



National Park Service receives input on historic trail

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Star-Spangled Banner path to link area sites

by Randy Leonard

Earlier this month, local historians and Defenders Day reenactors had the ear of state and national agencies tasked with designating sites and creating a trail and celebration to commemorate the locations of significant events related to the 1814 British invasion and subsequent Battle of North Point.

About 25 community and agency members attended a workshop sponsored by the U.S. National Park Service at North Point State Park on Dec. 9 to weigh in on plans for the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, as designated by Congress in May 2008.

The purpose of the meeting was to glean the area's stories, resources and experiences related to the Battle of North Point, Suzanne Copping, the National Park Service project manager for the Star-Spangled Banner trail told attendees.

"That's why we're here today," she said. "We have a lot of work to do."

The area is often overshadowed by celebrations at Fort McHenry, yet there were more casualties at North Point, said Harry Young, a volunteer at the Dundalk Patapsco-Neck Historical Society. Young later mentioned the bodies of 18 British soldiers interred at Oak Lawn Cemetery and the Francis Scott Key Buoy as items of interest in the area.

Attendees discussed tales such as that of a girl jumping from a window of the Shaw house as she fled from one of British Gen. Robert Ross's men.

Historical reenactor Ed Seufert explained that these events were part of the strategy for the British campaign against Baltimore.

Patricia Paul, a descendant of the Stansbury family, said new discoveries of fighting on Bear Creek involved the Stansbury family, which petitioned Congress for compensation after the war, giving precedent to war reparations. The battle helped define what it meant to be American, Paul said.

One man made the point that cultural and natural resources have no voice for themselves.

"There are a number of sites that are lost here," he said.

Historical society board member and reenactor Buzz Chriest emphasized that from Sept. 12 to 15, 1814, the peninsula was occupied by a foreign country, a rarity for U.S. soil. Chriest said one often-overlooked aspect of the war was that the British promised freedom to any slaves who took up arms against the U.S.

Up until the 1980s Defenders Day was a paid state holiday, and it is celebrated on Sept. 12, the day of the British invasion of North Point, not the 13th, the day of the bombardment of Fort McHenry, or the 14th, the day Francis Scott Key was inspired to write his poem that would become "The Star-Spangled Banner," Chriest said.

The centennial observation nearly a century ago included eight days of parades. "It was one humongous" celebration, Chriest said.

Young said the historical society had received requests from the park service, the state and the county.

"Is there anybody coordinating this thing?" he asked.

Katherine Marks, outreach coordinator for Maryland's War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission and the Office of Tourism Development, said her office had received a \$1.8 million grant for a historic byway and the new standard state license plate will celebrate the bicentennial, to be issued for five years starting in June. Plans for the celebration are ongoing.



History reenactors and community leaders gathered at North Point State Park to put forth their ideas for a national historic trail in North Point. photo by Randy Leonard

Asked what the focus will be after the bicentennial celebration, National Park Service contractor Shannon Kettering said the NPS's intention is for a trail that will serve beyond the next decade.

"We're going to make this happen," NPS contractor Faye Goolrick said.

Kettering made note of the various aspects and story lines suggested by the group, and attendees were asked to write down their top five sites for experiencing the history of the area before getting into how a visitor might be engaged at these locations.

Trail plans

Del. John Olszewski Jr. (6th District) suggested a ferry or shuttle service to connect Fort McHenry visitors to the North Point experiences.

North Point Peninsula Community Coordinating Council president Harry Wujek said visitors need a single destination to be drawn toward, such as a museum with exhibits, and he suggested a water portion of the trail for boaters.

"I think Todd's Inheritance is a jewel," said Jay Doyle, of the Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation. Doyle – who has presented plans to build a walking trail in connection to the homestead said to have been burned by the retreating British – extolled the site's historical narrative and surrounding natural beauty. The storied property could offer a potential site for a museum and a landing point for a nautical portion of the trail, Doyle said.

Another such site could be the former VA hospital property at Fort Howard, said NPC vice president Fran Taylor. In August, the VA pulled a lease from a company that had presented plans to develop a retirement community at the British landing site, and future development is under consideration.

Taylor also suggested the use of video and audio histories in presenting the area's stories.

Christ recommended offering a patch to Boy Scouts who experience the trail.

"I thought that the meeting went pretty well," NPS project manager Copping said last week. She said she was pleased by the local attendance.

The public will have the opportunity to comment on the interpretive plan by mail or e-mail once it is formulated. Public meetings on the implementation of the plans will be held in the spring. For more information visit nps.gov/stsp.

Top North Pt. historic sites

- *Todd's Inheritance*
- *Fort Howard State Park*
- *Shaw House/cemetery*
- *North Point State Park*
- *Aquila Randall Monument*

Trail ideas

- *Audio tour*
- *Military staff rides*
- *Podcasts*
- *Internet information*
- *Trail map, guidebook*
- *Geo/Earth caching*
- *Sailing/ boating tour*
- *Bike ride*
- *Ghost tours*
- *Sailing events*