



PRINCESS ANNE NEWS: Somerset salutes role in War of 1812

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PRINCESS ANNE -- With the approaching War of 1812 bicentennial next year, a newly formed committee is planning events to honor Somerset County's role in the war.

Although the major battles in the Chesapeake Bay were on the western shore, Somerset had its share of skirmishes with the British, said Paul Touart, an architectural historian and a committee member.

"They were all over the place," he said. "This area was impacted quite a bit."

Since the British had occupied nearby Tangier Island, their presence was seen and felt just across the Maryland-Virginia line in Somerset.

Newspaper accounts from the era tell of 80 British soldiers coming ashore at Deal Island, ships that were burned in the Annemessex River and a sloop that was captured in the Pocomoke River, he said.

There also was a report of the local militia protecting American ships docked at Coulbourne Creek that were loading local lumber for the Navy Yard in Washington.

Letters written by Elizabeth Teackle of Princess Anne recount how two recruiting offices had opened in Princess Anne in 1813.

She also wrote of the local militia drilling in the streets and of how a Major Martin came calling one evening at the Teackle Mansion, Touart said.

One mission of the new committee will be to identify sites in Somerset County associated with the War of 1812, and then create a trail for visitors to follow, said Warner Sumpter, chairman of the group.

Among them is the gravesite of a British soldier on Smith Island, as well as the Joshua Thomas Chapel and grave on Deal Island.

Thomas, who was known as the "parson of the islands," led worship services for British troops on Tangier.

There is some evidence to suggest the British also occupied Smith and Deal islands, Sumpter said.

The group also plans to honor War of 1812 veterans, and they are searching local cemeteries for graves.

Sumpter, who is chairman of the Somerset County Board of Education, said he hopes to eventually involve county students in some of the activities over the two-year span of the bicentennial.

The first War of 1812-themed event is planned for Thursday at Teackle Mansion. Attendees may bring antique weapons from the 19th century or earlier to be identified by Sumpter.

It will be followed by a discussion of War of 1812 bicentennial events planned in the county during 2012 to 2014.

If enough interesting artifacts show up that night, they could become part of an exhibit, Sumpter said.

"It's an opportunity to see what people have," he said.