

William J. Pencek, Jr.
Director, Baltimore Heritage Area, Office of the Mayor
May 15, 2007
H.R. 1388 “*Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail Act*”

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am Bill Pencek, Director of the Baltimore Heritage Area in the office of Mayor Sheila Dixon. The Baltimore Heritage Area is a Maryland state-certified heritage area, working to secure national heritage area designation.

You have heard from the National Park Service about the extensive effort that has gone into the feasibility study and impact statement for the proposed trail, and about preferred Alternative B. We concur with the preferred alternative and the proposed partnership between federal, state and local government, a dedicated trail organization, and individual site managers to sustain the trail. This approach will take full advantage of the regional character and focus of the Chesapeake Campaign, the distinctive regional cultural landscape of 1814 that survives today, and the many organizations that are invested in the stewardship, development, and interpretation of the many trail resources.

I would like to focus my comments in two areas—1) to give a sense of how important the lessons of this episode in our nation’s history are to our lives as Americans, and 2) to begin to outline the depth of the commitment of state and local government, and other partners, to the resources of the trail.

The story of the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812 could not be a more relevant or compelling story for the nation today—or a source of inspiration for the future. “Torn by internal conflict, plagued by an empty treasury, embittered by the human cost of a war that couldn’t be won, the United States seemed on the verge of collapse. Yet within a few months America was again safe and at peace, her people unified, her economy mending.” This was 1814, as described in historian Walter Lord’s *The Dawn’s Early Light*. The War of 1812 was the first and only time that a foreign military invaded the United States. The turning point in the amazing reversal of fortune is the story of the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812.

Although the administration of President James Madison pointed to maritime trade issues with England, the war was largely the result of the desire for national expansion. Led by War Hawks such as Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun, the southern and western slaveholding states wanted war with Britain to push annexation of Canada, expand western and southern frontiers, remove the threat of alliance between Britain and the tribes of the Great Lakes, and prevent slaves from leaving the United States. President Madison signed the declaration of war on June 18, 1812 after a war vote that narrowly passed the Senate. American opposition to the war was widespread.

America was very ill-prepared for war and suffered repeated setbacks and defeats. The victory of the *USS Constitution* over the *HMS Guerriere*, and American privateers who took the war to the coast of England, and won, were isolated successes. By 1814, the British navy blockaded the American east coast, bringing a virtual halt to the nation's international maritime trade. The burning of Washington in August 1814 was in retaliation for the America's burning of Toronto in April 1813. The attack on Baltimore was designed to exact revenge on the home of the privateers which had inflicted the most damage to British ships. Had the nation not been successfully defended at Baltimore, the future of our young country would have been in peril.

The events of the Battle of Baltimore helped forge our national identity. The actions of a brave citizenry, comprised largely of first-generation immigrants and free and enslaved African Americans, defeated the greatest military power in the world. In the process, they gave the nation our iconic flag, the Star-Spangled Banner—the most revered object in the collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History—our national anthem, and a new sense of identity and destiny. This was said no better than by a special committee of the 1816 Baltimore City Council for the Commemoration of the Repulse of the British Forces, September 13th and 14th, 1814:

The American Republic but just in its infancy, but just beginning to acquire a character and a name-- for this can only be the result of a series of noble actions-- demands that every exploit of her sons should be carefully monumented. It is important even with a view to the permanent Union of the States. The day will come when our Orators, our painters and poets will find ample matters for the exercise of their respective talents in the national achievements of our own Country. It is due then to that Country, to this City, to the brave men who fought, to the living and the dead, to our children who may be called on some future day to emulate the example, that some suitable measure be adopted to commemorate and mark those events so highly interesting to the City of Baltimore, and to the American People.

Clearly, the creation of a Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, is the best way we can—using the words of the special committee—“monument” the people and events of the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812.

Now I would like to focus a bit on the enthusiasm and commitment of the some of the non-federal partners that are dedicated to the stewardship, development and investment in the trail resources. More than 40 organizations have signed on in support of the trail, ranging in size and scope from the Naval Historical Foundation to the Chesapeake 1812 living history groups, from the Organization of American Historians to the Prince George's County, Maryland, Department of Parks and Recreation.

You might guess that the City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland are particularly heavily invested in the trail resources, with a record stretching back to the days immediately following the events of 1814 to the present moment. Among the most significant investments of the City of Baltimore in trail resources have been:

- The construction of the Battle Monument, begun in 1815 to honor fallen defenders. It was the first significant war memorial in the United States and the first to celebrate the common soldier. The image of the city-owned Monument is used as the official symbol of the City of Baltimore.
- Ownership and management of Fort McHenry, from May 1914, until 1925. Since 1793 when the Maryland Legislature authorized its construction by the federal government, the stewardship of Fort McHenry has been a federal, state, and city government partnership enterprise. Most recently, the City of Baltimore has committed \$1.4 million to the planning and construction of the new Fort McHenry Visitor Center.
- The 1927 purchase, restoration and management of the Star-Spangled Banner Flag House, in partnership with the non-profit Star-Spangled Banner Flag House Association. The Flag House is where Mary Pickersgill and her household of free and enslaved women made the Star-Spangled Banner, which flew over Fort McHenry, and which is undergoing restoration to become a centerpiece of the National Museum of American History.
- The investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in the ongoing preservation, enhancement, and interpretation of identified trail resources like Federal Hill Park, the Fells Point neighborhood, Ferry Branch, Hampstead Hill/Patterson Park, as well as institutional trail resources like the Maryland Historical Society, Flag House Association, Friends of Fort McHenry, and Friends of Patterson Park.
- The 2001 creation and ongoing funding of, with the State of Maryland, the Baltimore Heritage Area, to convene stakeholders and coordinate investment in Baltimore's national heritage stories—among the most important of which is the War of 1812. Special project activities of the Baltimore Heritage Area have included:
 - Creation of Heritage Walk, a 3.2 mile interpreted walking trail offering guided tours with Urban Park Rangers, connecting sites like the Flag House and Battle Monument.
 - Hiring of a War of 1812 bicentennial coordinator.
 - Originating and sustaining the Young Defenders Program with NPS and the Friends of Fort McHenry, which in two years has brought more than 2,500 school children to the Fort for an enriched experience.
- Current efforts to coordinate dozens of stakeholders in the development of the Middle Branch Master Plan. The Middle Branch of the Patapsco River is ringed by six trail resources—Fort McHenry, Ferry Branch, Ferry Point Redoubt site, Fort Babcock, Fort Covington and Fort Wood. The master plan will contain a very significant heritage preservation, interpretation and tourism component to ensure appropriate investment in these trail resources.

Among the most significant investments by the State of Maryland, in addition to those listed above, have been:

- Comprehensive statewide inventory and assessment of sites associated with the War of 1812, in partnership with the American Battlefield Protection Program.

- A contribution of up to \$1.4 million to assist the construction of the Fort McHenry Visitor Center.
- Creation of a map and guide to Maryland's Star-Spangled Banner Trail, to highlight the resources in Maryland associated with the War of 1812 Chesapeake Campaign, and continuous investment in marketing the trail resources to a national and international tourism audience.
- Acquisition of public lands in and around the Battle of North Point. The most recent purchase was the 2006 acquisition of a 9-acre parcel using \$1.75 million in Program Open Space Funds and assisted by the Trust for Public Land.
- Acquisition and on-going stewardship and interpretation of Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, site of the Second Battle of St. Leonard Creek.
- Provision of millions of dollars in financial assistance to support the preservation of trail sites such as Sotterley Plantation, Oxon Hill Farm, Indian Queen Tavern, Magruder House, Riversdale Mansion, Beall-Dawson House, and Todd's Inheritance.

This brief recounting of the contributions and commitment of the City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland to stewardship, development and interpretation of course leaves out the even larger contributions made by the many other local governments, the State of Virginia, and the many non-governmental organizations involved with the trail resources—which likely collectively exceed those of Baltimore and Maryland.

In closing, the merits of a Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail are clear. Also clear, to those of us in the trenches, is the extraordinary value that National Historic Trail designation would bring to our collective efforts. Recognition and validation of the significance of the story and our efforts stand at the top of the list. Designation will bring focus and leadership to stimulating partnerships and collaborations throughout the region that would otherwise not take place. New and exciting investments and techniques in stewardship, development, and interpretation will result.

The City of Baltimore believes this designation is of great importance, and is willing to be one of the strongest partners and contributors to a Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail.