

# The Washington Post

## Quiet Charles County hamlet of Benedict has much to say about history

By Nancy Bromley McConaty  
Maryland Independent  
Thursday, February 4, 2010

The site of a British invasion as well as a recruitment camp for African American Civil War troops, the sleepy little hamlet of Benedict has seen its share of action.

Charles County's cultural resource study of Benedict highlights the importance it played in local and national history and recommends ways to ensure that the town receives recognition during the state's 200th anniversary celebration of the War of 1812.

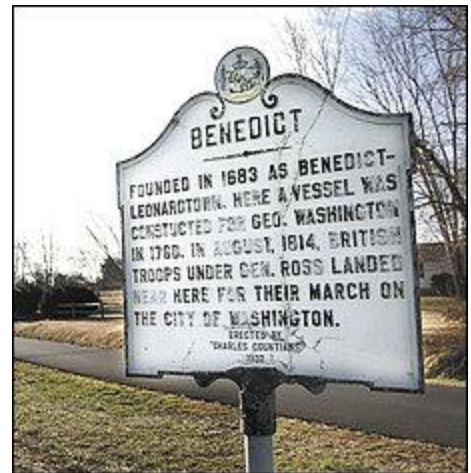
Completed in the fall, the 234-page study will be used as the county's resource guide when preparing for Benedict's role in the bicentennial of the war, said Cathy Thompson, the county's community planning program manager. The study outlines historic events that occurred in the Colonial port town in the past 300 years, including the British land invasion in 1814 and the establishment of Camp Stanton, the Civil War recruitment camp.

The document -- prepared by historians Ralph E. Eshelman, Donald G. Shomette and G. Howard Post -- also describes archaeological sites, architecture and landscapes that contain evidence of Benedict's history, Thompson said. The report includes several recommendations on how to preserve and promote the town's heritage. The recommendations offer the county guidelines in planning for the war's anniversary in 2012 and future development in the town, she said.

"Benedict is going to receive a lot of attention because of the War of 1812 anniversary, and we want to be prepared for that," Thompson said. "We need to know what resources we have and, with the War of 1812 celebration looming, this is a good time to work on those resources."

Benedict is to be included in the 300-mile, land-and-water Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, which will trace key battles in the War of 1812. The trail will start at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, wind through Virginia, the District and Prince George's County, and end in Southern Maryland, said Donna Dudley, the county's chief of tourism.

The five segments of the planned trail will include the British water advance and withdrawal on the Patuxent River and the British land march and withdrawal from Benedict in Charles County



*This historical marker notes some highlights of Benedict's 300-year history. (Carrie Lovejoy/Calvert Recorder)*

to Washington, where troops burned the White House. Other historic events of the war to be included along the trail are the Battle of North Point and the defense of Hampstead Hill in Baltimore.

"Benedict has a wonderful history that goes way back," Dudley said. "It's not obvious in terms of signage and buildings, but it was the site of the only ground invasion of a foreign enemy in the United States. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the attack on Pearl Harbor were by air. These were ground forces that invaded the United States and they landed in Benedict. It's an important component of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, and doing a cultural resources study is the perfect first step [to make sure Benedict is highlighted during the bicentennial celebration]."

The recommendations in the study include conducting an archaeological survey of Camp Stanton and the 1814 British Army encampment sites; surveys of historic sites pertaining to the War of 1812 and the Civil War, including Maxwell Hall, an 18th-century house now owned by the county; and performing archival research on the records of the U.S. Colored Troops who were stationed at Camp Stanton, Thompson said.

The report also suggests that the county create a Web site on which research findings can be posted and blogs, video presentations and other media are readily available to draw public involvement.

The study also recommends that the county work closely with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to research and interpret the historical significance of Camp Stanton and the War of 1812 on state land, and erect a memorial to the black soldiers who served and died at the camp.

*The 234-page Benedict Cultural Resource Study is available at Charles County public library branches and at <http://www.charlescounty.org>.*