



Virginia Bicentennial of the American War of 1812 Commission

Regular Meeting: July 9, 2014

Update: Monument to Virginians at Fort Meigs, Ohio

Project Overview

The Advisory Council to the Virginia Bicentennial of the American War of 1812 Commission discussed and recommended at its December 8th 2010 meeting the placement of a historic marker at Fort Meigs to commemorate the role of Virginians in the construction and defense of the fort during 1812 and 1813. This project has received conceptual approval from the necessary authorities in Ohio as well, and updates to the progress of this project have been made periodically since inception. The current standing of the project is outlined below.

Historical Background

Following serious military setbacks along the northwestern frontier in the summer of 1812 – especially the surrender in August of a force of over 1000 men under the command of US General William Hull at Detroit – the newly appointed commander of the Army of the Northwest, US General William Henry Harrison, requested additional troops be raised quickly for defense of the frontier. The US Secretary of War requested of Virginia Governor James Barbour that a brigade of Virginians be raised to be sent to the Northwest. Barbour commissioned Revolutionary War veteran Joel Leftwich of Bedford County to serve as General of the Virginia Brigade, this army to be raised mostly from Virginia's westernmost counties seated along the Ohio River. By late October the Brigade was assembled at Point Pleasant, Virginia, from where it crossed that month into Ohio. Marching up from eastern Virginia at this time were the Petersburg Volunteers, who would eventually join with the Virginia Brigade and begin arriving together at their destination on the Maumee River in northwestern Ohio on 2 February, 1813. The Virginians served alongside troops from Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania at this snowbound and wind-blasted post through the remainder of the winter of 1812/1813. Under direction of West Point engineers, they constructed what would become the largest

palisade fort in North America: Fort Meigs. Named for the wartime governor of Ohio, Fort Meigs was built not only under the duress of the winter weather but with minimal supplies and under the constant threat of attack by the British and their Indian allies. General Joel Leftwich commanded Fort Meigs and oversaw the continuation of its construction in the absence of General Harrison for most of February and all of March. The Virginia Brigade began leaving at the beginning of April at the conclusion of their service. The Petersburg Volunteers would remain in service at Fort Meigs, continuing to serve under General Harrison's command, fighting the British and their Indian allies during the two sieges of Fort Meigs in the spring and summer of 1813. Both sieges failed, and the Petersburg Volunteers would be part of the subsequent invasion of Canada under Harrison, with Fort Meigs serving as the staging area for that offensive. During the campaign through Ohio and the subsequent construction and defense of Fort Meigs many of these Virginians died of disease, wounds and in battle. Those who perished at the fort are buried together just outside the earthen walls of the fortification. As men were buried by their state of origin, the Virginian gravesite is well known to the contemporary site managers at Fort Meigs.

Published Resources on Virginians at Fort Meigs

Butler, Stuart L., *Real Patriots and Heroic Soldiers; General Joel Leftwich and the Virginia Brigade in the War of 1812*, Heritage Books, 2008

Ryan, James H and Lee A. Wallace, *Duty and Honor; Petersburg's Contributions to the War of 1812*

Marker Precedent at Fort Meigs

In 1908 the citizens of the Maumee River Valley erected a 100 foot tall stone obelisk in the center of the fort site in preparation for the annual convention of the Grand Army of the Republic, the primary Civil War veteran organization for Union soldiers, which was to be held in nearby Toledo, Ohio that year. In 1922 the State of Pennsylvania erected a monument of stone with bronze tablets on the burial site of Pennsylvanians who died during duty at the fort. This marker is located just outside the earthen walls of the fort. In recognition of the fort's significance to their state's history, the Ohio Historical Society reconstructed the fort in the late 1960s, opening to the public as a state historic site in 1974.

Virginia Marker Location and Design

In agreement with the Director of Fort Meigs, the marker proposed by Virginia would be placed on the site of Virginia's war dead at the fort – the site being known to Fort Meigs authorities. Similar to the site for fallen Pennsylvanians, this burial ground is located just outside the earthen walls of the fort and is on the grounds of the state historic site, maintained by the State of Ohio. In order to provide visual consistency of monument architecture at the fort site the monument would be of stone and have engravings on all four sides. Dimensions of the marker would be

three feet wide at the base and five feet in height (approx.), with a thickness of 1 foot or less. On the north face would appear the seal of the state of Virginia and the state's name on the top of the marker. The reverse side would contain the list of the dead from Joel Leftwitch's Virginia Brigade and the Petersburg Volunteers (with the titles and leaders of the units above each list), as well as the dates of their service in Ohio during the war. All imagery and text will be etched in the stone of the marker. The 1812 marker at Mt Hebron in Winchester, Virginia, is modeled below as an example of for dimensions and style:



Funding and Commission Representation

Funding estimates for the planning, fabrication and installation of the marker are estimated at around \$3,000. This estimate is based on the dimensions proposed in this report, materials to be used, and an informal poll of area monument companies concerning cost. Fundraising is to be accomplished through private efforts, and during the ceremony for the monument's dedication appropriate representatives of the Commission and Advisory Commission should be present at Fort Meigs. I volunteer to be a representative member of the Advisory Commission at such an event.

Timeline

The marker should be placed sometime before June 2015. 1-2 months should be expected for fabrication and installation once the final design has been drafted by the artisan and approved.

Communications

The Fort Meigs Historic Site in Perrysburg, Ohio (which manages the site) and the Ohio Historical Society (which owns the site) have both approved the erection of the Virginia monument.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Farris
Member, Citizens' Advisory Commission