



Maryland prepares grand salute to War of 1812

Key battle sites recognized in the 'forgotten war' that ended on Md. shores



Francis Taylor, chairman of Baltimore County War of 1812 Bicentennial Advisory Committee, and Carolyn Mroz, co-chair of the committee and president of Todd's Inheritance, on the grounds of the homestead that the British burned when they landed at North Point in 1814. The owners were lookouts for the local militia. The family rebuilt two years later. (Kim Hairston, Baltimore Sun / July 11, 2010)

By Mary Gail Hare, The Baltimore Sun

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Maryland will revel in its War of 1812 history with a two-year celebration of the pivotal battles, enduring sites and hometown heroes that played a role in the conflict that culminated in

America's defeat of the world's strongest military force.

Boston remembers annually the events that sparked the Revolutionary War and Virginia recently marked the 400th anniversary of its founding at [Jamestown](#). Now the 200-year-old war with the British that ultimately ended on Maryland's shores will take on renewed significance as communities across the state focus on stories many have forgotten.

"The whole purpose is to make people cherish the jewels we have here and to learn about how Maryland saved this country," said Carolyn Mroz, vice chair of the Baltimore County bicentennial advisory committee.

The state will kick off its bicentennial celebration of the war between the United States and [Britain](#) with a maritime festival in the Baltimore harbor in June 2012. That event will launch two years of festivities leading up to a re-enactment of the September 1814 battle at [Fort McHenry](#) that gave America its national anthem and its 15-star flag,

"1812 is the forgotten war that we want to make people remember," said Vince Vaise, National Parks Service chief of interpretation at the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. "This is a powerful national story and a powerful location story."

Bill Pencek, director of the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission for the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, organized six, daylong workshops in areas touched by the war.

Baltimore County's workshop last month drew about 90 people eager to help plan the commemoration of the Battle of North Point. In that key skirmish, a scruffy U.S. militia successfully repulsed an experienced enemy that had landed on the peninsula by the thousands.

"This was Marylanders defending Maryland and they were responsible for a pivotal victory that was instantly memorialized," Pencek said. "Think of Francis Scott Key reporting live from the [Patapsco](#) River. There was no [CNN](#) then, but his poem was, within weeks, published in all the newspapers. It resonated with people instantaneously."

Key, imprisoned on a British ship in the Baltimore harbor during the 1814 battle, was inspired to write "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the sight of the American flag still waving after intense fighting. Although that account is widely known, Vaise said highlighting it will help Americans better understand what they have been singing since 1931, the year Congress officially made Key's poem the national anthem.

"These events will have the power to jump-start interest in this subject," Vaise said. "Maybe then we won't have visitors to Fort Sumter, a Civil War shrine, asking where is the Francis Scott Key Memorial."

Help from the parks service

The National Parks Service is partnering with the state and numerous communities on organizing events to highlight the major battles. The service has recently awarded [Havre de Grace](#) \$100,000

to fund its observance of the 1813 devastation of the city by British soldiers.

"Only four homes in the city escaped the fire that destroyed Havre de Grace and three of them stand today," said Brigitte Peters, Havre de Grace's marketing and tourism manager. "We re-enact that battle every year, but in 2013, we will make the event even more regional."

Maryland tourism officials have met extensively with their counterparts in Virginia, which marked the 400th anniversary of Jamestown with 13 events in 2007.

"We are looking at this as our Jamestown and we are expecting huge crowds at signature events across the state," said Jill Feinberg, Baltimore County tourism director.

Virginia's celebration generated 20,000 jobs and \$1 billion in tourism revenue and Maryland can at least equal, if not surpass its neighbor, Pencek said.

Pencek estimated the cost for the commemoration at about \$20 million, but taxpayers will not pay the bill. The sale of gold and silver commemorative coins, which will be available in January 2012, will pay about half the cost with much of the remainder coming from corporate funding and foundation grants, he said.

Baltimore will open the celebration in June 2012 with a maritime festival that will bring tall ships and Navy vessels to its harbor. The city will recall those ships for a grand finale in 2014.

In January, the city plans to launch a national traveling exhibit to educate people on the historic significance of the war and to generate interest in the commemoration, said Jeff Buchheit, director of the Baltimore National Heritage Area, which works to connect residents to the history of their communities. The city took the lead prior to the 100th anniversary of the war.

"We want the nation looking at Baltimore as the home base for what is happening with the bicentennial," Buchheit said. "By 1914, the mayor had been on the road for a year promoting Baltimore. We are doing that with the exhibit that will travel nationally."

North Point trail

Baltimore County will focus on the North Point area, home to many touchstones of the war, among them Todd's Inheritance. From the attic of that farmhouse, lookouts spotted British troops landing on the peninsula. They alerted the nearby militia, who repulsed the enemy attack and mortally wounded a British general.

The British burned the home, but the Todd family, whose generations lived there through 1975, rebuilt within two years. The state bought the historic property, deeded in 1664, about 20 years ago. While completing a \$750,000 renovation of the exterior, charred stone from the fire was discovered in the foundation.

Mroz, president of the Todd's Inheritance Foundation, is working to convert the property into a museum. She expects the waterfront home, where a replica of the 15-star flag flies daily, to play

a role in the anniversary and to be one of many attractions along a planned 4-mile North Point heritage trail. The trail will retrace the route the British soldiers took on Long Log Road, long since renamed North Point Road.

"This area contributed a great deal to keeping us Americans and not making us British subjects again," she said. "But many people don't know that. We are going to brag about it."

Francis Taylor, chairman of the county's bicentennial advisory committee, is pushing to have the trail completed and its weathered battle monuments restored in time for the 2014 anniversary.

"You don't get these stories from the Internet," he said. "You have to walk these roads and fields that were the staging area for British cannons and thousands of troops."

The celebration will focus on "the roles our ancestors played," he said. "It is truly amazing what happened down here. North Point was the Americans' diversion to slow down the British and it worked."

Pencek noted, "About 20 states had battle actions in this war, but Marylanders prevailed against what was the greatest military power in the world. Theirs was a pivotal victory and we are taking pride in that."

If preliminary plans are any indication, he said, "These events will be among the largest spectacles Maryland has ever seen."