

Lights, camera, battle, action!

War of 1812 re-enacted on Friendship farm for Fort McHenry film

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The rolling hills and expansive pastures of Brooke Clagett's 250-acre Holly Hill farm in Friendship took on the look of a time machine last week as citizen soldiers, men in top hats and women wearing bonnets roamed the property.

Holly Hill was the production site for a few scenes being filmed for a live-action movie about the War of 1812. A Hollywood film crew and about 150 actors descended upon the south county farm Tuesday to work as extras.

The eight-minute film will be the centerpiece of a newly constructed 17,000-square-foot visitor center at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, set to open in March 2011.

The opening of the new center, which is about 75 percent completed, will be in time for the bicentennial of the War of 1812.

Vince Vaise is a park ranger at the fort and its chief of interpretation. He and other rangers at the park have played an integral role in developing the plans for the new space and the film.

Vaise said the film currently shown at the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine was created in 1983. He noted that computer animation technology now exists to make a more engaging piece.

"We want to get young people excited about their history," Vaise said.



Photos by Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital

TOP: Vince Vaise, chief of interpretation at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, describes citizen efforts to defend Baltimore in 1814 to actors before filming a scene for a movie about the War of 1812. The re-enactment was shot last week at Holly Hill farm in Friendship.

BOTTOM: Holly Hill farm owner Brooke Clagett portrayed a Baltimore citizen defending the city against the British during the War of 1812.

Both films conclude with the playing "The Star-Spangled Banner," whose lyrics were written by Francis Scott Key as he watched the British navy bomb the fort during the Battle of Fort McHenry in 1814.

The National Park Service contracted California-based Aperture Films to shoot the movie. Aperture is known for IMAX movies such as "Everest" and "The Living Sea."

Though the shoot began last week in Friendship, it has been in the works for months.

Josh Colover, director of the War of 1812 project, said the movie is unusual in that the action sequences are being shot on location. Typically, in a movie of this type, actors perform in front of a "green screen," or blank backdrop.

From there, computer animation is layered in. In this film there will be no green screen work with the actors. This means they had to get everything right on Tuesday because they won't have an opportunity to come back and redo it later.

The movie will be about five minutes of live action and another three minutes of animation.

"No one has done this before. We have a lot of handoffs, where we come from a live action element ... to an animation element," Colover said, adding that they want the battle scenes in the film to transport viewers and overwhelm their senses.

On location

When the Maryland Film Office contacted Clagett about using Holly Hill for the film, the homeowner readily agreed to be a part of the project.

Holly Hill is said to be the oldest, continuously occupied residence in the country.

"When asked, we tend to open it up," Clagett said.

"We were looking for a Maryland tobacco barn," Vaise said. "You just can't go anywhere for a tobacco barn. A Maryland barn is a distinctive architectural feature, and there are not many of them left."

In a night scene, British soldiers come out of the woods with lit torches, run toward the barn, and burn it down.

Fortunately, Clagett's barn is still standing.

The animators will take care of its destruction on a computer screen back in California.

By luck, Clagett also happened to have the perfect spot for another scene, one in which the citizens of Baltimore defend Harrison Hill in what is currently Patterson Park.

<http://www.hometownannapolis.com/news/top/2010/04/11-46/Lights-camera-battle-action.html>

In the August 1814 battle, Baltimore citizens dug a mile-long trench and defended their position against the British.

In the trench scene at Holly Hill, set on a sloping field, Clagett got to play one of the citizens. Her goat Basil and her sheep Rory also landed roles.

Many of the extras alongside Clagett were Fort McHenry re-enactors, while others came from a local casting call.

Colover and assistant director Kris Charas set up the actors, giving them their marks to start on.

"Cameras rolling," Colover said.

A man in a yellow shirt stepped in front of the camera and snapped a scene marker.

"Action!" Charas announced through a megaphone.

The actors then dug the trench, or walked a horse across the scene, or handed pickaxes to those in the trench.

This went on for about a minute, with each actor continuing in his assigned pursuit. Then Colover yelled, "Cut!" to signal the end of the take.

It took about a half-dozen takes to get what they needed.

After the shoot in Friendship, the Aperture crew headed to Baltimore to film the movie's remaining scenes. They plan to return to California with about 10 hours of footage, which they'll edit down to the final eight-minute product.

The movie will debut at Fort McHenry on March 3, 2011, the 80th anniversary of the signing of the act that named "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the national anthem.

[SLIDESHOW](#)



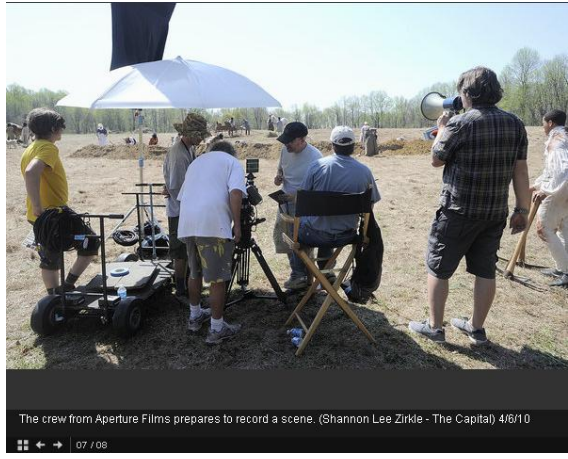
[Fort McHenry film](#)

The War of 1812 is re-enacted on Holly Hill farm in Friendship for a film about Fort McHenry.



Vince Vaise, chief of interpretation at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, describes citizen efforts to defend Baltimore in 1814 to actors before filming a scene for a movie about the War of 1812. The re-enactment was shot last week at Holy Hill farm in Friendship. (Photo by Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/8/10

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The crew from Aperture Films prepares to record a scene. (Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/8/10

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Actors dig a ditch to defend Baltimore in 1814. (Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/6/10

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Claggett waters her animals before the filming. (Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/6/10

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Director Josh Colover coaches the actors. (Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/6/10

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Assistant Director Kris Charas calls for the actors before the filming of a scene. (Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/6/10

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Director Josh Colover talks to Brooke Claggett. (Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/6/10

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Holly Hill owner Brooke Claggett leads a horse. (Shannon Lee Zirkle - The Capital) 4/6/10

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