced to borrow money.²⁶ Massachusetts petitioned the government for funds after the war, but government wanted to make a statement. According to a re-election broadside, President Monroe would have looked more favorable on the state only if in the case of “the renunciation of the UNCONSTITUTIONAL principles assumed and maintained by Governor Strong and your federal rulers.”²⁷ The election ticket tells voters that a vote for Eustis would “ensure the REPAYMENT of this ENORMOUS SUM into your STATE TREASURY” [emphasis in original].²⁸ The effective end of the Federalist Party in Massachusetts came in 1825. Eustis won re-election that year and the Republican Party swept the legislature.²⁹ The Republican Party in Massachusetts followed an elaborate plan pursued over several years to get its most prominent and capable people elected to public office. Surely, the Federalists made mistakes and contributed to their own demise, but this concerted effort by the Republicans succeeded, not only in their gaining power in Massachusetts, what was once a Federalist stronghold, but in also in destroying the Federalist Party in the state. Dr. Eustis died while serving as the Governor of Massachusetts on February 6, 1825.

Eustis was very committed to the Society of the Cincinnati. The purpose of the Society, officially founded on May 13, 1783, is to preserve the “memory of the patriotic sacrifices that

²⁶ Richard Buel, *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle Over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 233-234.

²⁷ “Important election. First Monday of April next. Republican Ticket. His excellency William Eustis for Governor. . . .” Broadside 1824, MHS, Boston.

²⁸ “Important election,” Broadside 1824, MHS, Boston.

²⁹ Buel, *America on the Brink*, 233-234.

made American liberty a reality.”³⁰ Today, the Society collects and provides access to books, manuscripts, art, and artifacts that illustrate the war and those who fought. The idea for the society developed to honor the men who served in the Continental Army who had risked or lost their lives in the fight for freedom. The Society was established with several purposes: to “perpetuate the memory of the War for Independence”; to “maintain fraternal bonds”; to “preserve the liberties for which the officers had fought”; to provide “financial support to members in distress and their widows and orphans in times of need”; and to “distinguish its members as men of honor.”³¹ Dr. Eustis was a founding member of the Society, which was established in 1783, and also served as the Vice President from 1786 until 1810 and then again in 1820.³² Dr. Eustis received a letter from David Townsend, dated July 14, 1810 that stated “Voted, That the thanks of this society be presented to Doctor Will^m Eustis for his services as vice President of the Society.”³³ The Society was an important aspect of Eustis’ life and he supported its causes throughout his life.

William Eustis continued to hold political positions after his tenure as Secretary of War. One of the main questions that this thesis explores researched why Eustis, called “a pathetic appointment” by Hassler, continued to have a successful political career after leaving the War Department.³⁴ Archival records indicate that Eustis was not an incompetent man and that he was continuously elected to fulfill positions because of his moderate views. His career as a Democratic-Republican in Massachusetts was successful because of his moderate and

³⁰ “About,” Society of the Cincinnati, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://www.societyofthecincinnati.org/about>.

³¹ “History of the Society, 1783-1784,” Society of the Cincinnati, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://www.societyofthecincinnati.org/about/history/founding>.

³² Shipton, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, Vol. 17, 443-444.

³³ David Townsend to William Eustis, July 14, 1810, microfilm P-94 (one reel), “Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825,” MHS, Boston.

³⁴ Hassler, Jr., *With Shield and Sword*, 73.

independent thinking and thus he was able to win votes from Federalists, who feared extreme views of members of their own party.³⁵

³⁵ Porter, "A Sketch of the Life," 106.

Chapter 4: Remembering Dr. William Eustis

Collective Memory of Dr. William Eustis

In “Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era,” Barry Schwartz traced the development of an American collective memory of President Lincoln.¹ The purpose of the Schwartz’s research was to find out why the memory of Lincoln changed from the period after his death, though the deaths of the last Civil War veteran generation, and throughout the Civil Rights movement.² Schwartz recounts the changing memory of Lincoln from a symbol of unity and justice to serving as a reminder of continued racial discrimination.³ The memory of President Abraham Lincoln changed over time because he “has always been a *lamp* illuminating the ideals of the American people as well as a *mirror* reflecting their interests.”⁴ According to Swartz, Americans use Lincoln both a lamp and a mirror because he is a moral symbol guiding and inspiring life because his “troubles reappear in present predicaments; Lincoln’s facing his troubles shows us how to work through our own.”⁵ Schwartz tracked this change of memory through newspapers, magazines, congressional activities, and the thoughts of American people.⁶

Schwartz’s research has been very useful for the study of collective memory in general and particularly that of a historical figure. There are many definitions of collective memory, but Schwartz’s succinct description fits within this thesis’ frame of study. Schwartz defined collective memory as “the distribution throughout society of what individuals believe, feel,

¹ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009).

² Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 7.

³ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, x.

⁴ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, xi.

⁵ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, xi.

⁶ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 5.

and know about the past.”⁷ Eustis is, unfortunately, not well known among the American public, and thus it is hard to assess his total collective memory. However, scholars and historians of the War of 1812 have formed a collective remembrance of Eustis. It is important to examine his memory, despite not being well known, because he was a key player in the early effort of the War of 1812 and President Madison’s administration, and yet he has been dismissed as unimportant.

The collective memory of Eustis is largely based on mentions in studies of the War of 1812, even though he held many other public positions before and after the war. As stated in the introduction, there are four main themes that historical studies have about Eustis: that he was utterly incompetent; he was responsible for military failures; that Eustis tried hard but did not have the ability or energy to successfully lead the department; and that the position itself was overwhelmed by duties and challenges that one man, no matter what his aptitude, could not handle by himself.⁸ These themes show that the collective memory of Eustis is in a variable state as more historians delve deeper into the duties of the secretary, the difficulties permeating the war effort, and learn more about the man himself.⁹

There are relatively few readily available sources about Eustis during his life before he was appointed Secretary of War. One group of sources is correspondence that either discussed Eustis, or had been written or received by him. These letters form part of his memory because they detail what his contemporaries thought of him. For example, on October 10, 1785, Samuel Adams wrote to Richard Henry Lee asking him to introduce Dr. Eustis to the area when Eustis visited Virginia. Adams wrote, “Will you give me leave to introduce to you the

⁷ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 11.

⁸ Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War*, 35.

⁹ Coles, “Eustis, William,” 175.

Bearer of this Letter Doctor William Eustis, a Gentleman whom I much esteem. He proposes to spend the insuing [sic] Winter in the Southern States hoping in a warmer Climate to recover his health which he lost in the Service of the united States."¹⁰ Furthermore, according to Sibley's *Harvard Graduates*, Eustis was known by his colleagues for "His personal appearance, his polished manners and gentlemanly address, added to his many amiable feelings, and an intellect well cultivated, rendered him a favorite of his youthful friends and fellow students, and secured to him the strong and growing attachment of his instructor [sic]."¹¹ These letters show that Dr. Eustis was esteemed among his peers.

It is evident that authors of secondary sources did not always provide references for their accusations against Secretary Eustis. Subsequent authors either cited these allegations as evidence for their stance against Dr. Eustis or just assumed their veracity without investigating the matter further. For example, Hickey relied heavily on secondary sources written by John K. Mahon, Harry L. Coles, Irving Brant, and Henry Adams. As shown in the introduction of this thesis, all of these authors maligned Eustis.¹² When something is common knowledge, scholars do not have to cite evidence. Perhaps historians do not cite evidence about Eustis' supposed incompetence because they believe it is an accepted fact.

Henry Adams is one author who repeatedly did not always offer evidence for his claims against Eustis. Adams was a nineteenth century historian who wrote before standards for citation of evidence were established, however, subsequent authors, like Hickey and Brant, have referenced his works and it is thus important to explore his works. For example, in *The Life of Albert Gallatin*, Adams made several references to Eustis. The first refers to Eustis as

¹⁰ Samuel Adams to Richard Henry Lee, October 10, 1785, microfilm P-94 (one reel), "Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825," MHS, Boston.

¹¹ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 71.

¹² Hickey, *War of 1812*, 320-321. Hickey included a section that discussed his sources.

“notoriously incompetent” while discussing how the war burdened the cabinet, especially Treasury Secretary Gallatin and Eustis.¹³ He also refers to Eustis as “unequal to the growing responsibilities of the office,” but he does not mention the magnitude of those duties.¹⁴ While discussing Hull’s surrender at Detroit, Adams included a letter that Gallatin wrote to his wife in which Gallatin stated that “Proper measures for repairing the loss [at Detroit] will be adopted; but how they will be executed by Eustis, no one can say...” and this letter reveals that Gallatin did not believe that Eustis would be able to handle the reorganizing the military efforts.¹⁵ Adams claimed that Gallatin believed that military failures, especially the defeat at Detroit the administration had just learned about, were largely Eustis’ fault.¹⁶ Yet, Gallatin does not acknowledge that these failures were more likely the result of widespread issues.¹⁷

Another author who doesn’t always offer support to claims is Stagg who has written several books and articles on the War of 1812. In *Mr. Madison’s War*, Stagg claimed “Eustis was the first to admit his inadequacies as an administrator.”¹⁸ Yet he does not include any source for his allegation. The letter dated March 18, 1809, that Eustis wrote to Madison thanking him for the mark of confidence in regards to his nomination as Secretary of War. Eustis told Madison that he hoped that the “inadequacy of [his] own powers” would not limit his success in fulfilling the duties.¹⁹ If scholars had only read that sentence, they might conclude that Eustis realized that he did have the ability to fulfill the duties of the office. Yet

¹³ Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 455.

¹⁴ Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 440.

¹⁵ Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 468.

¹⁶ Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 469.

¹⁷ This concept was explored in the Secretary of War and War of 1812 section.

¹⁸ Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 155.

¹⁹ William Eustis to James Madison, March 18, 1809, microfilm 11, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.11_0072_0073.

if scholars had read the letter in full, they would find that this sentence was part of a modest reply in which he thanked President Madison for nominating him.

Eustis did not write extensively about his personal feelings about his position as Secretary of War. He kept a diary and was a correspondent with many others, both government and civilian, but he was not a man to complain about his misfortune. Eustis once remarked "the United States...presented the 'rare phenomenon' of a country going to war with an army lacking staff support."²⁰ Neither Dr. Eustis nor his wife Caroline Langdon Eustis acknowledged any outright failure, yet both were frustrated that Congressmen among others blamed him for failures in the war. In a letter to Dolley Madison, dated January 7, 1815, Caroline wrote:

Under all the circumstances which design or accident have cast in our way, our confidence, our attachment and we are proud to add our friendship, have never been impaired or stationary. The last mark of confidence was received by him with peculiar satisfaction, it justifies and repays all his pride of sentiment and trust.²¹

This letter shows that Eustis and his wife believed that the criticism Eustis received from members of the government, including Crawford and other members of the War Hawks, was not warranted. Eustis' appointment as Minister to the Netherlands exhibited the fact that Madison believed that Eustis was a capable administrator. Eustis continued his political career at The Hague where he negotiated a commercial treaty with the Netherlands.

In *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent*, Stagg continued his condemnations against Eustis. Stagg stated "Congress was not blind for the need for change, but its members had no confidence the cabinet could manage it, and in December pressure from the legislators

²⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 673; Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 155.

²¹ "Caroline Langdon Eustis to Dolley Payne Todd Madison," January 7, 1815, in *The Dolley Madison Digital Edition*, ed. Holly C. Shulman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), accessed April 29, 2012, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/dmde/DPM0419>.

compelled both Eustis and Hamilton to tender their resignations.”²² Again, Stagg did not include any reference or evidence to support this claim. Yet, Stagg can also be sympathetic towards Eustis. He later wrote that Eustis was overwhelmed with matters out of his control. For example, Stagg recognized that issues such as finances and political incompetence permeated the government at all levels and hampered Eustis’ ability to successfully run the overwhelmed War Department.²³ The challenges Eustis faced were interconnected. Money was in short supply, and this hampered recruiting and supplies, while political fights between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans and even between the War Hawks and other Republicans also delayed the war planning effort. The obstacles that the government would have to overcome were numerous and Eustis had to confront these challenges.

George Daughan also makes accusations against Secretary Eustis without offering any evidence. In a section of *1812: The Navy’s War* discussing President Madison’s strategy for the war, Daughan included a paragraph where he introduced Dr. Eustis and the Department of War. According to Daughan, Eustis was “incapable” and “utterly unqualified to lead” the War Department.²⁴ Yet he does not explain his reasoning at all. Even more perplexing is that Daughan in the next paragraph admits that even a Secretary of “greater ability” would have faced almost insurmountable issues of raising troops, dealing with Congress, and finding money to finance the war.”²⁵ James Monroe briefly led the department after Eustis’ departure, but would not take the position permanently, while both General Henry Dearborn, Eustis’

²² Stagg, *War of 1812*, 79. Hamilton was the Secretary of the Navy.

²³ Stagg, *War of 1812*, 54; Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, xi.

²⁴ Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War*, 35.

²⁵ Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War*, 35.

predecessor, and William H. Crawford refused to take the post. According to Gallatin, no one was eager to fill the position because of “all its horrors and perils.”²⁶

Harry Lewis Coles also contends “nearly everyone was aware of the inadequacies of Secretary of War William Eustis and Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton, even in time of peace.”²⁷ Coles never defines who “everyone” was. Moreover, Coles asserts that the only reason that Eustis was nominated in the first place, and later kept even though he was thought to be incompetent, was because “devotion to one’s friends was a virtue that President Madison took to excess.”²⁸ Coles’ conclusion is not what other authors believed, such as Adams, Stagg, and Hickey. Eustis was appointed Secretary of War because of his administrative abilities and loyalty.

Eustis had not been greatly acquainted with James Madison prior to his appointment, and even then, though they remained friendly towards each other, they did not become close confidants. Early letters between the two men mainly discussed business matters. For example, one of the first letters between the two men was written on May 17, 1803 in which Madison responds to a letter he received from Eustis. Madison, who was Secretary of State, wrote to Eustis that Congress could decide if a man, presumably Eustis’ constituent, deserved compensation for services he performed.²⁹ The letter did not specify what kind of service the man performed. Another letter from Madison to Richard Cutts is one of the earliest letters that mentions Eustis. On August 17, 1804, Madison wrote that “In the letter with which you

²⁶ Harry Lewis Coles, *The War of 1812* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 109.

²⁷ Coles, *War of 1812*, 109.

²⁸ Coles, *War of 1812*, 108.

²⁹ James Madison to William Eustis, May 17, 1803, *Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-02-05-02-0008>; William Eustis to James Madison, November 24, 1809, *Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-02-05-02-0008>.

avored me some time ago it was intimated that Dr. E. was not averse to some foreign employment.” Madison continued to write that no positions were available abroad.³⁰ Even though it was impossible to find or read every letter that might have mentioned Eustis’ early relationship with Madison, it can be concluded that they were not great friends, but rather distant colleagues with mutual respect towards one another.

Another memory evident in many histories of the war is that Eustis was unable to focus on important military information. For example, as the head of the War Department, Dr. Eustis was responsible for the formation of an attack plan on Canada, including troop arrangements and other logistics. Coles stated “Penny-pinching William Eustis of Boston wasted his time with trivial matters to the utter neglect of more important things.”³¹ Coles references Gallatin but Eustis had to focus on so-called “trivial matters” because there was no other staff. As Secretary Eustis had to make sure the army had enough supplies.

Eustis did focus on military matters, including troop arrangements and officer commissions. Before the war began, Eustis and Madison were worried that the officers involved in the 1811 court martial of Wilkinson would be tied up with that matter and wouldn’t be able to resume their commands in a timely manner. In a letter dated September 8, 1811, Madison told Eustis that “Perhaps it might not be amiss, to signify to the officers at Fredk. Town, the expediency of holding themselves in momentary readiness to repair to their military posts” because he felt that the coast was not defended well.³² On September 5, 1812, Eustis wrote to Madison about troop movement, including the campaigns of General Henry

³⁰ James Madison to Richard Cutts, August 17, 1804, in *Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-02-07-02-0589>.

³¹ Coles, *War of 1812*, 109.

³² James Madison to William Eustis, September 8, 1811, *Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-03-03-02-0535>.

Dearborn and General Wadsworth, as well new developments with the Indian uprising led by Tecumseh.³³ On September 8, 1812, Eustis again wrote to Madison about new developments, including Dearborn's efforts to find volunteers, and that "it appears that events of great importance are almost daily occurring," and Eustis wanted to make sure that the Commander in Chief was appraised of all of these developments.³⁴ There are many letters, more than can be discussed individually, that show that Eustis took his position seriously and did his best to prepare the nation for war.

The court martial trials in 1811 and 1815 of General Wilkinson also tainted the memory of Eustis. According to Fitz-Enz, Wilkinson was the most consistent man of the War of 1812 because "he failed at everything."³⁵ Wilkinson was relieved of service by General Wade Hampton after accusations of poor treatment of his troops, including his refusal to move them after Eustis recognized signs of extreme illness.³⁶ He was brought to trial for his conduct during the war, which resulted in two key military failures and the deaths of hundreds of men under his command from sickness after defying direct orders. Garry Wills believed that Wilkinson was under the protection of Madison, but letters between Eustis and Madison and writings by Madison show that this belief wasn't supported.³⁷ After the 1811 court martial trial, Madison was tasked with examining the trial documents to give his final word on the matter. On February 14, 1812, Madison wrote

I have examined & considered the foregoing proceedings of the General Court Martial held at Frederick-town for the trial of Brigadier General James

³³ William Eustis to James Madison, September 5, 1812, microfilm 14, "The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress," LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.14_0533_0536.

³⁴ William Eustis to James Madison, September 8, 1812, microfilm 14, "The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress," LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.14_0551_0552.

³⁵ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 300.

³⁶ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 306.

³⁷ Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, 259.

Wilkinson. And although I observed in those proceedings with regret that there are instanced in the conduct of the Court as well as the Officer on trial which are evidently and justly objectionable, his acquittal of the several charges exhibited agst. Him is approved, and his sword is accordingly ordered to be restored.³⁸

Madison did not believe that the men who tried Wilkinson did a thorough job, but he approved the acquittal of Wilkinson. However, even with the multitude of evidence against the general, “friendly officers, who despised the secretary of war, William Eustis, who had mustered the government’s case,” cleared Wilkinson of all charges in court martial.³⁹ For example, Senator William Crawford, whom it has been established did not like Eustis, defended Wilkinson at the 1811 trial. Crawford argued that he believed that Wilkinson’s refusal to move his troops from the malaria-ridden camp was the correct decision.⁴⁰ On January 15, 1812, Crawford wrote to Madison that he objected to Eustis’ testimony because the evidence produced would “implicate the conduct & character of Genl. Wilkinson” that he wanted Madison to consider all the evidence, and “that all those, of my acquaintance, who are friendly to you from patriotic-disinterested motives-are highly interested in the issue.”⁴¹ The purpose of the Eustis’ involvement in the trial was to prove that Wilkinson did not follow orders and caused the preventable deaths of soldiers. However, Crawford was a member of the War Hawks and pushed Madison’s war policy and it seems, tried to influence other aspects of Madison’s administration. Taylor’s section on the court-martial supports this stance. Taylor states that leading Republicans in Congress were extremely supportive of Wilkinson and they viewed

³⁸ James Madison, “Proceedings February 19, 1812,” *Annals of Congress*, 12th Congress, 1st Session, 2137.

³⁹ Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 281.

⁴⁰ James Wilkinson to James Madison, April 20, 1811, microfilm 13, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.13_0260_0262.

⁴¹ William Crawford to James Madison, January 15, 1812, microfilm 13, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.13_0840_0841.

him as “the best of generals afflicted by the worst of enemies.”⁴² According to Fitz-Enz, even though many could see through Wilkinson’s false demeanor and “had the measure of the man, his undoubted charm was such that his many supporters defended his honor.”⁴³

The last court-martial trial of Wilkinson convened in January 1815 in Utica, New York.⁴⁴ The four charges brought against Wilkinson were: “neglect of duty, un-officer like conduct, being drunk on duty, and conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman, countenancing and encouraging disobedience of orders.”⁴⁵ He was acquitted of all charges because Wilkinson and the court would blame Secretary of War Armstrong for all failures.⁴⁶ Wilkinson, caricatured as ““von Puffenburg”” has the distinction of “never having won a battle nor lost a court-martial.”⁴⁷ Wilkinson’s behavior during Eustis’ tenure as Secretary of War thus had an extensive impact on Eustis’ memory. Eustis almost became the enemy of the party, while Wilkinson was considered a hero.

The previous paragraphs included official correspondence between officials. However, the historical studies of the War of 1812 have not look extensively into the personal correspondence of the key players. Many authors have consulted the official war correspondence, but these letters did not always tell the whole story. There are exceptions. Henry Adams discovered an interesting letter from President Madison to Henry Lee. Adams paraphrases President Madison as saying that “Little could be said of the appointment, except

⁴² Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 281.

⁴³ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 304.

⁴⁴ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 308.

⁴⁵ Fitz-Enz, *Hacks, Sycophants, Adventurers, & Heroes*, 308.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 282.

⁴⁷ Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 67.

that no other candidate was suggested who seemed better qualified for the place.”⁴⁸ If people do not read the actual letter themselves, they might interpret the statement as asserting Madison had to settle for the lesser-qualified Eustis. For example, political scientist Doris A. Graber quoted this statement to assert that Adams believed that Madison was stuck with Eustis as Secretary of War because there was no other candidate.⁴⁹

In the full letter to Lee, dated February 16, 1827, Madison replied to questions posed about the War of 1812. Lee asked why certain appointments were made and why Madison picked certain people for cabinet positions.⁵⁰ In the reply, the former President explained his selection of individuals for certain positions:

Before I advert to your review of Cabinet Appointments, I must allude to the field of choice, as narrowed by considerations never to be wholly disregarded. Besides the more essential requisites in the Candidates, an eye must be had to his political principles and connections, his personal temper and habits, his relations of feeling towards those with whom he is to be associated; and the quarter of the Union to which he belongs. These considerations, the last as little as any, are not to be disregarded, but in cases where qualifications of a transcendant [*sic*] order, designate individuals, and silence the notions of competitors whilst they satisfy the public opinion. Add to the whole, the necessary sanction of the Senate; and what may also be refused, the necessary consent of the most eligible individual: You are probably very little aware of the number of refusals experienced during the period to which your observations apply.⁵¹ [Emphasis in original]

Here, Madison states that it is not just perceived ability or experience in the field, but other characteristics that influenced his choice. This distinction is important because many critics of

⁴⁸ Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the First Administration of James Madison*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921), 9.

⁴⁹ Doris A. Graber, *Public Opinion, The President, and Foreign Policy: Four Case Studies from the Formative Years* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 210.

⁵⁰ Henry Lee to James Madison, February 2, 1827, microfilm 13, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.21_0863_0865.

⁵¹ James Madison to Henry Lee, February 16, 1827, microfilm 21, “The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress,” LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.21_0914_0917. None of the War of 1812 histories consulted ever mentioned this letter or these reasons for appointments.

Eustis, including Adams, Daughan, and Wills, often wondered why President Madison appointed a man as Secretary of War whose main military experience was as a field surgeon.⁵² The letter from Lee to Madison did not even mention Eustis.⁵³

Instead of criticizing Eustis, Madison remained very supportive of his fellow Democratic-Republican. The former President included a large paragraph defending Eustis against criticism in his reply dated February 16, 1827. Madison stated that Eustis “was a acceptable member of the Cabinet, that he possessed an accomplished mind, a useful knowledge on military subjects derived from his connection with the Revolutionary army, and a vigilant superintendance [*sic*] of subordinate agents; and that his retreat from his station, proceeded from causes not inconsistent with these endowments.”⁵⁴ Nowhere in the letter, does it state that Eustis was the only choice. Rather, Eustis was the only nominee who passed the confirmations and accepted the job. Moreover, Madison defended Eustis’ performance as Secretary of War, explaining the “overload of duties” that the department faced, that “no minister could have sustained himself,” and that “Eustis would have satisfied public expectation” if the War Department had been properly organized.⁵⁵ Madison also mentioned Congress’ refusal to appoint assistant secretaries, with more experience than the clerks to help with the war preparations.⁵⁶ Stagg explained the situation best “It was Eustis’s misfortune to try to prepare for war under a system which he knew did not function adequately, while also

⁵² Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 9; Daughan, *1812: The Navy’s War*, 35; Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America*, 251.

⁵³ James Madison to Henry Lee, February 16, 1827, LOC, MD. In the letter, Madison wrote, “As you have made no reference to Doctr. Eustis....”

⁵⁴ James Madison to Henry Lee, February 16, 1827, LOC, MD.

⁵⁵ James Madison to Henry Lee, February 16, 1827, LOC, MD.

⁵⁶ James Madison to Henry Lee, February 16, 1827, LOC, MD.

trying to introduce a better one.”⁵⁷ As explained in Chapter 2, Eustis tried to introduce new training and warfare tactics to the U.S. Army, but these were rejected.⁵⁸ His successor, John Armstrong, was able to introduce these new tactics later during the war and the reason for this discrepancy is not known as the tactics were based on the same French manual.⁵⁹ Therefore, the state of the War Department and the government both contributed to the United States’ lack of preparedness.

In the letter he wrote to Eustis informing him of the nomination to the cabinet position, Madison was very supportive. In it, Madison told Eustis: “I transmit the Commission with a hope that I shall have the pleasure of learning that your Country will have the benefit of your services in that important station.”⁶⁰ The President, with this statement, showed his trust that Eustis would perform to the best of his abilities. Eustis replied, “I will come to the duties of the office with such means and talents as I possess and with the hope that...there may arise no just cause for censure from the public and no regret on your part that the appointment as thus bestowed.”⁶¹ Eustis promised the President that he would do his best and support the Party’s causes. When it became evident that war with Britain would occur, Eustis apparently tried to resign his post because of the multitude of “burdens that military preparations would place upon the War Department.”⁶² However, Madison refused to accept his resignation. Eustis continued his efforts to reform the War Department by requesting the creation of several

⁵⁷ Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 155.

⁵⁸ Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon*, 43-44

⁵⁹ Fredriksen, *United States Army*, 19. The tactics were both based on the French style of warfare. I have not found a reason why they were rejected when Eustis was Secretary, but accepted when Armstrong was.

⁶⁰ James Madison to William Eustis, March 7, 1809, LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.11_0001_0002.

⁶¹ William Eustis to James Madison, March 18, 1809, LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.11_0072_0073.

⁶² Stagg, “Revolt Against Virginia,” 46.

positions, including the quartermaster general's department, which would allow the Secretary of War to focus on other, more important duties.⁶³

When Madison received Eustis' final letter of resignation, the President's reply remained complimentary of Eustis, even though many historians, including Ingersoll, believe that Eustis "resigned in feelings of chagrin" because of the early failures of the war.⁶⁴ In the letter dated, December 4, 1812, Madison wrote:

I have received your letter of yesterday, with the impressions which could not but result from your purpose of retiring from an office so nearly related to that which has been entrusted to me, in which your services have been coeval with mine, and in which I have witnessed the zeal and constancy of your exertions for the public good under difficulties peculiarly arduous and trying. In bearing this testimony, I indulge my own feelings as well as pay a tribute which is so justly due. I take the liberty of adding a hope that it will not be inconsistent with your arrangements to continue your official attentions until they can be replaced by a successor.⁶⁵

Why did Madison keep Eustis in the War Department even after the loss of Detroit and the defeat at the Battle of Queenstown Heights? Was it out of friendship or party loyalty?⁶⁶ In this correspondence Madison thought that Eustis was a very capable man who he trusted in the office as they moved towards war and was reluctant to let Eustis leave the department.⁶⁷ Eustis did not believe he failed as Secretary of War, but did the best he could under the circumstances and was overwhelmed by the escalation of military preparation.

Admittedly, not everyone supported Eustis. James Monroe, the Secretary of State during the War of 1812, wrote to former President Thomas Jefferson about the changes in the cabinet on June 7, 1813. After both Eustis and the Secretary of the Navy left the cabinet,

⁶³ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 78. Congress reluctantly approved these positions.

⁶⁴ Ingersoll, *History of the War Department*, 439.

⁶⁵ James Madison to William Eustis, December 4, 1812, MHS, Boston.

⁶⁶ Coles, "Eustis, William," 175.

⁶⁷ John K. Mahon, *The War of 1812* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), 5.

Monroe stated “we conferred on the then state of the Departments of War and Navy, and agreed that whatever might be the merit of the gentlemen in them, which was admitted in certain respects, a change in both was indispensable.”⁶⁸ This is not exactly a charge of incompetence, but rather could also be read to mean that they needed a person with more war experience instead of an administrator. Furthermore, much of the contemporary anger at Eustis came from factions that either did not support the war, including the Federalists, or did not think the U.S. was doing enough, including the War Hawks. The War Hawks were a group of Republicans from the southern and western states. Among their members were Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and William H. Crawford. These members of the party wanted a war with Britain more than any other bloc.⁶⁹ It is impossible to find every letter or mention of Eustis from each of these men. However, as stated in this chapter, Crawford was openly hostile towards Eustis. Crawford defended Wilkinson at the general’s 1811 court-martial and argued that he believed that Wilkinson’s refusal to move his troops from the malaria-ridden camp was the correct decision.⁷⁰ He then wrote to Madison that he remonstrated Eustis’ testimony at the trial because it would “implicate the conduct & character of Genl. Wilkinson” and that Madison needed to realize “that all those, of my acquaintance, who are friendly to you from patriotic-disinterested motives-are highly interested in the issue.”⁷¹ Finding more information about the War Hawk’s attitude towards Eustis would be another area of study, but

⁶⁸ Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 571.

⁶⁹ Thom M. Armstrong, “Madison, James, 1751-1836, Fourth president of the United States,” in *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*, ed. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 317.

⁷⁰ James Wilkinson to James Madison, April 20, 1811, LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.13_0260_0262.

⁷¹ William Crawford to James Madison, January 15, 1812, LOC, MD, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.13_0840_0841.

from the information found, it is clear that they did not believe Eustis was a competent secretary.

Eustis was clearly used as a scapegoat and blamed for early failures of the War of 1812. Adams stated that Eustis' failures "pointed directly to the responsible source of appointment, - the President himself; but in face of a general election, Republicans could not afford to criticize their President, and only in private could they assail his cabinet."⁷² The War Hawks thus criticized Eustis in a time when they needed to ensure that Madison would be re-elected. In a letter to Eustis, dated September 5, 1812, Madison wrote

I found on the way that the surrender by Hull had made a deep impression; but as far as I have learnt, the calamity is imputed to his temerity in the first instance, or the opposite extreme, finally. This impression may not prevail elsewhere nor continue in this quarter; but it exists at present; and without any apparent disposition to do injustice to the administration.⁷³

This letter reveals that Madison was worried about Hull's surrender and how it would effect his administration. At the time the letter was written, Madison believed that most Americans would feel that the disaster at Detroit was only Hull's fault and he hoped that this view would not change. However, letters such as this one, and the War Hawks' attitude towards Eustis reveal that blame had to be placed on someone, and Eustis was chosen as the scapegoat.

One letter written by Eustis sheds light about his feelings on his resignation as Secretary of War. In a letter to Henry Dearborn dated August 21, 1823, Eustis stated:

That it has fallen to my lot to have been the medium thro' which the public opinion has been expressed, as it is among the latest so it is the highest gratification which a long course of public life has afforded. Whether considered in a personal or public point of view the triumph is complete. For

⁷² Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 573.

⁷³ James Madison to William Eustis, September 5, 1812, *Papers of James Madison Digital Edition*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/JSMN-03-05-02-0196>.

me it is enough. It is an answer to all the abuse, a refutation of all the slanders which have been put forth.⁷⁴

Eustis discussed his role as a scapegoat on whom was placed the failures of the War of 1812. Thus, it is clearly evident that Eustis spent years frustrated about his reputation, most of it gained from his tenure as the Secretary of War. Furthermore, in the letter Eustis that wrote to Madison accepting the appointment as Minister to the Netherlands, Eustis stated: “With a just sense of the honor confessed on me by this distinguished mark of confidence from the government of my country, I accept the appointment.”⁷⁵ Eustis believed that the subsequent appointment as Minister to the Netherlands showed that Madison believed him to be a valuable member of the government.

Eustis’ appointment as Minister is not well remembered. In December 1814, the Netherlands sent in envoy to Washington to re-establish a relationship after their independence from France. Madison “submitted the name of Dr. Eustis to the Senate for confirmation as the diplomat,” and the Senate confirmed the position on May 9, 1815 Dutch historian Cornelis A. van Minnen, gives an overview of Eustis’ time in the Netherlands.⁷⁶ Minnen believed that Eustis was unfairly treated by history and called him a “scapegoat” that “embarked upon a new diplomatic career,” after leaving the War Department.⁷⁷ Minnen did not elaborate his beliefs that Eustis was a scapegoat. President Madison wrote to Eustis that when it was time to

⁷⁴ William Eustis to Henry Dearborn, August 21, 1823, “Eustis-Landon Papers, 1803-1876,” MHS, Boston.

⁷⁵ William Eustis to James Madison, December 29, 1814, MHS, Boston.

⁷⁶ Wright and Hanson, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 79; Minnen, *American Diplomats in the Netherlands*.

⁷⁷ Minnen, *American Diplomats in the Netherlands*, 22.

replace the current minister, he immediately thought of Eustis.⁷⁸ This appointment shows that Madison continued to believe that Eustis was a competent administrator.

Collective memory is complex and challenge field. Memory constantly changes as societal beliefs change. Eustis fell victim to collective memory. His opponents in government and histories about the War of 1812 have maligned him. However, this chapter has shown that the memory of Eustis' life and service to his country are not simple. In histories of the war, authors have used blanket statements to describe Eustis as incompetent, but those statements are unfair to Eustis by not researching further into his career and life. Chapter 2 illustrated Eustis' role during the War of 1812 and paints a more accurate portrait of the man and politician. This chapter presented his collective memory, which had been abused by historians of the war. Eustis had been used as a scapegoat by the Democratic-Republican Party, especially by the War Hawks, in order to re-assure Madison's re-election. Archival records, the building-blocks of collective memory, demonstrate that Eustis' current collective memory of an incompetent Secretary of War has not been deserved and historians of the War of 1812 need to take these findings into consideration in order to present a more accurate portrait of the man and of the history of the war.

⁷⁸ James Madison to William Eustis, December 15, 1814, microfilm P-94 (one reel), "Letters received by William Eustis, 1775-1825," MHS, Boston.

Conclusion:

Eustis, Memory, and History

“The prosecution of the war was marred by considerable bungling and mismanagement. This was partly due to the nature of the republic. The nation was too young and immature-and it’s government too feeble and inexperienced-to prosecute a major war efficiently.”¹

Dr. William Eustis’ reputation has been maligned since his tenure as Secretary of War during the War of 1812. Archival research suggests that, while he shoulders some of the blame for the conduct of the War of 1812, he was not an inept, incompetent bureaucrat. The body of his political work, from his early days to his terms as governor of Massachusetts, suggests a man of competence and capability who understood his own limitations and wanted to do his part for the nation he loved. A proper understanding of both the revolutionary war and the War of 1812 gives valuable insight into the difficulty of establishing a new state while transitioning power from those who led the revolution to the next generation. William Eustis played minor but important roles in both the revolution and the founding of the United States of America including establishment of a young nation in the world scene. Rediscovering his life through archival research establishes a more balanced and accurate view of the role he played on the national and state levels, giving insight into the formation of the United States and the political atmosphere of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The War of 1812 was a tumultuous time for the young nation. The United States wanted to establish itself on the world scene peacefully with commercial activities. However, Great Britain, angered that the United States was able to gain former French trading routes, continuously bullied its former colony by passing the Orders in Council and the impressment of sailors on American merchant vessels. Historians are still debating the causes and outcome

¹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 2.

of the war, but this thesis agrees with Hickey that the neither the United States nor Britain won the War of 1812 because “the Treat of Ghent...said nothing about the issues that had caused the war and contained nothing to suggest that America had achieved her aims.”² Yet was Eustis solely to blame for the failure to win the war? He was made a scapegoat by members of his own party when they besmirched his reputation during his term as Secretary and members of the opposition were only too happy to exaggerate his supposed failures. This thesis rejects the notions that Eustis is solely to blame for both the military failures of conducting the war as well as the failure to win the War of 1812.

As the head of the War Department, Eustis was in the strictest sense at fault for war disasters, and thus could be considered incompetent in that role. Yet, it is not fair to place all the blame for this on Eustis. Notably, President Madison “knew the unprepared state of the country, but he esteemed it necessary to throw forward the flag of the country, sure that the people would press onward and defend it.”³ However, evidence shows that the people of the United States did not support the war. The Treasury Department failed to raise the estimated amount of money Gallatin believed was needed to finance the war effort to its fullest extent. Furthermore, many states could not raise enough militia members and the New England states refused to send any troops. These facts illustrate the total unprepared nature of the United States in the War of 1812.

Eustis was aware of how ill-equipped the nation was. When Eustis first tendered his resignation, Madison refused to accept it, largely because “to find a successor qualified,

² Hickey, *War of 1812*, 2.

³ Adams, *Life of Albert Gallatin*, 460.

popular, and willing to accept, [was] extremely difficult.”⁴ Eustis could be, and was, replaced, but that fact cannot lead to the conclusion that he was incompetent. While Secretary of War, he worked diligently to oversee its conduct; from planning grand strategy to spending as efficiently as possible the small amount of money he was budgeted by Gallatin to prosecute the war. The research conducted for this thesis has shown that historians place a heavy emphasis on Eustis’ incompetence to explain the failures of the war prior to his resignation. One may ask “Why didn’t historians investigate matters instead of relying on previous “blanket statements?” Sufficient archival evidence exists to show that these failures are more systemic than individual and should be shared proportionately by all those responsible for the conduct of the War from the President to his advisors, including the Secretary of War, other Secretaries and officials, and the Generals who conducted field operations. Research suggests that the history of the War of 1812 should be rewritten to show the challenges the government, and particularly Eustis, faced.

As new evidence emerges and history is re-evaluated collective memory of that subject will be affected. Collective memory, defined as a “group’s recollection of the past in the present,” should be built upon both what a society remembers and evidence, such as archival records.⁵ The collective memory of Eustis is slanted toward what society remembers, specifically what historians publish about the War of 1812. This memory is based upon the misrepresentations of his former colleagues, cabinet members who tarnished his character when Madison ran for reelection, as well as the slander of political opponents. Sadly, the collective memory of Eustis sees him as an incompetent Secretary of War who “had become a

⁴ Henry Adams, ed., *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1879) I, 531.

⁵ Bastian, “Flowers for Homestead,” 116.

liability to the administration” and spent his time trying to find deals for shirts and shoes instead of formulating military strategy.⁶ Archival research has proved this memory to be false. Eustis spent months diligently working with Madison to select officers and re-build the United States Army and militias. He also met with top-ranking generals, like Hull and Dearborn, to prepare a plan for the invasion of Canada. Eustis worked under hard conditions and “no man in this country...is equal to one-half the duties which devolve[d]” on the Secretary.⁷ The collective memory of Eustis, focused as it is on his role as Secretary of War, ignores his part as a participant in the Revolutionary War, the various political offices he held, his role as Minister to the Netherlands, and his terms as Governor of Massachusetts. The collective memory of Eustis is inaccurate and needs to be reconsidered.

There is also a need to establish a better collective memory of the War of 1812. As Hickey stated, “the average American is only vaguely aware of why we fought or who the enemy was” and thus the collective memory of the war is not at the same state as the Revolutionary War or the Civil War, which are better remembered.⁸ There are many ways to increase the collective memory of a subject, including educational initiatives, such as improving classroom lessons or museum exhibits, and new research into aspects of the war, for example, investigating local history connections through archival research. One reason that Eustis is not better remembered outside of scholarly circles is because of this lack of a popular collective memory of the War of 1812.

In addition to readdressing the collective memory of the War of 1812, this paper suggests additional specific research projects. First, this questions posed in this thesis could be

⁶ Mahon, *War of 1812*, 5.

⁷ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 75.

⁸ Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*, 1.

more fully explored by taking more time to visit more archives and special collections of individuals connected to Eustis and examining more correspondence. Second, Chapters 2 and 4 discuss Eustis' attempt to reform the War Department. A history of the War Department from its inception to its reform after the War of 1812 is in order. The government applied the lessons of the War of 1812 to reorganize the War Department when the inherent disorganized and unresponsive nature of the department became obvious. A history of the department would answer many questions about the War of 1812 and establish a better collective memory. A history of the War Department was published in 1879, but as more evidence emerges, a new history is imperative. Finally, this thesis was not a biography of Eustis. It only begins to tell the story of his life. However, a biography is in order because there are different questions that could be explored. For example, it would be great to find out more about Eustis' time as a doctor during the Revolutionary War, where exactly was he stationed and at what time. He was not a major national political figure, like Madison or Monroe, but he was represented the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in several political positions and an official, honest biography will improve his collective memory.

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