

Historian Scott Sheads to speak at Canton Branch

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If you have ever taken a stroll around the northwest corner of [Patterson Park](#), you may have wondered what all those cannons are doing around the Pagoda, the Chinese-influenced Beaux-Arts observatory perched on a hill next to the Lombard Street gate.

A better question would be, what's the Pagoda doing in the middle of all the cannons—because the cannons were there first.



Rodgers Bastion in Patterson Park (then Hampstead Hill) was a vital part of the Defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812.

They mark Rodgers Bastion, where residents of Baltimore, alarmed at the coming British invasion during the War of 1812, cobbled together a fortification from whatever they could find—tables, carts, wheels, plain old dirt—and defended the eastern edge of the city from the British invasion of 1814.

To the southeast, the Battle of North Point raged, and militia riflemen shot the British commander Major Gen. Robert Ross off his horse. Ross died under a tree at Gorsuch Farm, near what is now the intersection of Wise Avenue and North Point Road. The men credited with killing him, Daniel Wells and Henry McComas, also died that day.

The Brits won the Battle of North Point and advanced into what is now Highlandtown, but later fell back to their boats in North Point when they couldn't breach the defenses at Hampstead Hill. At the same time, the British Navy was experiencing similar frustration trying to bombard Fort McHenry into submission.



Scott Sheads, in costume for a reenactment weekend at Fort McHenry

The defenders of Fort McHenry get just about all of the credit for the successful Defense of Baltimore, thanks to that little ditty that Francis Scott Key wrote while imprisoned aboard a ship among the attacking British fleet. But if Key could have seen the Eastside merchants, clerks, stableboys, butchers and blacksmiths stave off the British ground invasion at Hampstead Hill, he might have written another verse to “The Star Spangled Banner.”

Scott Sheads, historian and ranger at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, says that the Eastside defenders don't get enough recognition for their part in the battle, and he will expand on that theme in a talk he is giving **Saturday at 2 p.m. at the Canton Branch** of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, 1030 S. Ellwood Ave., right in the

path of the British that day—had they gotten that far.

The event at the library is called “Canton Memories,” and its goal is to allow individuals to share, and learn about, the history of Canton. There is no cost to attend.

Sheads is the author of several books on the Defense of Baltimore and Fort McHenry, and the events surrounding the defense. In his 30 years as historian-ranger at the fort, he has never stopped combing through the maps, records and accounts of the battle.

“For 100 years, over and over we have told the traditional story of the flag, the song and Francis Scott Key. Everybody forgets all the other stories,” he says. “Here's what really happened.”

He says that during his search through original documents for his forthcoming books, he found evidence of a British landing at Colgate Creek. He will discuss that landing during his talk on Saturday. There was also a British naval attack on Bear Creek in Dundalk that is never discussed—but Sheads will bring that up in his 30-minute talk as well, and he has some new information about the making of the Star Spangled Banner—not the song, but the flag that actually flew over the fort the night of September 13-14, 1814.

Everyone is welcome to come to “Canton Memories.” In addition to being free and open to the public, it is inclusive — people are encouraged to bring their own photos and memories relating to Canton's past to contribute to a temporary display at the library. (Memories, photos and so forth can be from any era — they don't have to be confined to the War of 1812). The event is sponsored by the Friends of the Canton Library.