

County gets grant for War of 1812 celebration

Benedict history to get top billing with new brochure

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Staff writer

Charles County's plans to spruce up Benedict for the 200th anniversary celebration of the War of 1812 is slowly moving ahead with a \$6,000 state grant to design a brochure and develop an interpretive plan for an 18th-century house in the village.

The county purchased historic Maxwell Hall a couple of years ago for \$791,500 of Maryland's Program Open Space money, Tom Roland, county assistant director of public facilities, said in an earlier interview. The 670 acres that surround the house were purchased for \$3 million in the 1980s, he said.

Edwin Swann and his late wife, Marion, historically restored the house. The couple bought the property in 1980 and when it was time to sell the house they hoped that it would be purchased by someone who wanted to preserve it, said Cathy Thompson, county community planning and program manager.

Maxwell Hall was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, Thompson said in an earlier interview.

Although there are no historical records that link Maxwell Hall with the War of 1812 there are rumors that the British set up an encampment on the property when they landed in Benedict prior to their march to Washington, D.C., according to local historians.

Benedict was also the site of Camp Stanton, a Civil War recruitment camp for African-Americans.

The county's \$6,000 grant is part of \$250,000 in funding awarded to the Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium in Hughesville for several historical projects in Charles, St. Mary's and Calvert counties, said Roz Racanello, SMHAC's executive director.



*File photo by EMILY BARNES
Mary Pat Berry, foreground, of the Gov. William Smallwood chapter of the Maryland State Society of the U.S. Daughters of 1812, holds the hand of her granddaughter, Leanne Berry, last year as she walks down the steps of historic Maxwell Hall with Tom Roland of the county's public facilities department and Carol Whitsell of the Maryland State Society of the U.S. Daughters of 1812.*

"We're really pleased to have this grant for Charles County," she said. "It's a funding priority because of the War of 1812 bicentennial celebration that is coming up. We expect a pretty big multi-year celebration.

"We've got significant sites in Southern Maryland," she added

Funding for other projects in Southern Maryland includes \$90,000 for the Calvert Marine Museum's Cove Point Lighthouse keepers' quarters, \$6,500 for the museum's regional War of 1812 map and guide, \$9,600 for Historic Sotterley for the implementation of a living history program and \$90,000 for the Three Notch Trail in St. Mary's County.

The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, which operates under the Maryland Historical Trust, awarded the grants for projects that support cultural heritage activities, Racanello said.

The SMHAC also received \$54,000 for fiscal 2011 to support the office in Hughesville, Racanello said. A total of 55 grants was awarded to jurisdictions across the state, she said.

Last year, Charles County received a \$2,500 Preservation Maryland grant and a \$1,000 SMHAC grant to conduct a cultural resource study of Benedict that highlights the importance of the village in both local and national history.

The 234-page report recommended ways to ensure that the town receives its due recognition during the state's upcoming bicentennial celebration of the War of 1812, Thompson said.

The document — prepared by local historians Ralph E. Eshelman, Donald G. Shomette and G. Howard Post — described archaeological sites, architecture and landscapes that harbor evidence of Benedict's story, Thompson said.

Benedict is included in the 300-mile land and water Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail that traces key battles in the War of 1812. The trail begins at Fort McHenry in Baltimore, winds through Virginia, the District and Prince George's County, and ends in Southern Maryland, according to state officials.

Recommendations in the study include conducting an archaeological survey of Camp Stanton and the 1814 British Army encampment sites and surveys of historic sites pertaining to the War of 1812 and the Civil War, Thompson said.

Maxwell Hall, originally known as Maxwell's Seat, was built in 1764 by George Maxwell, a wealthy tobacco merchant, according to local historical records.

Currently, the county is using the house for meetings and occasional trolley tours sponsored by the county, Roland said. In the future, the county wants to open the house for special events and set up interpretive displays that will tell the story of Maxwell Hall and the county's role in the War of 1812, he said.

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