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The War of 1812 Bicentennial

Two years from now the nation will begin to commemorate the War of 1812 Bicentennial. The National Park Service has been working hard to publicize the commemoration in the various states that participated in the War of 1812. Based at Baltimore's Fort McHenry, the NPS has initiated an International War of 1812

Bicentennial Planning Committee with partners in Ontario (Parks Canada) and regional institutions throughout the Eastern United States and Canada.

In early 2009, the Congress passed the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail legislation. This provides funding for sites to provide educational programs, build signs, set up reenactment events, and stimulate public awareness and tourism.

Maryland, in particular, has gotten off to an early start including the development of an action plan identifying more than 370 historic sites along the Star Spangled Banner Trail.

As the Naval Order makes plans for future Congresses and Commanderies' meetings, officers may wish to consider addressing topics related to the War of 1812. The same might be said of the approaching Sesquicentennial of the U.S. Civil War. 20 December 2010 will mark the 150th anniversary of the secession of South Carolina from the Union. The upcoming couple of years will provide many opportunities for our Companions to think and talk about historical naval events. Read more about upcoming bicentennial preparations in our online edition.

From the online edition:

http://www.navalorder.org/NEWS/NOUS_News_Winter_2010/War_of_1812_Bicentennial.html

War of 1812 Bicentennial: Planning in Progress



Defenders Day fireworks illuminate the Garrison Flag at Fort McHenry, 12 September 2009.

Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.

Submitted by Dr. Bill Dudley, Historian General

Only three years from now the nation will begin to commemorate the War of 1812 Bicentennial. To history buffs, this is no surprise, but to the rest of America's citizens this may come as more of a curiosity. For many years, the War of 1812 had a prominent place in our history text books; unfortunately, that is no longer the case. Today, the War of 1812 barely gets a

mention in social studies or history classes. For those of us in the naval history business, this anniversary provides a wonderful opportunity to send a message on the importance of the War of 1812 from the perspective of two hundred years.

There is as yet no national bicentennial commission similar to the one Congress established for the bicentennial of the American Revolution in 1976. That effort faltered in 2008 in Congress due to opposition in the House of Representatives. Yet, the [National Park Service](#) is doing a great service in its effort to publicize the commemoration in the various states that participated in the War of 1812. Commencing in 2008, the National Park Service based at Baltimore's [Fort McHenry](#) initiated an International War of 1812 Bicentennial Planning Committee with partners in Ontario ([Parks Canada](#)) and regional institutions from the Old Northwest to Quebec, New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio Indiana, Michigan, and Louisiana. For the last eighteen months there have been several conference calls involving representatives of these institutions to learn about regional and local plans to commemorate the bicentennial and to determine ways to collaborate. A great boost for the United States' commemoration was the passage of the [Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail](#) legislation in early 2009. This will provide seed money for sites in the areas concerned to provide educational programs, build signs, set up reenactment events, and to stimulate public awareness and tourism.

In the National Capitol region, Maryland has gotten off to an early start. In January 2007, Governor Martin O'Malley issued an executive order that created a [Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission](#), based in the Division of Tourism, Film, and the Arts, under the leadership of Bill Pencek, head of the Office of Tourism Development. Although the members of the commission have yet to be named, the staff has created a 77-page action plan that sets goals such as resource stewardship, visitor experience, education and curriculum programs and events, communications, and marketing. It contains appendices and maps that show the principle campaigns of the war, the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, a Maryland War of 1812 resource base, and a bicentennial programming and events survey. The Star Spangled Banner Trail in Maryland will include interpretive centers, trailside kiosks, historic markers, trail guides, maps, and brochures. This trail will also include water-based segments because of the essential part played by Chesapeake Bay and its many rivers and creeks in the amphibious warfare waged by the British and the lack of road access to many of the sites. With more than 370 historic sites identified, it is no wonder that Maryland has been proactive in developing its War of 1812 commemoration potential.

The Office of Tourism Development has commenced a series of conferences that include traveling to War of 1812 sites in Maryland. On 25 June 2009, the first of these conferences was based at [Calvert Marine Museum](#) in Solomons, Maryland. It was featured as the Southern Maryland Star Spangled 200 Conference. Its purpose is to provide public briefing sites in Southern Maryland where War of 1812 events took place-British raids along the Potomac River, the operations of Commodore Joshua Barney's Chesapeake flotilla in the Chesapeake Bay and Patuxent River, the battles of St. Leonard's Creek, British raids on both shores of the Patuxent, the amphibious landing of a British army at Benedict, and the invasion of Maryland and Washington, DC. Attendees gathered in the museum gallery to view a fiber optic track chart showing the events of the Chesapeake campaign of 1814 near an exhibit containing artifacts from Barney's flotilla. They later heard lectures by Ralph Eshelman and Don Schomette on the British raids and Barney's efforts to divert and delay the British advance. Finally, attendees climbed into buses and visited [Jefferson Patterson Park](#) on St. Leonard's Creek where they walked along the fields and shores where the battles of June 1814 took place, with Shomette and Eshelman acting as guides. Finally, the buses visited the Serenity Farm on a hill west of Benedict, where it is known that the British set up earthworks and an encampment before their march to Bladensburg and Washington in August 1814. The tour was very helpful in giving students of these events a chance to walk where the skirmishes and battles occurred, and to get a vivid reminder of the events of the War of 1812 in southern Maryland. Future conferences are planned for Bladensburg, North Point, and Fort McHenry.

Archeological work to discover and unearth artifacts from War of 1812 battlefields is underway thanks to the National Park Service's [American Battlefield Protection Program](#). The ABPP provided a grant of \$40,000 to Maryland's Department of Business and Economic Development, matched in kind by grants from the Maryland Historical Trust. This is intended to complete a Phase I assessment of [Caulk's Field](#) in Kent County, where, in late August 1814, Maryland militia defeated a contingent of Sailors and Marines from HMS Menelaus, killing Captain Sir Peter Parker, the ship's Commanding Officer. The NPS awarded \$60,000 to the Maryland State Highway Administration to develop and interpret the historic site of the [Battle of](#)

[Bladensburg](#). Another grant of \$78,000 will assist the Maryland Department of Planning to identify and evaluate battle sites in Maryland from the Revolutionary War and War of 1812, such as those on the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers, St. Leonard's Creek, the Elk and Sassafras Rivers, and Baltimore.

As the Naval Order makes its plans for future Congresses and Commanderies' meetings, officers might consider asking Companions to speak on topics on the War of 1812 to honor the upcoming bicentennial. The same might be said of the upcoming commemoration of the [sesquicentennial](#) of the Civil War. 20 December 2010 will mark the 150th anniversary of the secession of South Carolina from the Union.