

Department of Historic Resources

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For Immediate Release

October 23, 2014

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STATE HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER “LT. COL. GEORGE ARMISTEAD (1780-1818)” TO BE DEDICATED

—Marker recalls Caroline County native who was commanding officer at Fort McHenry during the Battle of Baltimore in 1814, which inspired “The Star Spangled Banner”—

—The marker’s text is reproduced below—

RICHMOND – A state historical marker issued by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources that honors Lt. Col. George Armistead, a Caroline County native who was commanding Fort McHenry when British forces attacked Baltimore during the War of 1812, inspiring Francis Scott Key’s “The Star Spangled Banner,” will be dedicated in early November.

The dedication ceremony begins at 3 p.m., Sunday, November 2, on the grounds of the Newmarket Plantation, where Armistead was born in 1780. The plantation is located on U.S. 301, three miles south of Bowling Green. The Caroline Historical Society is hosting the event, which is open to the public.

Speakers during the ceremony will include Bernard Collins, president of the Caroline Historical Society, and Dr. Jennifer Loux, historian with the historical marker program at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

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

The Armistead historical marker recalls that “Armistead distinguished himself in 1813 during the capture of Fort George, Canada, but is best known as the commanding officer of Fort McHenry during the 1814 Battle of Baltimore, for which he earned the rank of lieutenant colonel.”

The battle, during which American forces prevailed over the British, is considered a turning point in the War of 1812. The U.S. victory also “was the inspiration for Francis Scott Key’s poem, ‘The Star Spangled Banner,’” in the words of the sign. Armistead remained commander at Fort McHenry until his death in 1818. He is buried in Baltimore’s Old St. Paul’s Cemetery.

The Armistead sign marks another stop on a War of 1812 heritage highway route linked by historical markers created to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the war. The signs—now numbering 19 approved, with 12 erected—result from collaboration between the Department of Historic Resources and the Virginia Bicentennial of the American 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.”

A 12-page booklet that lists all the historical markers in Virginia relating to the War of 1812, including each sign's text, is available online for downloading (as a PDF) from the Department of Historic Resources' Website (www.dhr.virginia.gov). Here is the direct link to the publication:

http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/pdf_files/War%20of%201812%20Markers%20publicationFINAL.pdf

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.

Texts of the marker:

Lt. Col. George Armistead (1780-1818)

Known for his service in the War of 1812, George Armistead was born here at Newmarket plantation. Armistead distinguished himself in 1813 during the capture of Fort George, Canada, but is best known as the commanding officer of Fort McHenry during the 1814 Battle of Baltimore, for which he earned the rank of lieutenant colonel. The American victory proved a turning point in the war, and was the inspiration for Francis Scott Key's poem "The Star Spangled Banner." Armistead commanded at Fort McHenry until his death in Baltimore in 1818. He is buried there in Old St. Paul's Cemetery.

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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