



U.S. TO MARK 1812 WAR WITH STAR-SPANGLED BANNER TRAIL

Wednesday, 11 June 2008 19:00

North Point sites included in federal plans

by Randy Leonard

Though neglected and ignored for years, a number of monuments along the route the British took in an attempt to attack Baltimore could get some new attention.

On May 8, President Bush signed a law that included the establishment of a Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, linking sites in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Despite a recent Baltimore Sun report to the contrary, monuments along North Point Road were recommended for inclusion in the trail in a 2004 feasibility study and will be evaluated as the project moves forward.

In Fort Howard, grass grows through cracks in the asphalt and paint peels from dilapidated officers' quarters. A plaque marks the nearby North Point beachhead, where British forces began landing at 3 a.m. on Sept. 12, 1814.

"When they landed, Americans could see them from the top of the Todd House," said local history buff Charles Echols when touring the sites last week. Another plaque, easily accessed off North Point Road, stands in front of the Todd House, rebuilt in 1816 after the British burned it.

Other sites considered for the Star-Spangled Banner Trail, such as the Gorsuch and Shaw houses, are no longer standing and have limited access.

In front of Battle Acre, near where much of the fighting occurred, the masonry gate posts are askew and the dented iron gate stands agape. Echols is dismayed by the condition of the site.

"Nobody's taken care of it," he said.

A monument marking the location of a Methodist meeting house used both by the Americans and the British is in better shape, but foliage obscures it from the road.

According to the National Trails System Act, the main intent of the national historical trail designation is to preserve these historical sites and to provide access to the public, but only the sites on federal land, such as the Fort Howard site, are included as federal components.

According to the act, sites on state-owned or privately held land can be designated as protected, but the federal government would not pay for their upkeep.

On Monday county, state and federal representatives held a ceremony at Fort McHenry commemorating the establishment of the trail.

“As we prepare for the bicentennial celebration of the War of 1812, the Star-Spangled Banner Trail will ensure that Americans have a much better appreciation of America's past and of Maryland's important contributions to it,” U.S. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin, who introduced legislation for the trail in 2003, was quoted as saying in a press release.

“Senator Cardin and the Maryland delegation deserve our thanks for their efforts over the past five years to establish the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail,” Baltimore County Executive James T. Smith Jr. was quoted as saying in the release.