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STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER
"BRITISH RAID ON TAPPAHANNOCK"
TO BE DEDICATED

—Essex County marker recalls when British forces "shelled and seized the town of Tappahannock during the War of 1812"; British were aided by "three companies of Colonial Marines composed of formerly enslaved African Americans"—

—The marker's text is reproduced below—

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources that recalls when British forces, aided by formerly enslaved Colonial Marines, "shelled and seized" the Town of Tappahannock during the War of 1812, will be dedicated this weekend.

The dedication ceremony begins at 1:30 p.m., Saturday, October 18, at the marker's location along Queen Street (U.S. 360) near the Downing Bridge, which spans the Rappahannock River in Tappahannock. The event is open to the public. A reception will follow at the Essex County Museum and Historical Society, located at 218 Water Lane, Tappahannock.

The keynote speaker for the event is Dr. Robert Alexander Armour, professor emeritus at Virginia Commonwealth University, who has researched and written extensively about the impact of the War of 1812 on Essex County and Tappahannock. Other speakers providing brief remarks will include Rob Geiger, president of the Essex County Museum and Historical Society (ECMHS); Stuart Butler, author and historian; Lt. Col. Myron E. Lyman Sr., past president of the Society of the War of 1812 in Virginia; Priscilla Vaughan, an ECMHS board member; and

Dr. Jennifer Loux of the Department of Historic Resources. The Essex County Museum and Historical Society is hosting the ceremony.

The War of 1812, fought between the U.S. and Great Britain, is called by some historians the nation's second war of independence.

During the war, on December 2, 1814, "British naval forces commanded by Capt. Robert Barrie shelled and seized the town of Tappahannock," according to the historical marker. "Aiding the British were three companies of Colonial Marines composed of formerly enslaved African Americans."

The British departed the town by December 4 and Essex County militia reentered Tappahannock to discover "the British had ransacked private houses, blown up a tannery, and burned two jails, the customs warehouse, and the courthouse," the marker reads. The raid on Tappahannock was one of the last the British conducted before the Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24, 1814, ending the war.

The Tappahannock sign marks another stop on a War of 1812 highway route linked by historical markers created to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the war. The signs—now numbering 19 approved, with 11 erected—result from collaboration between the Department of Historic Resources (DHR) and the Virginia Bicentennial of the War of 1812 Commission.

Each of the bicentennial signs features on one side general information about the causes of the War of 1812 and its adverse impact on Virginia, especially the Chesapeake Bay and Tidewater regions. The signs also note that "more than 2,000 enslaved African Americans in Virginia had gained their freedom aboard British ships."

According to the legislation enacted by the General Assembly to establish the bicentennial commission, "An estimated 70,000 Virginians served during the War of 1812. There were some 73 armed encounters with the British that took place in Virginia during the war." The 2008 legislation also states, "The nation's capitol, strategically located off the Chesapeake Bay, was a

prime target for the British, and the coast of Virginia figured prominently in the Atlantic theatre of operations."

Virginia's historical highway marker program, which began in 1927 with the installation of the first historical markers along U.S. Route 1, is considered the oldest such program in the nation. Currently there are more than 2,400 official state markers, most maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation, as well as by local partners in jurisdictions outside of VDOT's authority.

Text of the marker:

British Raid on Tappahannock N-39

On 2 Dec. 1814, British naval forces commanded by Capt. Robert Barrie shelled and seized the town of Tappahannock during the War of 1812. Aiding the British were three companies of Colonial Marines composed of formerly enslaved African Americans. By 4 Dec., when the raiders departed and Essex County militia reentered the town, the British had ransacked private houses, blown up a tannery, and burned two jails, the customs warehouse, and the courthouse. They also desecrated the burial vault of the prominent Ritchie family. This was one of the last British raids before the Treaty of Ghent was signed on 24 Dec. 1814.

The War of 1812

Impressment of Americans into British service and the violation of American ships were among the causes of America's War of 1812 with the British, which lasted until 1815. Beginning in 1813, Virginians suffered from a British naval blockade of the Chesapeake Bay and from British troops plundering the countryside by the Bay and along the James, Rappahannock, and Potomac Rivers. The Virginia militia deflected a British attempt to take Norfolk in 1813 and engaged British forces throughout the war. By the end of the war, more than 2,000 enslaved African Americans in Virginia had gained their freedom aboard British ships.

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