

Battle site survey back on track

Committee hears about signs

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CHESTERTOWN — Even as plans move forward in Kent County to celebrate the bicentennial of the War of 1812, an archaeological survey at the site near Fairlee of a rare American battle victory is ready to get under way.

A National Park Service grant of \$40,000 is funding the “phase I archaeological survey” of the battle site at Caulk’s Field. William Pencek, deputy assistant secretary in the Department of Business and Economic Development, division of Tourism, Film and the Arts, said Tuesday, that while it’s “not a completely done deal,” the survey is ostensibly to begin sometime between now and spring. He described it as a “reconnaissance-level” survey.

Plans are for it to be conducted by the Cultural Resources Program of the State Highway Administration.

“You won’t necessarily see archaeologists out there with squared-off segments,” he said, adding that it will be exploratory to see what kinds of resources are present.

It will require researching the history of the site from early times to the present. That will include a study of the agricultural history, but the primary focus will be on the Battle of Caulk’s Field.

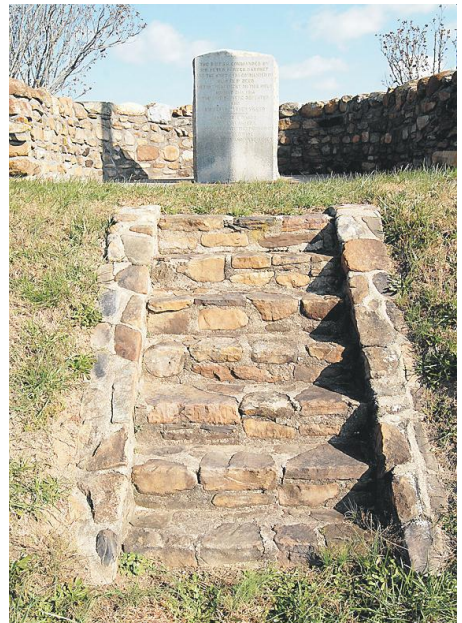
There will be some field study, he said, including shovel test pits, ground coll see if a phase two archaeological survey is justified.”

“Anything we do will be done with the cooperation of the property owner.”

Richard van Stolk owns the productive farm.

The battle took place in the early morning hours Aug. 31, 1814, when a Kent militia unit, comprised of 171 men faced a slightly smaller British force of marines and sailors that had marched about five miles inland from the bay shore. Lt. Col. Philip Reed, former senator and Revolutionary War hero led the Americans. Capt. Sir Peter Parker commanded the British. Reed’s men nearly ran out of ammunition in the one-hour fray, but Parker was fatally wounded, resulting in a disorganized British retreat during which their dead and wounded were left behind.

Counting Parker, 14 British soldiers were killed, and 28 wounded. There were no American fatalities and only three wounded.



The Battle of Caulk’s Field monument was placed at the site, on Caulk’s Field Road, in 1902. A rededication ceremony is being planned for 2014.

PHOTO BY KEVIN HEMSTOCK

The site, including the 1743 brick farmhouse, has changed little since the battle and Pencek described it as one of the "best preserved War of 1812 battlefields in Maryland, perhaps in the United States."

"It's an astonishing resource that Maryland should be proud of," Pencek said.

Meanwhile, the Friends of the Kent County Maryland War of 1812 committee continues to hone plans for activities, starting next year, to mark the bicentennial.

Tuesday, at a meeting in the county offices at 400 High St., members heard a presentation by Abbi Wicklein-Bayne, interpretive specialist from the National Park Service, the federal agency involved in the Star Spangled Banner Historical Trail, which includes Kent County.

Wicklein-Bayne gave an update on the sign program planned for the bicentennial.

She said that initially, the trail would include two three-sided kiosks in Kent, one in Chestertown and another at the Kitty Knight House in Georgetown.

The burning of Georgetown by the British in 1813 spawned the much embellished story of the woman who prevented the soldiers from burning two houses there.

On two of the 3-foot by 4-foot panels would be regional story and a map and on one side information "specific to Kent County."

The 6-foot-tall kiosks will have a steel base and legs, with colorful high-pressure laminate panels.

She said historical trail information is not just about battle sites, but also about "life on the home front."

She tasked the committee with providing the content for the local panels, and getting permission to install the kiosks. The information must be submitted by Christmas. Plans are to install the kiosks by June.

Funding is also available for smaller, individual signs at War of 1812 locations in the county. Among the locations being considered are Eastern Neck Island, the Inn at Mitchell House, Chestertown's town square, Turner's Creek Park.

Among the county's many bicentennial activities planned is an elaborate rededication ceremony and a battle re-enactment at the Caulk's Field site on the battle's anniversary in 2014.

Steve Frohock, committee member, noted that the dignitaries will likely include British military officials and possibly a member of the royal family.