

Eastern Shore is home to many War of 1812 sites

By JACK SHAUM Staff Writer

Published: Wednesday, March 10, 2010 5:01 AM CST
Historian Eshelman says Shore played a significant role in the war

CHESTERTOWN Just about everyone knows that a pivotal battle of the War of 1812 was fought in the Chesapeake Bay region when British forces unsuccessfully slugged it out with Fort McHenry in an effort to take the city of Baltimore.

That, of course, was the battle that led to the writing of "The Star Spangled Banner."

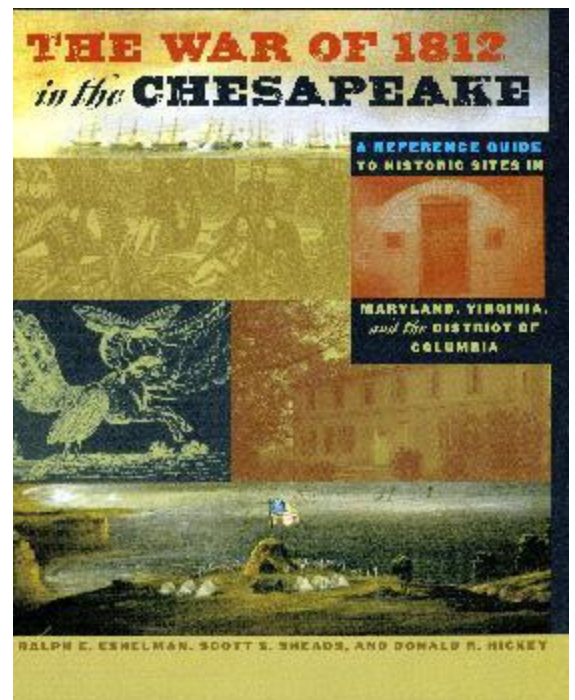
But, as a rule, the War of 1812 is not often a subject of popular discussion.

"The average American has very little true understanding of the War of 1812," said historian Ralph Eshelman during a presentation sponsored by the Kent County Historical Society at Washington College on Friday, March 5.

Eshelman, co-author of the newly-published "The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake: A Reference Guide to Historic Sites in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia," was on hand to talk about what he called the significant role the Eastern Shore played in the war.

"No other theater of the war had more raids, skirmishes, and battles than the Chesapeake," Eshelman said, noting that Maryland has more sites that have been studied and inventoried so far than any other states.

The Eastern Shore, he said, has a wide variety of battlefields, locations of raids and skirmishes,



"The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake" is a comprehensive 410-page reference guide to War of 1812 sites in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. It includes much information about many sites on the Eastern Shore that are connected to the war.

earthworks, buildings, gravesites and homes of prominent people who participated in the war.

Those sites can be found up and down the length of the Shore in places like Queenstown, Kent Island, Fort Point, Eastern Bay, Caulk's Field and many others. There are an estimated 623 such sites in Maryland, according to the authors.

Eshelman's talk coincided with the release of the book, which he co-authored with National Park Service Ranger-Historian Scott Sheads and history professor Donald Hickey. It was so new that someone quipped that readers should be careful not to smudge the ink.

The book is a guide to many sites of significance their specific location, what still exists at a site and what took place there. Each entry is often told through quotations from primary source material the authors have uncovered, and their commentary.

Significant space is devoted to the British attack on Queenstown, including a map. Kent Island and its use as a British base of operations in August 1813 is covered, including a map. There is also a section about the British capture of two small vessels in Eastern Bay.

Among the places Eshelman mentioned as being well-preserved is Fort Point, an earthen fort with a dry moat on private land on the banks of the Corsica River near Centreville, which he called one of the best preserved earthworks from the war in the Mid-Atlantic region. It can be seen from the river.

Caulk's Field in Kent County is unchanged from the time of the war and is "the best preserved" War of 1812 battlefield in the nation, Eshelman said. It can easily be viewed today. A sunken road off Route 18 near Queenstown is probably where the Battle of Slippery Hill took place, he said, and is clearly visible.

He said it's important that as many of these sites as possible be preserved.

"If we don't take care of some of these sites now we may not have another chance," Eshelman said, referring to the approaching bicentennial of the war.

Interesting little items about the war in the region were included in his presentation. For instance,



*Historian Ralph Eshelman, left, and National Park Service Ranger-Historian Scott Sheads on a visit to what is probably the sunken road portion of the Queenstown Road near where the Battle of Slippery Hill took place during the War of 1812. That battle and other incidents on the Eastern Shore, as well as elsewhere in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, are covered in the new book *The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake* by Eshelman, Sheads, and history professor Donald Hickey.*

he said the "Star Spangled Banner" was conceived by Francis Scott Key as the lyrics to a song he knew, rather than as a non-musical poem. Eshelman also said St. Michaels was one of only two towns in the region to repel the British twice. He also said the story of hanging lanterns in the trees to fool British gunners is not mentioned in any of the official reports of the battles. And, he said, it was during the War of 1812 that the icon of Uncle Sam was born.

"The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake: A Reference Guide to Historic Sites in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia" is published by The Johns Hopkins University Press in Baltimore.



*National Park Service Ranger-Historian Scott Sheads, left; reporter Jack Shaum, center; and historian Ralph Eshelman, right, stand in what is probably the sunken road portion of the Queenstown Road where the Battle of Slippery Hill took place during the War of 1812. Eshelman and Sheads, along with history professor Donald Hickey, are the authors of the just-published book *The War of 1812 in the Chesapeake*, which details historic sites associated with the war in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Many Eastern Shore sites are examined in detail.*