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Special Resource Study  
 Newsletter 1  
 September 2008

National Park Service  
 U.S. Department of the Interior



# River Raisin Battlefield

## RIVER RAISIN BATTLEFIELD SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY LAUNCHED



This painting by Ken Riley entitled "Remember the River Raisin!" depicts a scene from the October 1813 Battle of the Thames, a decisive victory for the Americans in which Shawnee Chief Tecumseh gave his life and Americans re-established control over the Northwest frontier. Kentucky troops were encouraged to fight this battle as revenge for an earlier massacre of Kentucky militia at the River Raisin.

Nearly 200 years ago, more than 330 Americans, British, Canadians, and Indians gave their lives in a fight over land in a town then known as Frenchtown (today Monroe) along the River Raisin in Michigan. In this fight, which played out the over four days between January 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> 1813, the American Army suffered one of the worst defeats of the War of 1812. After the battles had ended, some of the Indian participants who were British allies killed wounded Americans, mostly members of the Kentucky volunteer militia, who had been taken prisoner. This killing, coupled with the failure of the British commanders to ensure the safety of prisoners of war, so enraged Americans that the phrase "Remember the River Raisin" became a rallying cry for future engagements in the war. The event still stands as the bloodiest conflict ever fought on Michigan soil.

The story of the Battles of the River Raisin prompted Michigan Congressman John Dingell and Senator Carl Levin to sponsor legislation requiring the National Park Service to study the battlefield for possible inclusion in the National Park System. With the help of co-sponsors Senators Debbie Stabenow, also of Michigan, and Jim Bunning of Kentucky, this legislation was signed into law on December 20, 2006 as Public Law 109-429. In response, the NPS formed a River Raisin Special Resource Study Team tasked with conducting a Special Resource Study of the battlefield. The NPS process for conducting these studies includes five steps:

- First, the national significance of the battlefield is assessed. The criteria used to determine whether or not a property is nationally significant enough for inclusion in the National Park System are the same as National Historic Landmark (NHL) criteria. While a portion of the River Raisin Battlefield was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, until now it had not been evaluated for a higher level of recognition as an NHL. An NHL nomination is now being developed for the battlefield by a team headed by Heidelberg College's Center for Historic and Military Archeology under contract to the Monroe County Historical Society. The results of this NHL nominating process will be used to determine national significance for the Special Resource Study. (See the article on page 3 on the NHL nomination).



**Region**  
 River Raisin Battlefield  
 United States Department of the Interior / National Park Service  
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### PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2008, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. and WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2008, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.**

Monroe County Community College Main Campus, La-Z-Boy Center  
 1555 South Raisinville Road, Monroe, Michigan

### STUDY SCHEDULE

Time Frame	Planning Activity	Public Involvement
2008	<b>Begin the Study</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather the team members to visit site, become familiar with related work affecting it, and make preliminary significance, suitability, and feasibility determinations</li> <li>• As a team and with the public, discuss issues and opportunities for the battlefield</li> </ul>	Attend a public meeting and let us know what you think. You can also send a note through our website or use the response form included with this newsletter
2009	<b>Develop Alternatives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze public comments and use the feedback they offer to craft potential management alternatives</li> </ul>	Attend a public meeting to provide comments on alternatives. You will also receive a newsletter describing the alternatives and including a comment form
2010 to early 2011	<b>Analyze Alternatives and Produce Draft Study</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using feedback from the public on the alternatives, analyze their benefits, costs, and impacts and identify the most efficient and effective alternative</li> <li>• Produce a draft of the full study, including an Environmental Impact Statement</li> </ul>	Provide comments on the draft study
Summer 2011	<b>Finalize the study and transmit to Congress</b>	

- Second, the suitability of the battlefield for inclusion in the National Park System is assessed. The suitability assessment will involve comparing the battlefield to other areas already included in the National Park System or comparably protected by others (by park systems of other federal agencies, states, and localities or privately). If the study team finds that preserving and interpreting the River Raisin battlefield would not duplicate comparable efforts elsewhere, then it will be found suitable for inclusion in the National Park System.
- Third, the feasibility of the battlefield for inclusion in the National Park System is assessed. According to the Management Policies that govern the National Park Service, an area must be “(1) of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment, taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond proposed park boundaries, and (2) capable of efficient administration by the Service at a reasonable cost.”
- Fourth, the study team will determine whether or not there is a need for direct management by the National Park Service. Unless direct NPS management of the battlefield is identified as the clearly superior management alternative, the Service will recommend that another organization (for example, state, local or private entities or another federal agency) assume a lead management role.
- Lastly, a range of alternative ways to preserve and interpret the battlefield will be developed, presented to the public for feedback, and evaluated in terms of costs, benefits, and environmental impacts in order to determine how to most efficiently and effectively protect and interpret significant resources.

Public involvement is a critical part of this study process. The purpose of this newsletter is to invite you to participate by introducing you to the study process and encouraging your feedback about key issues we should consider as we proceed. See page 3 of this newsletter for information about how to be involved in this study.

## RELATED EFFORTS

### Cleaning up the Battlefield Site

The paper-making industry developed much of the River Raisin battlefield in the early 1900s and operated on the site until 1995, when the Jefferson Smurfit company closed down its operations in Monroe. For more than 10 years, the industrial buildings sat empty and deteriorating while decisions were made about how to clean up environmental contamination at the site and what the best use was for the land they occupied. Eventually, with the help of grants and loans from the Clean Michigan Initiative and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, plans were made to remove the buildings and clean up the site.

With knowledge from the historical record and archeological investigations showing that River Raisin battles were fought on this land, the decision was made to reclaim this history by returning the site as much as possible to its 1813 appearance. Archeologists were hoping that, once the buildings were taken down, the earth at the site would reveal artifacts telling more of the story of battle, but they were skeptical. It seemed that constructing such large industrial buildings would have involved extensive excavation, removing all of the dirt and the artifacts it contained. But, remarkably, this was not the case. Now that these buildings have been demolished, archeology funded by the NPS American Battlefield Protection Program is revealing information about the locations of homes in Frenchtown and how the battles were fought.



The study team visiting the battlefield in April - NPS staff (Ruth Heikkinen, Dale Phillips, Vergil Noble, Sue Judis, Kristen McMasters, Paul Hawke, and Michael Evans) and NPS partners on the study team (Jeffrey Green, Michael Pratt, Bill Rutter, and Ted Ligibel).

### Preparing a National Historic Landmark Nomination

This past spring, the Monroe County Historical Society contracted with the Heidelberg College's Center for Historic and Military Archeology (CHMA) to prepare a NHL nomination for the battlefield. A team of archeologists, historians and planners from CHMA, Eastern Michigan University and the City of Monroe is undertaking this work now. Dr. G. Michael Pratt, director of the CHMA effort and SRS team member, anticipates completion of the NHL nomination by this fall. The Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board conducts initial review of NHL nominations. Nominations recommended for listing then proceed through the Advisory Board and ultimately to the Secretary of Interior for final designation.

Designation as an NHL would place the battlefield among the places that possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. While there are roughly 80,000 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, only about 2,400 of these are NHLs. By confirming the national significance of the battlefield, designation as an NHL would ensure it meets the first criterion for inclusion in the National Park System.

### Work of the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program

The National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) promotes the preservation of significant historic battlefields associated with wars on American soil. The goals of the program are 1) to protect battlefields and sites associated with armed conflicts that influenced the course of our history, 2) to encourage and assist all Americans in planning for the preservation, management, and interpretation of these sites, and 3) to raise awareness of the importance of preserving battlefields and related sites for future generations. The ABPP focuses primarily on land use, cultural resource and site management planning, and public education. Research on the River Raisin Battlefield is currently benefitting from the third in a series of grants from the ABPP. With this grant, a team headed by Heidelberg College and involving Eastern Michigan University's Historic Preservation Program is documenting areas of the battlefield currently outside the defined National Register boundary, creating detailed maps, assessing the potential of archeological resources, and identifying and evaluating threats to these resources.

The ABPP also recently completed a study on War of 1812 Battlefields. In 1996, Congress, concerned that the historical integrity of many Revolutionary War sites and War of 1812 sites were at risk, enacted legislation calling for a study of historic sites associated with the two early-American wars. With funding that became available in 1999, the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program's identified and surveyed, on a reconnaissance level, almost 1700 sites, including of course, the River Raisin Battlefield. This study is available through the ABPP website at <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/abpp/Rev1812Study.htm>

### HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

There are three ways to provide feedback at this early stage:

- 1 Send comments through our study website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/>. Once at this site, click on the “plans/docs” tab and then select “Special Resource Study” for the plan type and scroll down to “River Raisin Battlefield.”
- 2 Send in the enclosed, postage-paid comment form
- 3 Attend a public meeting to learn more about the study and offer comments.

*Meetings will be held Tuesday, October 28 and Wednesday, October 29. Both meetings will be from 6-8 PM at Monroe County Community College Main Campus, 1555 South Raisinville Road in Monroe. Meet in the La-Z-Boy Center.*

Once we develop a range of management alternatives, we will issue a second newsletter asking for your specific feedback on them. In the meantime, please check our website for project updates. Questions about this study can be addressed to: Ruth Heikkinen, Project Manager, River Raisin Special Resource Study, National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, 601 Riverfront Drive, Omaha, NE 68102. 402-661-1846. [Ruth\\_Heikkinen@nps.gov](mailto:Ruth_Heikkinen@nps.gov)