

Residents Experience the War of 1812

Reenactors demonstrated the Battle of Bladensburg during an afternoon of activities at Riversdale House Museum.

By [Maya T. Prabhu](#) | [Email the author](#) | August 15, 2010

More than 300 people from all over the region visited [Riversdale House Museum](#) Saturday to participate in their [15th annual Battle of Bladensburg encampment](#).

The event featured a number of living history interpreters who reenacted a 1814 battle against the British, when the Americans were defeated, allowing to British to capture and burn Washington D.C. during the War of 1812.

Though the actual events took place about a mile south of Riversdale, Museum Specialist Ann Wass said the mansion's mistress, Rosalie Stier Calvert, reported seeing battle canons from her home.

"We know that was probably impossible, so she most likely saw Congreve rockets," Wass said. "Her son also wrote in his autobiography that he helped bury the dead. So the mansion is very connected to the battle."

In 1995, Museum Director Edward Day suggested Riversdale begin hosting the encampment as a way to talk about the War of 1812 – a piece of history he said is often overlooked.

"It's where we got the 'Star Spangled Banner.' It's what finally settled whether or not we were going to be British subjects or indeed be free," Day said.

When the British left Washington for Fort McHenry in Baltimore, American troops were able to hold them off, he said. All the lights were extinguished in Baltimore the night of the attack, and the fort was bombarded for 25 hours. The only light was given off by the exploding shells over Fort McHenry, illuminating the flag that was still flying over the fort. The defense of the fort inspired the American lawyer Francis Scott Key to write a poem that would eventually supply the lyrics to "The Star-Spangled Banner."



War of 1812 reenactors bow their heads for a moment of silence for soldiers who have lost their lives in battle Credit [Maya T. Prabhu](#)

Wass noted that War of 1812 reenactors is a finite group with many choosing to reenact the Revolutionary or Civil wars. Since the group is so intimate, participants at the Riversdale event spread the word and bring more groups to participate.

"They share with others who are looking for an opportunity to play – that's what they call it," Day said.

Seizing the opportunity to play, Paul Hoffmaster of Catonsville – a reenactor with the 5th Maryland Militia – said he's been involved with different reenactments for the past 40 years.

"My high school history teacher got me interested in reenactments. And he's here with me," Hoffmaster said, pointing to another reenactor. "I come from a long line of flag-waving patriots."

The day's events included a canon firing, music and dancing, tours of the mansion and children's activities that included crafts and old-fashioned tug-of-war.

"These were the days before PlayStation 3. How kids would entertain themselves are entirely different from how they entertain themselves today," Day said. "This way kids can connect with something other than a screen."