

A Thesis

entitled

A History of Fort Meigs: The Fort's Reconstruction as Reflection
of Sense of Place to Northwest Ohio

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in History

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Fort Meigs has endured for nearly 200 years due to its sense of place it offers to northwest Ohio. A sense of place consists of an area that offers locals an anchor of identity and explanation to understand their place and existence in time and space. In 1813, Fort Meigs first served northwest Ohio through the War of 1812 campaigns after the disastrous River Raisin Massacre and other repeated American losses; the two campaigns at the fort helped to turn the war in America's favor. Following the war period, the fort continued to serve the area by providing a space and backdrop for such things as political campaigns, memorial grounds for soldiers, celebrations of American war victories, and as a recreational area. Community efforts began and increased throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to memorialize and protect the grounds, culminating in the 1960s and 1970s into an actual reconstruction of the fort as a public history site. Since then, the reconstructed fort and museum have continued to underscore its sense of place by providing an educational and relatable history of Fort Meigs by highlighting its role in the war and to the state of Ohio.

For Phillip, my family, and God. I thank you for all the help, encouragement, and support you have given me. Shemah.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Public and History

“I have little patience with these polemics attacking the public for their ignorance of history or the professors for being out of touch. From my perspective it seems that popular interest in the past has never been greater.”¹

-David Glassberg, professor of University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2001.

¹ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 2001, 6.

Fort Meigs, a wooden fortification in Perrysburg, Ohio, serves as a sense of place for northwest Ohio. Built on an embankment jutting over the wide Maumee River, the fort protected American soldiers against the British and allied Native Americans in the War of 1812. This war ensured America's independence from England and affirmed the United States' growing power over the Native Americans. After the war ended, northwest Ohio became safer for settlement due to the natives' defeat in war. The War of 1812, though successful for the United States, first divided Americans between choosing to support the war efforts. These divisions, along with poor leadership and organization, resulted in a string of battle losses and American casualties. Fort Meigs, even with this blemished war history attached to it, stands reconstructed almost 200 years later.

Fort Meigs' history began in 1813 in the midst of the war after a massacre of American prisoners of war in Southeast Michigan. The men at Fort Meigs defeated the British and natives following the massacre, improving war morale and deflecting the enemy from northeast America. Following the war, the fort became partially dismantled and faded into historical memory. A local farmer, Timothy Hayes, took over the care of the area, knowing the importance it represented to the developing northwest Ohio. The farmer did not allow any agricultural development of the land, and instead permitted livestock grazing. To local visitors, he retold the importance of the fort and its history. Following the farmer's death, local efforts surfaced to memorialize and protect the dead buried at the fort, something achieved later in 1908 with a granite monolith. Following these and future preservation efforts, the idea to reconstruct the fort surfaced in the 1960's. Following reconstruction, the fort faced severe financial threats and faced closure twice. Through a combination of local efforts, the fort continued operations both times. The fort's preservation, throughout its history, repeatedly alludes to its local importance.

Fort Meigs serves as a sense of place by acting as a place of local identity and by offering an explanation for northwest Ohio's environmental state. The reconstructed fort attests to over two hundred years of local efforts to preserve northwest Ohio's history. As a public historic site, Fort Meigs' staff educates about the war's importance to both the United States' and Ohio's local history. It is through public history that the staff communicates this sense of place, and passes on the fort's history to future generations.

Public History is the middle realm between academia and the lay world, the bridge between academic history and a layperson's conceptions, understandings, and uses of history. The term public history became part of the professional vocabulary in the 1970's after a period of unemployment crisis for graduated historians. Discussions emerged from the crisis and included talks as to what exactly defined history and what careers historians could or should engage in.² Public history became an option for some who turned to employment outside of university settings. These historians were concerned with researching and communicating history for audiences outside of academe and often worked in public environments such as museums, state parks, historic sites, or memorials. Specific programs for training in public history followed in the 1980's and provided a training base for the developing field.³ These skills were learned alongside the traditional focus on historical knowledge and research methodology. These beginning programs made public history a more distinguishable field within academic history.

Public history today encompasses a wide variety of professions and includes historians working both within and outside universities. From Public History: Essays From the Field, a sense of this professional variety becomes evident.⁴ Careers range from administration and

² Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition" in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, ed. James B. Garden and Peter S. LaPaglia, (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company), 13.

³ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴ Ibid.

fundraising, to research, preservation, documentary filmmaking, and conservation. Other public historians work in or alongside museums, parks, universities, cemeteries, battlefields, and archives, and work as tour guides, teachers, professors, archivists, professional journal editors, and site managers. These careers and places all fall under the public history banner and contribute to the field's professional variety. This variety makes it difficult however to define the field finitely to those unfamiliar with public history. Overall, those within public history attempt to bring the public and history together in a symbiotic relation, each side benefitting in the sharing and preservation of histories.

Studies quizzing or polling Americans on American history or government systems often decry citizen ignorance when it comes to history—an attitude the field of public history normally does not support. Questions such as “Who was the first Vice President of the United States?” or “Who is the current Speaker of the House?” or the more comical “When was the War of 1812?”, often, to the reader's or viewer's entertainment, results in a bumbling answer from participants. A 2010 *Washington Post* article, by Valerie Strauss, reported findings based on several studies polling Americans on basic American history. A poll conducted by the Marist Institute for Public Opinion, for example, discovered that 26% of those surveyed did not know the United States won its freedom from England.⁵ Strauss summarized what Americans did know about their history among grade levels, such as students understanding the symbolism of the State of Liberty. However, the article ended on a pessimistic note declaring that “Americans historically haven't known much about their own history.”⁶ A similar news article from NBC Los Angeles in 2008 reported findings from the Intercollegiate Studies Institute—again polling Americans on U.S. history and civic policy. The study revealed only half of U.S. adults could

⁵ Valerie Strauss, “What Americans don't know about their history,” *Washington Post* July 3, 2010, <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/civics-education/what-americans-dont-know-about.html>.

⁶ Ibid.

report the three branches of government, more than half did not know what branch the power to declare war belonged to, and just below half did not know the functions of the Electoral College.⁷ Such polls, focused on minutia of American history or civic government structures, fail to examine what the field of public history includes: a human's personal definition of history and the recognition of individual histories.

Recent studies in public history provide contrary evidence to Americans' supposed ignorance and lack of interest in history, particularly U.S. and personal-related histories. In Presence of the Past, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen reported their study in examining how the past, or history, was present in the lives of everyday people.⁸ The study was performed under the guidance of Rosenzweig and Thelen, and included a team of historians, a large committee group, and ample volunteers. Around 1500 American citizens were called randomly to talk about how they used and understood the past in everyday living, if they participated in any history related hobbies, how they conceptualized or perceived history, and were questioned about personal histories.⁹ The study was conducted to investigate just how "Americans understood their past" in order to create "better ways of connecting academic historians with larger audiences."¹⁰

Interestingly, the research team found that respondents felt most distant to the past when encountered in traditional forms of media or pedagogy, such as in books, movies and classroom settings.¹¹ Participants discussed history with a noticeable lack of traditional narratives or historical frameworks found in history textbooks, such as the American Revolution, the Civil

⁷ "Study: Americans Don't Know Much About History," *NBC LA*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/Study-Americans-Dont-Know-About-Much-About-History.html>.

⁸ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1998.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

War, or even immigration discrimination of an earlier era.¹² The study as well revealed what sources the participants trusted when learning history. Regardless of the participant's age, gender, education and income, museums, personal accounts from grandparents or relatives, and accounts from a person who lived through a historical event ranked as the top three sources of trustworthy historical information. Professors and teachers, along with nonfiction books, media programs and movies, ranked below these top three in source trustworthiness.¹³

The results of Rosenzweig and Thelen's study astounded the research team and provided ample information about how Americans understood and related to the past. Many participants talked to the interviewers for sizeable blocks of time, usually around a half hour, and volunteered to expand on answers. Some participants shared personal events and feelings related to the interviewee's past, including experiences with chronic alcoholism,¹⁴ drug abuse,¹⁵ the affects of religion in their past,¹⁶ marital problems,¹⁷ experiences in WWII,¹⁸ and the birth of children.¹⁹ Most interviewed also discussed their deep involvement with history outside of their personal pasts and the plethora of avenues they engaged the past. These activities varied from watching historical programs on television, keeping photographs as remembrances of experiences, to pursuing genealogical research, visiting museums and historical sites, collecting artifacts, and subscribing to historical magazines. Participants, as well, discussed sharing their knowledge with relatives, particularly children and other immediate family members.²⁰

¹² Ibid., 9

¹³ Ibid., 244-247.

¹⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵ Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 78.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹⁹ Ibid., 79.

²⁰ Ibid, page 9; 33-35.

Rosenzweig and Thelen's study provides ample evidence that Americans do care about history. Furthermore, they make considerable effort to understand, conserve, and share their knowledge of the past with others. Americans are engaged actively in history and they pursue related activities by volition. However, despite the conclusions presented by Rosenzweig and Thelen, not all historians agree on the worth of these personal approaches to history or to the presence of the past in the lives of Americans.

Michael Kammen, in his book In the Past Lane, discusses this element of personal uses of the past through examining American's interest of heritage.²¹ Kammen, like the aforementioned news articles and polls, laments on how little students and adults know about history. He attributes this lack of knowledge to what he terms as "heritage phenomenon", something he defines most notably as a type of "sugar-coated history."²² Kammen distinguishes between Americans' interest in heritage with a more national sense of a past, although nebulously. He distinguishes the two aspects of historical understanding by attributing heritage and American's fixation on it as a "beguiling daydream," "an enticement" and as an "enchantment," something necessary for museums and textbooks to appeal to the public, but as something that apparently serves as a "preparation for the pasts (wars and all) that produced the present (warts and all)."²³ The author defines heritage then as a necessary aspect of history, but as something that should lead to broader narratives of traditional history. Kammen acknowledges the importance of heritage in history, but unlike Rosenzweig and Thelen's study, does not equate heritage with

²¹ Michael Kammen, *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1997.

²² Ibid., 219.

²³ Ibid., 224-225.

history. Kammen provides a different perspective by viewing heritage as an avenue to bring persons to “enlightenment if not wisdom” about the past.²⁴

The idea of heritage is further described By David Glassberg in American Historical Pageantry.²⁵ Glassberg explains the pageantry in 19th and early 20th century America as a reaction to civic leaders trying to connect communities together under a common historical or cultural banner. This period, known as the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, was a time of great social change and industrial development following the American Civil War. Elaborate processions formed by local community’s often depicted histories important to a particular group. What made the pageantries use of history unique, Glassberg argues, is the belief these historical reenactments could bring future social and political change.²⁶ What resulted was historical pageantry becoming a professional practice of public history, something Glassberg argues as a type of connective tissue to Americans in the Progressive Era.²⁷

Glassberg, in Sense of History, further develops the idea of local communities depicting histories through his study on WWI monuments.²⁸ The chapter “Remembering a War,” examines how the small industrial area of Orange, Massachusetts preserved their memories of the Great War through a unique sculpture. More common depictions of the war included statues of soldiers bravely entering into battle, holding guns, or standing resolutely, staring ahead. The citizens of Orange chose instead to design a unique statue that reflected how they wished as a community to memorialize the war. Their final design showed two figures. A soldier dressed in a WWI uniform patiently tells an enraptured child about the tragedies and horrors of the Great War.

²⁴ Ibid., 225.

²⁵ David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1990, 225.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 285-290.

²⁸ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life*.

Below the sculpture are engraved words the community wished to underscore: “It Shall Not Be Again.”²⁹

Glassberg describes this monument as attributing a sense of history to the people of Orange. He defines a sense of history as a part of human identity, and gives humans an understanding of themselves in relation to where they came into existence. A sense of history also gives an explanation to an environment’s state.³⁰ Glassberg defines history as a fluid, personal construct and one used widely by humans to understand not only their environment but something used in reasoning self-existence:

History locates us in space, with knowledge that helps us gain a sense of *when* we are, filling in gaps in our personal recollection and family stories that allow us to understand our place in our personal recollection and family stories that allow us to understand our place in a succession of past and future generations. And history locates us in society, with knowledge that helps us gain a sense of *with whom we belong*, connecting out personal experiences and memories with those of a larger community, region, and nation.³¹

Glassberg argues historical consciousness and place consciousness are “inextricably intertwined” as humans are inclined to attach histories to places. The value attached to a place comes through memories and associated histories humans link to an area.³² Glassberg points out that little research has been done in this area of public history—a field overlapping with studies of memory—and defers instead to psychology studies examining attachment and bond formations. Research psychologists, according to Glassberg, have already demonstrated how

²⁹ Ibid., 38-39.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ Ibid., 72.

³² David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Spring 1996), 9-11; 17-19.

attachments to places in environment occur from childhood, and have demonstrated how changes to these places results in emotional stress.³³ From Glassberg's arguments, humans appear dependent on places for history, and the conservation of history remains dependent on the preservation of these places. Place and history, linked together, provide Glassberg's sense of place.

Fort Meigs' sense of place begins in the winter of 1813 after a massacre of American troops and another battle loss in Southeastern Michigan. General William Henry Harrison, alarmed at the American casualties, takes his troops and the remaining men from the massacre site south. The general orders the men to build a fort and to prepare for the enemy's attack. The War of 1812 so far appeared to be a war in the favor of the enemy. Fort Meigs, the general hoped, would help change that for the United States.

³³Ibid., 18-19.

Chapter 2

1800 – 1815: Bivouac of the Dead

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat

The soldier's last tattoo

No more on life's parade shall meet

The brave and daring few

On Fame's eternal camping ground

Their silent tents are spread

And glory guards with solemn round

The bivouac of the dead.³⁴

-Nathaniel Vernon, American private

of The Pittsburgh Blues, September 1813

³⁴ John C. Fredriksen, ed., "The Pittsburgh Blues and the War of 1812: The Memoir of Private Nathaniel Vernon," *Pennsylvania History* 56 (1989), 208.

Fort Meigs' successful sieges against the British and Native Americans became a turning point for American troops during a gloomy first year of war and altogether saved the northern states from further enemy involvement. Private Nathaniel Vernon and his Pittsburgh Blues men, along with the other soldiers and captains under the leadership of General William Henry Harrison, defeated General Procter and Tecumseh's forces twice in the spring of 1812. These defeats became an impetus for greater morale among American troops still fighting and encouraged additional victories in the area. These victories became the foundation for Fort Meigs' sense of place in the history of northwest Ohio.

Private Vernon ended his war memoir with his poem and reflected on the consequences of battle referenced through the tent's "bivouac of the dead." Vernon gave his last salute on August 28, 1813 at Fort Meigs, honorably discharged with the rest of his regiment a year and a half before the war's end. The militia's general spoke of the troops leave with regret, as they had provided aid and obedience to the war efforts, particularly with the sieges at Fort Meigs. As Vernon walked by his general during the discharge processions, he overheard his remarks on the occasion: "I would rather see five hundred militia leaving my camp, than that one company; they have been the most subordinate and best disciplined company in the Northwestern Army."³⁵

Often an overshadowed war in accounts of U.S. history, the War of 1812 emerged as the awkward middle sibling of the older Revolution and the younger Civil War. The War of 1812's story is often contained in a minute, short few paragraphs in history textbooks; England as well appeared to view the war as a nuisance before the war ended.³⁶ Although studies of the war have increased recently, the war remains as a forgotten conflict among historical research. Most of the present research focuses on the war's military history and not on the broader implications of the

³⁵ Ibid., 207.

³⁶ Wilbur Devereux Jones, "A British View of the War of 1812 and the Peace Negotiations," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Dec., 1958), 486.

war.³⁷ This war took place at a time when most Americans wanted nothing to do with another conflict against England. England was in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars, and had invested much of its energies and attentions into stopping Napoleon's sweeping gains across Europe, reaching well into parts of western Russia. Because of Napoleon's innate cunning, innovative use of geometry in aiming weaponry, and his training at the prestigious École de Militaire, England among others suffered heavy casualties in the drawn out war and found itself in great need of more able bodied men to help fight. Such men especially became needed to replace bodies in England's Royal Navy. It was from these circumstances that Americans began to feel their lack of independence from their former ruler.

England used a policy of impressment to recruit men, which called for raiding U.S. merchant ships to apprehend alleged traitors or deserters. Such expeditions, however, were not always successful in separating Americans from Englishmen, and the practice at times recruited those identifying as U.S. citizens. Some of these deserters identified as American due to living on U.S. soil—a citizenry practice England chose not to recognize. These confusions about citizenry, along with inadequate paperwork, became a festering sore to U.S. citizens and to their leaders who attempted to govern a free nation and protect its economy. The issue of impressments contributed to the outbreak of war and lengthened American's list of complaints against England. Added to this, Americans did not agree on how to best deal with these circumstances arising so quickly after its War of Independence.

The War of 1812 divided Americans amongst themselves even before being declared—a dangerous circumstance for a young nation trying to establish itself amongst world powers. Support or opposition formed in distinctly geographical areas, or generalized theatres, in the

³⁷ Donald R. Hickey, "The War of 1812: Still a Forgotten Conflict?," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), 741-769.

continental United States: the northeast, the south, and the expanding western frontier. When cooperative support emerged in areas, particularly in the south and west, arguments quickly followed of which men would serve, how many from each area, how long, and who would remain excused from battle. Religious groups traditionally and legally excused from war, like the Quakers and the Shakers, found themselves in the debate crossfire of military exemption. Ohio, for example, had not yet developed laws to exempt such conscientious objectors from war.³⁸ Confusions and difficulties like these created heated arguments about who would, but also who should, share the burden of warfare.

The northeast theatre, the area located closest to England via the United State's east coastline, suffered first from the War of 1812 and its preclusions. This theatre suffered from England's impressment policy but also in the wider area of economics. In 1807 President Thomas Jefferson had issued an Embargo Act, an act which halted any exports from the United States. This law was passed in reaction to a particular incident of impressments with England's navy, namely the opening of fire on an American ship—the Chesapeake—in a British attempt to secure supposed English traitors. As the northeast area of the United States depended upon trade, Jefferson's Embargo Act weakened the area's economy and depressed morale and support. The act was supposed to protect American ships and sailors from leaving and entering dangerous foreign ports under influence of the English and French—countries both locked into battle and in need of supplies. In 1809, after dissent within the United States, Jefferson finally relaxed and altered the confining embargo; strict trading restrictions, however, still remained for both England and France.

³⁸ Mark Pitcavage, ““Burthened in Defence of our Rights”: Opposition to Military Service in Ohio During the War of 1812,” *Ohio History*, Vol. 104 (Summer-Autumn 1995): 148.

The northeast theatre thus entered the war in the spring of 1812 already in a politically soured, pessimistic mood. As such, the area only half-heartedly supported the war efforts with the few troops it did provide. People who lived in the northeast theatre understood the power of the English navy, and knew the United States' smaller sea forces probably could not win against England's disciplined and maintained navy. The northeast, because of its poor economic condition and firsthand knowledge of the English navy, remained cautious of starting any conflict. If the United States lost the war, the northeast would crumble to the English and the area would probably be among the first to fall to England's ruling. In spite of this unsupportive stance, a few pockets of war support did exist in the northeast theatre. Mostly notably, Americans in Indiana and Ohio supported the rallying cry for war, and contributed soldiers from the beginning of the war processions.³⁹

People in the southern theatre, by contrast, held views widely different from most of the northeast and generally supported the war with shows of great enthusiasm from the onset. Some southern states, like Kentucky and Tennessee, supported the war from the original debates in Congress concerning whether or not to declare, and thus participate in, another war against England. These states also contributed many of their men to help build up troop numbers.⁴⁰ Kentucky showed such war support through its soldiers' actions and heavy losses. After the war ended, Kentucky reported the most in physical losses for any of the states.⁴¹ Many southern men, as those from Kentucky, were eager to prove their worth as a soldier and declared their patriotism through war services. Such volunteers had grown up hearing of war and battle tales from the previous generation fighting in the War of Independence, or the American Revolution.

³⁹ Robert B. McAfee, *History of the Late War in the Western Country*, (Bowling Green, OH: Historical Publications Company, 1919), 49.

⁴⁰ Mark Pitcavage, 142.

⁴¹ G. Glenn Clift, ed., "War of 1812 Diary of William B. Northcutt," (*Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*), 340.

Now, their generation had the chance to fight yet again for America's freedom, and many took advantage of such an open opportunity.

The western theatre—or more commonly, the western frontier—of the United States at this time remained isolated from the political and economic concerns sweeping the east and parts of the south. Instead westerners, in the area from Illinois south to Mississippi and expanding west, remained concerned with exploring and forging a living in what were recognized as America's western territories. A unique population of strong, toughened, and independent Americans slowly came to establish itself in these areas. A fierce pride in their labor for their country developed as a result.⁴²

These westerners believed they were completing great services for America, as they were helping to expand and develop their nation through labor in an unknown, hostile environment. This population's priority was to continue their work, but to do so they needed more people to develop the west's vast territories. The west already offered many opportunities to those living in the east, such as land, financial opportunity, and a chance for a new, or better, life. One missing element, westerners knew, hindered many from coming to the west. The assurance of safety, something especially important to those with families, was not consistent in the west. Relations with Native American tribes already living in the area were generally negative and fearful; such fears and anxieties, coupled with cultural ignorance and limited ideas of civilization, resulted in physical clashes at times and some murders.⁴³ Americans thus viewed the natives already established in the territories as inhumane, as savage obstacles dangerous to establishing a civilized white American life.

⁴² John F. Cady, 429-430.

⁴³ Ibid., 456.

Native Americans, particularly in the east, felt the pressures of white Americans sweeping into their lands, expanding and taking their resources greedily. As relations worsened, and as treaties were broken, compromised, or ignored, tribes became desperate for a solution to protect their survival as a people. A Native American from the Shawnee tribe, Tecumseh, along with his brother, commonly referred to as The Prophet, traveled across the country, asking tribes to unite in an Indian Confederation as the Prophet's earlier vision had compelled. Tecumseh felt such a union could defend his people against the white Americans, their spreading population, and the detrimental effects of the white man's liquor on their tribes.

As rumors of this Indian alliance trickled into westerners' ears, alarm rose, resulting in support for a solution to remove the natives. Added to these rumors of Tecumseh's union, news of England's impressments also reached those in the west. The westerners' zealous patriotism left no room for such embarrassments, and they viewed such actions as humiliating and simply unacceptable for an independent nation. The westerners thus came to believe a war with England could solve their problems not only with England's meddling, but also with their problems with the Native Americans as well. More Americans then could come west to help develop the nation. Though western Americans represented a minority in America's population, the passionate group greatly contributed to Congress' later, final decision to enter into war.⁴⁴

Because of the support in the south, west, and parts of the northeast, along with eager young men who wanted to fight for America's freedom again, Congress was able to declare war. War hawks in Congress, men who wanted to reignite patriotism in America's younger generations, pushed the war through the necessary government channels. These war hawks

⁴⁴ Ibid., 473.

included such figures as Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Felix Grundy.⁴⁵ These and other new members of Congress elected in the campaigns of 1810 recognized and discussed the humiliations England imposed on them through impressments and economic meddling. The war hawks played on these humiliations to the United States. They worked to convince members concerned with America's economy and tired of Jeffersonian pacifism of the necessity of war. In light of this growing support, Congress declared war against England in June 1812.⁴⁶ The United States, one generation removed from its original revolution, found itself in another war, one promoted largely by populations in the minority.

Disorganization, ineptitude, and an inflated ego of what America could accomplish soon followed these beginnings of fear, instability, and zealotry. Lofty goals emerged for the war, including the integration of Canada and the final overthrow of British influence in America's northern neighbor. Enthusiastic American soldier and captain recruits—some from the American Revolution—carried on Congress' cry for action. Native Americans led by Tecumseh and English soldiers led by General Procter allied together and fell into battle against the Americans for the next three years and few months.

When the War of 1812 began, it became a war quickly entrenched in the weak policies of President John Adams and his inept Secretary of War for most of the conflict, John Armstrong.⁴⁷ It was not unusual, for example, for soldiers not to receive their pay on time, and in some circumstances, for widows not to be compensated for their late husbands' services.⁴⁸ Important front line supplies such as medicine, the availability of doctors and surgeons, blankets, uniforms,

⁴⁵ Norman K. Risjord, "1812: Conservatives, War Hawks, and the Nation's Honor", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Apr., 1961), 196.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 196- 210.

⁴⁷ W.M. Heflinger, "The War of 1812 in Northwestern Ohio: The Year of Disasters," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, Vol. XXII, No. 3 (Summer 1950), 159-160.

⁴⁸ Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Letters to the Secretary of War 1812 Relating to the War of 1812 in the Northwest* (Document Transcriptions of the War of 1812 in the Northwest., Vol. VII, Part III), (Columbus, OH: The Ohio Historical Society, 1961), 992.

and food often ran short or undelivered during the war and harmed morale and health among soldiers. From the beginning battles, the war became miserable because of this disorganization and over-zealotry of defeating England.

Fort Detroit, a key fortification to successfully invade Canada, fell to the British all too easily in 1813 as it was surrendered by the commander, General William Hull, without any fired shots.⁴⁹ The defeat gave the British upwards of 2500 prisoners and the loss humiliated the United States. The fall of the fort eliminated any real hope of taking over Canada or integrating it into the United States. General Hull's actions angered other leaders in the war, including those in government. Hull became scheduled for execution because of these war actions, but was pardoned by President James Madison. Future attempts to invade Canada failed and the goal was never completed. Other forts fell to the enemy forces in the war, including Fort Mackinaw of Northern Michigan and Fort Dearborn of present day Chicago. As January of 1813 neared, American losses worsened, especially in the northeast.

In late January of 1813, a group of American soldiers were captured after the defeat at the Battle of Frenchtown (present day Monroe, Michigan). This winter campaign was designed in part by General Harrison to help take back Fort Detroit, but was botched by the commanding general, General James Winchester. After the defeat, American soldiers were left behind by General Procter of the British forces to be guarded by Native Americans. The general was unable to transport these remaining wounded soldiers until more sleds arrived. The Native Americans, in the general's absence, slaughtered an estimated twelve to 40 of these injured prisoners. The natives captured and scalped their victims, and burned buildings housing other American

⁴⁹ W.M. Heflinger, 162.

prisoners.⁵⁰ The act became a point of fixation for many American soldiers and “Remember the Raisin!” became a popularized cry for the duration of the war. The cry alluded not so much to the battle loss, but to the atrocities suffered by prisoners of war at the hands of the English and natives. This massacre caused General William Henry Harrison to change his plans of taking back Fort Detroit.⁵¹ General Harrison—a former aide to General Anthony Wayne in the American Revolution—with his men retreated from Frenchtown to a site by the Maumee River to take a now defensive stance against the English and Natives. He immediately ordered his men to build a fort in the winter of 1813, and chose a location at an advantageous point—a jutting bank high over the Maumee River, a location about 40 miles southeast of Frenchtown.

Named after Ohio’s governor, Return Jonathan Meigs, Fort Meigs was constructed hurriedly in response to the River Raisin Massacre and acted as a bulwark for American troops against future attacks. Captain Eleazor Darby Wood, following the illness of Captain Gratiot, took over the duties and oversaw the building of Fort Meigs in the cold winter of 1813. In his war diary, Captain Wood described the fort’s design to include eight blockhouses and four batteries, along with storehouses and underground magazines.⁵² He also described the long list of construction details, such as digging ditches, clearing away trees, and creating abatis—a line of sharpened sticks pointed upward in defense. The camp was estimated by Captain Wood to be a total of 2,500 yards total in circumference.⁵³ Captain Wood described the work as an “immense deal of labor,” something hindered by the hardened, wintered ground:

⁵⁰ “The Battle of Frenchtown,” *River Raisin Battlefield—Remember the Raisin*, http://www.riverraisinbattlefield.org/the_battles.htm.

⁵¹ W.M. Heflinger, 159.

⁵² The number of blockhouses was later changed to seven to allow for another battery.

⁵³ Eleazor D. Wood, *Journal of the Northwestern Campaign of 1812-13, under Major-General William H. Harrison*, 8-9.

...and all this to be done too, at a time when the weather was extremely severe, and the ground so hard frozen, that it was almost impossible to open it with a spade and pick-axe. But in the use of the axe, mattock and spade, consisted all the military knowledge of the army. So we fell to work to bury ourselves as fast as possible, and heard nothing of the enemy.⁵⁴

Fort Meigs, once completed, withstood two major sieges from the British and Native Americans—the first occurred in May and the second in July of 1813. The war after this began to turn in favor of the United States, with such victories as the successful defense of Fort Stephenson in Fremont, Ohio and General Harrison's October 1813 victory at the Battle of Thames. This victory lead by General Harrison helped solidify America's growing stronghold in the northeast and was the battle where the Native American leader, Tecumseh, was killed. After additional victories against the British and Native Americans, the war ended with the Treaty of Ghent signed on Christmas Eve of 1814. The treaty reaffirmed America's independence from England, but kept the issues of impressments, property repayments, and other retribution solutions ambiguous.⁵⁵ Due to inept communication, however, fighting did not end until 1815 with the Battle of New Orleans under Major General Andrew Jackson.

In a country where the War of 1812 is often forgotten, the reconstructed Fort Meigs stands as a bulwark, this time against the erosion of historical consciousness rather than against the British and Native Americans. Fort Meigs' staff and volunteers replay the events that unfolded at the fort through various events, tours, and the use of period clothing and artifacts. Reenactments, costumes, the firing of period guns, tours, displayed artifacts excavated from the site, the presence of memorials on the fort's grounds, and the continued occurrence of patriotic

⁵⁴Ibid., 9.

⁵⁵ John K. Mahon, *The War of 1812* (New York: Da Capo Press), 1972, 381.

related services all lend evidence to the long battle to preserve and protect Fort Meigs' sense of place and history to northwest Ohio.

Through public history, Fort Meigs continues to serve as a reminder of what the War of 1812 gave to Americans and those within northwest Ohio—an affirmation of their complete independence from England and a chance to expand into an area of Ohio inhabited by Native Americans. This sense of place and history of the area, however, began before the war ended. In-between the two sieges in July of 1813, American militia troops celebrated Independence Day inside the fortification. In a time when America's freedom laid precariously in the balance, the celebration reflected militia hopes of defeating the British once and for all.

Chapter 3

1813 – 1946: Early Preservation Efforts

“Yes Stranger, I would like to get a bit of information about this monument; why it was placed here; what events it commemorates and such other details of the historic surroundings as are obtainable. I have been only a casual reader of our history, and am sorry to say my memory is a little rusty, but I am very much interested to learn more right now.”⁵⁶

-Summary of passerby comments

on the Fort Meigs memorial construction, 1908

⁵⁶ C.W. Evers, e.d., *Dedication of Fort Meigs Monument: September 1, 1908*, (Bowling Green, OH: Democrat Print, no date), 7.

A sense of place began forming for Fort Meigs during the early 19th and 20th centuries as large numbers of people began visiting the area. The grassy grounds served as a site to hold recreational and political related events after the war. The fort's associated military history served as a backdrop displaying America's militant might for the events. These events drew visitors from all over the United States to northwest Ohio, bringing attention to Fort Meigs' legacy in the War of 1812. The increase in visitors promoted local interest in historical preservation of Fort Meigs' grounds, something that in turn prompted more official efforts to protect and maintain the area. Fort Meigs, instead of fading away, became increasingly important to the local identity.

Even before the War of 1812 ended, Fort Meigs began to serve as a sense of place for the soldiers and war leaders inside the fort. An Independence Day celebration took place inside the fort in between the two sieges of May and July 1813. A series of toasts, eighteen in total, proclaimed enduring freedom from Great Britain, praised current war leaders such as General Harrison, ridiculed English officers, mourned over losses thus had, and alluded to America's future victory and the war's sought for successful end.⁵⁷ The Independent Volunteers, a corps present at Meigs, played songs such as Yankee Doodle, the Turkish march, and Hail Columbia for those present. Through this Independence Day celebration, Fort Meigs reignited a candle of identity and purpose to the militia fighting and waiting for the end of their second American revolution. This celebration held at the fort reminded the men of their sense of duty, their sense of identity, and gave them their sense of place.

After the successful defeat of the British at Fort Meigs and the deflection of General Procter and the allied Native Americans, the fort was abandoned. The entire fort was dismantled

⁵⁷ "Fourth of July in Camp," *National Intelligencer*, July 29, 1813.

at this point, save for a northwest corner segment left to stand.⁵⁸ In December of 1814, the war officially ended; fighting, however, continued into early 1815 with the Battle of New Orleans before the treaty could be relayed. After this disorganized ending of the war, the fort and the grounds fell into disuse until 1817, when the government sold the area.⁵⁹ The land was sold through the “Spafford Grant of 160 acres” by a “special act of Congress.” Major Amos Spafford received the title to the land, the first deeded land act to occur in Wood County. The granted title made Spafford the first permanent settler and landowner in the county.⁶⁰ The remaining portion of the fort left behind in 1815 was generally thought to have been either torn down later by militia or burned down by careless squatters. The original fort, however its closing epilogue took place, no longer existed after 1815. Its grounds became subject to an array of new settlers that the War of 1812’s victories encouraged into the area.

Northwest Ohio began to see an influx of settlers, both American and foreign, in the post-war decades. Even though there were a few scattered settlers in the region before the conflict, the area remained largely uninhabited by Americans up to the war period.⁶¹ This isolation of northwest Ohio was due to the remoteness of the location, the presence of Native American tribes, and the challenging, swampy geography of the area.⁶² Following the end of the war, more white settlers began to explore this area of Ohio. Government policy encouraged this through treaties designed to remove reservations protecting Native American tribes.⁶³ The area, one commonly referred to as the ‘Black Swamp’, challenged settlers with its muddy ground coupled with few paths to navigate through the swampy terrain. The ground’s characteristics especially

⁵⁸ Richard J. Wright, “Fort Meigs Dedication,” *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, Vol. XL VIII, No. 3 (Summer 1976), 107.

⁵⁹ “The Heroes of Fort Meigs,” *Ohio Archaeological and History Publications*, Vol. XII, 1903, 334.

⁶⁰ C.W. Evers, 11-12.

⁶¹ Francis P. Weisenburger, “Northwest Ohio a Hundred Years Ago,” *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (January 1944): 12-13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 12-14.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

posed problems to agricultural development. Those settlers wishing to farm in the area became forced to take on large-scale drainage projects to make it suitable for farming.

With this increased flow of out-of-state Americans settling into the Black Swamp came immigrants as well. These people included primarily French, German, and Irish groups. Cholera, a disease that manifested itself overtime in the Perrysburg area, was thought erroneously to be introduced by these immigrants—either those living in the area or simply passing through.⁶⁴ The water born disease affected small numbers of people until the 1854 epidemic.⁶⁵ A 1974 Perrysburg newspaper article commented on the extreme nature of the outbreak, with upwards of around 100 to 300 persons dying of choleric like symptoms. Around 700 citizens fled the area in hopes of escaping the fatal illness, reducing the population of an estimated 1,300 to approximately three hundred.⁶⁶ In this period of increased settlement and expansion, the ownership of Fort Meigs' grounds began to change and the area became a place to hold community events. The protection of the grounds in these changes began under a farmer and community labeled fort wizard—Timothy Hayes.

In 1841, the Hayes family leased the Fort Meigs' grounds. Timothy Hayes, an Irish immigrant, remained a bachelor throughout his life. He became, with the help of a brother, the owner and self-proclaimed caretaker of the fort's grounds. During Hayes' life, he ensured that no farming or land development occurred. Hayes used the land to graze livestock instead of cultivation. This act preserved the ground and protected the graves of over 800 soldiers buried at the site from shovels or plows. Visitors interested in the area were informed of the history of the fort by this “Wizard of Fort Meigs” wandering over the grounds, a nickname due to Timothy

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Karilon Jacobs, “Cholera epidemic of 1854 struck terror in Perrysburg,” *Perrysburg-Messenger Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), July 25, 1974.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1-2.

Hayes' long figure, dangling beard, blue eyes, and accompanying lantern. Reportedly, the Wizard gladly gave a tour for an exchange of a picnic lunch.

Hayes not only helped preserve the land, but also preserved the historical memories of the fort. Hayes actions carried on the sense of place the fort offered to the area. On July 5, 1864, the Hayes brothers purchased the fort's grounds.⁶⁷ Veterans who later visited the site commented on their surprise of the well-kept property where the fort once stood. James Averill, author of the article, "Fort Meigs, A Condensed History," attributed this in part to the type of sod the grounds contained, a feature that preserved the earthen mounds built to stop British cannon balls, along with the outlines of the fort's structures and of the fort's original five openings.⁶⁸ Averill also attributed these lasting marks of the fort to the "proprietor of the domain" along with the "patriotic citizens of the community" who helped take care of the grounds.⁶⁹

General William Henry Harrison's presidential rally of 1840 was the first event held at the fort grounds. A year before the Hayes leased the grounds, an estimated 40,000 persons attended to listen to General Harrison deliver his campaign promises. The spectators came by ship, train cars, wagons, and even horseback, across the United States including Indiana, Michigan, New York, Kentucky, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Representatives and other delegates of the states arrived early on June 10th for the three-day political celebration held at Fort Meigs; General Harrison was scheduled to speak on the 11th, with other political figures to speak afterwards. But as *The Toledo Blade* later emphatically reported, "the PEOPLE", the "farmer, the mechanic, and the laboring man, the hardworking and the weatherbeaten

⁶⁷ "Commemorate Historical and Biographic Record of Wood County, Ohio; Its past and Present...", J.H. Beers and Co., (Chicago), 1897, Vol. 1, 591-592.

⁶⁸ Averill, James P., "Fort Meigs, A Condensed History of the Most Important Military Point in the Northwest, Together With Scenes and Incidents Connected with the Sieges of 1813, and a Minute Description of the Old Fort and its Surroundings as they now Appear," *Blade Printing and Paper Co.*, (Toledo, OH), 1886, 36-38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

yeomanry”, were also present in great number alongside the campaigners.⁷⁰ The visitors raised banners in support of Harrison and political goals, bearing phrases such as “Justice to the man who is too modest to be just to himself” and “A protective Tarriff, sound currency, no reduction of wages.”⁷¹

As *The Toledo Blade* commentary pointed out, Harrison used Fort Meigs’ grounds—either purposely or accidentally—to reflect his war duties and his services to the state of Ohio. General Harrison began his speech describing his decision to attend the day’s events to appease a friend’s wishes; the general was previously going to stay home from the occasion.⁷² After this humble introduction, the presidential candidate described some of his memories of the fort’s grounds that surrounded his stage. During his speech, General Harrison pointed to an area of the fort where he witnessed fallen comrades being buried; he expressed his anguish and deep wishes to redeliver entrusted husbands and sons to the mothers and wives waiting for their safe returns.⁷³ Preempting this war story was an emotional reunion with a fellow General James Hedges, one who had stood by General Harrison’s side during the war. General Hedges joined General Harrison by request on the stage in a publicly viewed reunion to the 40,000 in attendance, causing “many a glistening eye” and “swelling of the breasts.”⁷⁴

The effect of Harrison using the fort’s grounds to support his campaign helped him to win the election and become the ninth president of the United States. Harrison died, however, months after beginning his term—the first president to die in office. Harrison’s memories of fighting for the freedom of his future spectators and supporters, along with the reunion of the

⁷⁰ “The Celebration at Fort Meigs”, *The Toledo Blade* (Toledo, OH), June 17, 1840.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

General in the crowd, bolstered Harrison's popularity. The campaign held at Fort Meigs brought attention to the grounds as well, along its sense of place.

By the end of the century, following the Hayes ownership and caretaking, the revered status of the fort began to lose public notice. In a 1897 address delivered before the Maumee Pioneer Valley Association reunion held at Fort Meigs, comments were made about the grounds' increasing ill kept state. The group, composed of earlier settlers, attempted to preserve local history, particularly at the fort.⁷⁵ The speaker, Judge C.H. Norris, went so far as to describe the conditions as a veritable "disgrace" to the soldiers who remained buried there.⁷⁶ Since Timothy Hayes had reached old age at this point, it was possible the caretaking tasks became too much for him and his brother to maintain. Whatever the circumstances, the caretaking baton of Fort Meigs passed. The quest to memorialize the fallen and beautify the grounds was taken up by another group working to uphold the fort's sense of place. Women of another historical organization—the Wives and Daughters of the Boys in Blue—took up the cause of Fort Meigs' crumbling status.

Around 1903, outrage by the "band of patriotic women of the Maumee Valley"⁷⁷ resounded, and members of this group pulled on heartstrings to help preserve Fort Meigs. As the site neared its centennial, nothing had been done to memorialize the grounds, particularly the soldier's graves. A commission from Kentucky, a group that already established a memorial for their fallen soldiers on the grounds, inquired of the Maumee Valley Pioneer and Historical Association why Ohio had done nothing to mark the grounds for their soldiers' graves.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ C.W. Evers, 16-17.

⁷⁶ Judge C. H. Norris, "Address Delivered Before the Pioneers At Their Reunion At Ft. Meigs August 12th, 1896, by Judge C.H. Norris, of Marion, Ohio," *Addresses, Memorials, and Sketches Published by the Maumee Valley Pioneer Association to Be Delivered at the Reunion At the Old Court House, Maumee September 10, 1897*, Vrooman, Anderson, & Bateman (Toledo, OH:1897), 23.

⁷⁷ Richard J. Wright, 333.

⁷⁸ C.W. Evers, 15.

The women shrewdly targeted their campaign toward living soldiers who remembered the fort and its significant role in the war. The group pointed to the more than 800 graves left unmemorialized, and alluded to the present meaninglessness of Memorial Day to the dead soldiers.⁷⁹ The women presented fears of how future agricultural development, unrestricted nature, or even the northern state climate could destroy the peace and memory of the veterans, to the point of possibly harming their interred remains. The group challenged local people's gratitude for the dead soldier's deeds through their poor care of the grounds, something previously left to the Hayes. In a Wives and Daughters' circular published in 1903 by the *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, the members admonished the U.S. government for selling the land, ignorant of what it held:

...and almost before the blood of the slain had dried on the bosom of the hillside which had received their mangled forms, the Government, all unaware of its terrible act of ingratitude, sold Fort Meigs—sold Fort Meigs, with its battlefield, its fortified grounds, its scenes of valor, and its soldiers' graves. Brave hearts lay stilled beneath the turf whose every beat in life was for home, flag, and country—but they were sold.⁸⁰

President Theodore Roosevelt stopped the plowing and destruction of these unmarked graves a few months before the women raised the call to memorialize and preserve. According to the circular, President Roosevelt brought the issue to the Secretary of War to stop the further neglect and destruction of the soldiers' graves.⁸¹ It was from this brush with destruction that the Wives and Daughters centered their first efforts to memorialize the fort's grounds with some sort of marker; the group logically decided the exhuming and relocation of the 825 bodies as

⁷⁹ Richard J. Wright, 335.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 334.

⁸¹ Ibid., 335.

unfeasible. Instead, the women asked for living veterans to donate to their fund—the only population they allowed to donate. For another fee of ten cents, the veterans could become a member of the Fort Meigs Protective League; the members' names would be published in *The Toledo Daily Bee*, advertising their patriotic support to the community.⁸² The women estimated \$15,000 would be sufficient to purchase the Fort Meigs property, improve the land's visage, and to erect the monument. It was thus with these women that the call to memorialize Fort Meigs as a sense of place continued after the Hayes' efforts. As the fort's state became a subject of discussion again, the ownership of the fort's land also became a topic of discussion.

In 1903, the land's owner, a "Mr. Duncan who resides in New York", sold 11 of 58 acres to the Maumee Valley Pioneer and Historical Association.⁸³ The following year, another important moment of the fort's history occurred: the first raising of an American flag since the war campaigns. The flag, raised 100 feet, was to wave on the grounds for "all public days and other fete occasions" and marked, according to *The Toledo News-Bee's* commentary, the beginning of an "aggressive campaign" to unify the fort's land under a common ownership. Only about 250 persons attended the demonstration because of impending weather, but the event was marked by speakers, patriotic songs sung by school children, letter readings, and invocations to acquire the remainder of the fort's grounds. The commentary ended on the picnic grounds of the fort, an area the public was using as recreational space—an activity that continued into the twenty first century.⁸⁴ Action to own, preserve, and memorialize the fort's grounds—almost a full hundred years after the war's end—was finally underway. The fort's sense of place to its people was reemerging.

⁸² Ibid., 336.

⁸³ Richard J. Wright, 110.

⁸⁴ "Stars and Striped Unfurled Over The Site Of Fort Meigs," *Toledo News-Bee* (Toledo, OH), April 20, 1904.

Legislation and deal making followed these cries, picking up the cause to unite the fort's land under a common ownership. In March of 1906, the state of Ohio purchased the main strip of land the fort originally stood on, along with a part of a highway built over the graves of an estimated 40 Pittsburgh Blue soldiers. The land was purchased through an act of the General Assembly. Another purchase of 36 acres was settled from the Hayes heirs on June 12, 1907 for \$10,800. Smaller parts of the fort land, areas purchased previously by the Maumee Valley and Pioneer Association, were still kept in separate, but cooperative, ownership. In September 1907, a contract for \$14,000 was drawn up for the memorial construction—a budget the commission kept.⁸⁵

In September 1908, the first fruits of memorializing, commemorating, and preserving Fort Meigs were realized. From the base to the top of the monument, the granite shaft was an imposing 81 feet and 8 inches.⁸⁶ A program by the Pioneers of Maumee Valley advertised the unveiling ceremonies as including a picnic around 10 a.m. in the morning, with the memorial to be unveiled later that afternoon. Civil War officers spoke at the event, along with Governor Andrew Harris of Ohio. Trolley lines from Toledo—ones running to the fort every thirty minutes—were advertised at the end of the program, encouraging visitors from outside the area to take a trolley to witness the unveiling.⁸⁷ Altogether, approximately 7,000 spectators arrived for the monument's unveiling.

In 1910, \$3,629.02 was appropriated from Ohio's state treasury to build up and maintain the fort's grounds. These maintenance projects included the installation of driveways, sidewalks, and the planting of trees and other landscaping flora. The act was amended in 1911 by the Ohio

⁸⁵ C.W. Evers, 14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3, 14.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

House of Representatives to include specific details of how to appropriate the money.⁸⁸ In 1911, the act was again amended to establish a commission of five Ohio citizens. These citizens were to protect and maintain the fort's grounds and memorial for a term of five years.⁸⁹ An additional \$5,000 dollars was appropriated for these efforts, along with building a potential cottage for the caretaker(s).⁹⁰

In 1912, the centennial celebration of Fort Meigs and the War of 1812 took place. A full 100 years since the War of 1812, Ohio, several surrounding Great Lake states, and Kentucky and Rhode Island, took notice of the occasion. The centennial commissions of Toledo and Fremont devised an extravagant pageant for northwest Ohio, including reenactments of the sieges at Fort Meigs, General Perry's victory at Lake Erie, the defense of nearby Fort Stephenson, and a reenactment of the Battle of Fallen Timbers.⁹¹ Armies, boat fleets, charges and bombardments were all planned; written daily schedules included detailed battle reenactments of the Revolution and the War of 1812. These reenactments were designed to display America's might against its past foes. These states became so enraptured by the centennial that President Woodrow Wilson became involved in the festivity planning. With the authority of Congress, he designated \$250,000 for the events, an action that encouraged other states to provide financial support.⁹² However, the extravagant and detailed plans were scrapped. In the spring of 1913, Ohio experienced devastating floods with "appalling loss of property and life" which stopped the dramatic pageantry from taking place.⁹³

⁸⁸ General Assembly of the State of Ohio, House, *An act to make appropriation for the improvements and maintenance of Fort Meigs*, No. 596, (May 10, 1911).

⁸⁹ General Assembly of the State of Ohio, House, *An Act Providing for the care and protection of the memorial at Fort Meigs.*, No. 913, (February 25, 1908): H 13G-14G.

⁹⁰ C.W. Evers, 14-15.

⁹¹ Lucy Elliot Keeler, "The Centennial Celebration of the Siege of Fort Meigs," *Ohio History*, Vol. 23, 1914, 34-37.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

However, another commission took up the cause to commemorate the War of 1812. The Toledo Perry Centennial Committee planned for a week of celebrations, beginning Sunday July 27. General Oliver Hazard Perry's boat, the *Niagara*, was scheduled to arrive, the first attraction to kick off the centennial. The arrival of the boat alluded to General Perry's victories during the war that rid British influence from Lake Erie and allowed General Harrison to advance against the enemy.⁹⁴ The city of Perrysburg took its namesake from General Perry for his war deeds. Celebrations of the sieges at Fort Meigs followed, organized by the Maumee Valley Historical Association. Reenactments and salutes came next, including the performance of the patriotic song "America" performed by school children, various speeches, and, of course, a picnic lunch held at the fort. A poem was recited among the addresses by a descendant from opposing sides of the American Revolution—the Americans and Native Americans. A woman referred to as Mrs. Gentry traced her ancestry to both Little Turtle of the Miami tribe and to Captain William Wells, a captain under General Anthony Wayne. The poem narrated the present conditions of Fort Meigs with "emerald carpet" and "whispering trees" and poetically delineated the different history the grounds had seen in the War of 1812.⁹⁵ Another speaker, Judge Hardy Doyle, commented on the occasion's importance as evidence of continued peace between England and the United States.⁹⁶ The Toledo Art Museum took part in the centennial celebrations, displaying battle paintings, portraits, and relics, including personal belongings of General Harrison and General Perry.⁹⁷

Fort Meigs' grounds held other celebrations following the centennial that displayed America's continued power through military victories. On September 13, 1919, a "Grand

⁹⁴ John K. Mahon, *The War of 1812* (New York: Da Capo Press), 1972, 175.

⁹⁵ Lucy Elliot Keeler., 41.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 48.

Victory Celebration” was held at Fort Meigs organized by the Maumee Valley Pioneer and Historical Association in recognition of the end of World War I. Tanks and airplanes arrived at 11:00 a.m., followed by a basket lunch, a naval band concert, air stunts, a military salute, presentations of war medals, followed by addresses by government and religious leaders, all ending with an exhibition by the Boy Scouts of America.⁹⁸

Upkeep of the fort became secure in this period. In late December of 1920, an appropriation of \$10,000 was given by Ohio’s Secretary of State to help the Fort Meigs Commission continue to maintain the fort.⁹⁹ This group continued to hold regular meetings to take care of fort related concerns as they arose.¹⁰⁰ In July 1946, following World War II, an additional ten and a half acres of land was dedicated to the memorializing efforts. This dedication brought Fort Meigs’ total owned acreage to 55 acres.¹⁰¹ The fort’s next era, however, took a different turn. Thus far, the citizens of the area had accomplished owning the land in a cooperative, unified manner. The soldiers were memorialized, the centennial celebrated, and the ground maintenance secured. In view of these victories, ideas of actually reconstructing the original fortification in its War of 1812 state began to be discussed. The next thirty years of the fort’s history involved what one 1989 *Sentinel-Tribune* article referred to as “pulling political teeth”¹⁰² to restore the fort to its original existence.

Fort Meigs’ first hundred years following the war defined its future as a sense of place to northwest Ohio. Greater citizen and local involvement in the care of Fort Meigs emerged as the

⁹⁸ “Grand Victory Celebration Held at Fort Meigs,” flier, September, 13, 1919.

⁹⁹ A.V. Donahey, “Department of Auditor of State,” letter, December, 29, 1920.

¹⁰⁰ General Assembly of the State of Ohio, House, *An Act Providing for the care and protection of the memorial at Fort Meigs.*, No. 913, (February 25, 1908): H 13G-14G.

¹⁰¹ Jesse R. Long, ed., “Fort Meigs Park Addition Dedicated,” *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, 102-103.

¹⁰² Paula Davis, “Battle to restore Fort Meigs was 10 years of pulling political teeth,” *Sentinel-Tribune* (Bowling Green, OH), July 25, 1989.

fort's condition declined after Timothy Hayes stewardship. The battle to memorialize the grounds was over by 1908, but the battle to create a national awareness of the site had begun. As ideas of reconstruction circulated, Fort Meigs' sense of place increased in northwest Ohio, propelling efforts to rebuild the fortification of 130 years ago.

Chapter 4

1946 – 1980: Reconstruction

“The restoration of Fort Meigs will proceed as normal this summer. It will be delayed.”¹⁰³

-1970 *Toledo Blade* commentary

¹⁰³ “Work on Fort Meigs Again Delayed,” *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), February 11, 1970.

The decision to rebuild the 1813 wooden fortification built by General William Henry Harrison and his men ignited another war all of its own. The project, intended to take two years to complete, turned into a ten year ordeal. These war years became riddled with financial, engineering, and land ownership issues, political red tape, negative public relations, miscommunications, and work delays piled onto work delays. Fort Meigs' completion appeared to hang in an ever-lengthening limbo; its final reconstruction appeared tentative and unsure. The forces involved in the reconstruction, however, remained committed throughout the delays, and eventually saw the construction and official opening of the site to its completion.

Fort Meigs' importance as a sense of place grew steadily and resolutely despite these decade long efforts. Fort Meigs and the struggle undertaken to re-establish it after 150 years provided unmistakable evidence of its psychological worth to the area and its source of identity to the local history. Because of the many challenges involved in the reconstruction, the project could have been delayed indefinitely or those involved could have quit out of frustration. Further still, the public's outcries with the changes alluded to the value and identity the local community connected to the fort's grounds. A sense of place already existed with Fort Meigs, and the troubled reconstruction, at least at first, damaged this. Discussions turned into arguments about how to consider and replicate historical accuracy, while also respecting the public's attachments to Fort Meigs' grounds as a park. Delays resulted from the groups not working together to create a clear interpretive mission; the OHS and construction crews remained more concerned about historical accuracy to 1813, and not present day historical meanings compared to the public and Citizens Committee. However, this long war to rebuild Fort Meigs did not undermine its sense of place, but rather radically emphasized it. Instead of giving up in the face of challenges, the drive to finish the fort became stronger and the eventual outcome succeeded in creating a renewed and

revitalized sense of place to the area's residents. Fort Meigs, after 10 years of start and stop labor, became the largest reconstructed wooden fortification in the United States.¹⁰⁴

Beginning interest for the historical development and recognition of the lower Maumee Valley's rich history—a geographic area that included Fort Meigs—began in the latter half of the 1950's. The Anthony Wayne Parkway Board, a self-described “planning agency”, authored a report for the development of historical sites in the Valley and listed Fort Meigs as the first site in the report's table of contents. The board's objectives were to share and make known the history of the lower Maumee Valley area, to create facilities to channel and provide this information to the general public, and to attract tourists and visitors to the area for local business. In a letter written to the director of the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board (a state group involved in Fort Meigs reconstruction efforts), members of the board argued that the Valley was “one of the richest historical and recreational areas in Ohio” and that its “many resources need to be put to use.”¹⁰⁵ Fort Meigs, the board envisioned, would act as a center for the “historical activity” proposed in the Lower Maumee Valley.¹⁰⁶ The board's specific proposals for Fort Meigs included new markers for the site, a redevelopment of old markers, a museum to display local war artifacts, and a program of historical interpretation using the fort's grounds. This interpretation of the fort grounds would be aided by a proposed created map of Fort Meigs in 1813. Once established on the grounds, the board felt the map would show visitors significant points of interest in the area.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Karilon Jacobs, “Fort Meigs to Open Friday August 1,” *Perrysburg Messenger Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), July 31, 1975.

¹⁰⁵ Guy D. Hawley and J. Richard Lawwill, letter to the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board, ca. 1956.

¹⁰⁶ Guy D. Hawley and J. Richard Lawwill, “The Anthony Wayne Park Board: A Program of Development for the Lower Maumee Valley,” September 1956, 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

The idea to rebuild Fort Meigs in its entirety—a goal that the Anthony Wayne Parkway Board did include in its report—came from Arthur Jenkins, an Illinois publishing house owner. Jenkins recognized the importance that Fort Meigs held during the War of 1812, along with its wider significance to Ohio history. Jenkins also traced some of his ancestors to Fort Meigs and knew of their involvement during its sieges. These two factors added to Jenkins’ interest in seeing Fort Meigs made into what he described as a veritable “historical shrine.” He described his vision in a letter to William Welsh, the superintendent of historical sites in northwest Ohio.¹⁰⁸ Jenkins’ idea remained undeveloped and was pushed to the backburner. The idea to attract national attention to Fort Meigs began much earlier; an 1893 demonstration by a 16th regiment was intended to result in a shrine similar to Jenkins’ vision.¹⁰⁹ These ideas resurfaced in 1965 when the state of Ohio passed a bond issue for historical restoration projects. Fort Meigs and the “historical shrine” concept reemerged, but not to the extent of the original vision. At first, the Fort Meigs restoration project was overshadowed by nearby Fort Miami, a fort which had been served in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. The historical importance of this area was connected to General Anthony Wayne’s 1795 Treaty of Greenville, a treaty which set clear boundaries between white settlers and Native Americans and allowed further settlement into northern Ohio. In early development plans for the area, the better known history of Fallen Timbers took precedence over a focus on the War of 1812 at Fort Meigs. Planners at Fort Miami received \$90,000 for reconstruction, while Fort Meigs was given \$70,000 for its projects.¹¹⁰

Private property owners of some of Fort Miami’s land halted redevelopment plans and drastically changed Fort Meigs’ future. These land owners did not want to give up their property and refused to compromise in deals with the Ohio Historical Society (OHS). The OHS and

¹⁰⁸ Karilon Jacobs.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

construction workers found themselves working with a much smaller amount of property after this failure to consolidate Fort Miami's original land base, and the available acreage did not allow for the planned full reconstruction of Fort Miami. In reaction to these circumstances, Fort Miami and Fort Meigs switched roles in the reconstruction plans: Miami's project aspirations dramatically shrank, and the project received a lesser amount of funding—a sum of \$10,000—while the rest of Miami's original funds, \$80,000, shifted to Fort Meigs. With a new total of \$160,000—an amount more than doubling Fort Meigs' original grant—a fuller reconstruction project became possible.

Robert Barber had become chairman of the Citizens Committee for Fort Meigs just prior to the reconstruction era. The Citizens Committee served as a group (along with the OHS) that oversaw and interacted with many of the reconstruction efforts developed for Fort Meigs. Unlike the OHS and later construction workers, however, the Citizens Committee's members consisted mostly of area residents who purposefully remained in contact with the public and their desires for Fort Meigs. Barber received the request to act as chairman of the Citizens Committee from Judge Lair Fess, an OHS trustee. He informed Barber that his role would involve “mostly ceremonial duties”, “visiting the site” of Fort Meigs and “presiding over local meetings” regarding general site business.¹¹¹ At this time, the fort's reconstruction was not yet a pursuit among Citizens Committee members and Barber entered the group based on Judge Lair Fess' lukewarm description. When Barber convened the group, Jenkins' idea of reconstructing the fort resurfaced. With financial backing now in place, Barber and his committee, along with the OHS, decided to embark on the recreation of Fort Meigs. The war had begun.

An initial battle in the reconstruction concerned the relocation of the 1908 Fort Meigs' monument—all 81 feet and 8 inches of the granite shaft, along with its cement foundation. OHS

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Director Daniel Porter argued that the original location of the monument, one in the center of the fort's grounds, was "inappropriate" to the 1813 period. Porter and the OHS proposed moving the shaft from the center of the fort grounds to the newly planned public entrance of the reconstructed fort. Their quest for finite historical accuracy later was criticized by the local press and plagued reconstruction efforts. One Toledo *Blade* article poked fun at the other obvious "historically inaccurate" components of the reconstructed fort, such as "central heating, electricity, a souvenir shop, and a restroom complex"—all characteristics anachronistic to the time of 1813 and yet ones approved by Porter.¹¹² The plan to move the Fort Meigs monument, however, never came to fruition and the shaft remained at its central location. Another *Blade* article cited "high removal cost" as one of the points used against moving the monument, a monument that took close to 100 years to create and memorialize the fort's dead.¹¹³

A second heated controversy Barber and the OHS experienced involved Fort Meigs' trees. The fort's land had long been used by travelers and area citizens as picnic grounds, a tradition dating back to the early 19th century. Many trees dotted the fort's grounds and provided both shade and picturesque scenery to the area's grassy fields bordering the Maumee River. Area citizens used the grounds for picnicking and socializing, while children used the land and fort embankments to play. Fort Meigs' trees thus were attached to the site and represented a natural oasis for the community, a place of outside enjoyment tied loosely to the fort's military history.

The fort's construction by Harrison and his men in 1813 had used the trees in the area to build Fort Meigs. Others not used were cut down to create a clear line of sight for the soldiers and officers, while other trees provided firewood for cooking, light for sentry duties, and heat for warmth in the winter. When reconstruction projects began in 1967, the OHS and construction

¹¹² "Quest for Historical Accuracy at Fort Includes Central Heat, Souvenir Shop", *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), August 24, 1973.

¹¹³ John Grigsby, "Full Fort Meigs Restoration Delayed Two Years," *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), ca. 1972.

wanted to portray Fort Meigs as close to its 1813 original structure as possible—a vision they saw as ideal for historical recreation. The trees grown after the war and used by modern day visitors had to go.

Construction workers dug up the trees in 1967 during the beginning phases of the fort's reconstruction. Area residents were shocked and then mortified at the number of trees felled—an estimated total of eighty.¹¹⁴ The trees consisted of “cottonwoods, maples, elms, willows, and hawthorns” some with trunks “1 to 2 ½ feet in diameter.”¹¹⁵ When attacked later for cutting down too many trees, the OHS cited a variety of reasons for their actions. Some of the trees were dying and needed to be removed, while others were cut to allow movement of the construction workers' machines. Porter also claimed that additional dirt was needed for building up of the fort's ramparts and embankments. Previous construction crews had removed the mounds when the nearby State Route 65 was built—a road then bisecting the fort's grounds. Dirt was taken from nearby abandoned canals, canals which dated back to early Ohio settlement. The dirt was needed for fill material, however, and the trees growing in or nearby the canal beds were also removed.¹¹⁶ Some of the trees that were cut down, as had occurred in Harrison's time, were used in parts of the reconstruction process itself. In addition, OHS officials announced plans to exclude picnicking from inside of the barricade—an area traditionally left open to residents and visitors. This announcement added to the growing resentment and alarm in the surrounding communities.¹¹⁷

The feelings of local citizens concerning the changes were expressed in an array of editorial letters and articles that circulated throughout the area. Barber, throughout these initial

¹¹⁴ “Quest for Historical Accuracy at Fort Includes Central Heat, Souvenir Shop.”

¹¹⁵ “Fort Meigs Tree Cutting Riles Citizens' Committee,” *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), August 23, 1973.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ John Grigsby.

phases, reported receiving “irate letters and crank calls”, complaints about “living in a sea of mud” during the construction work, and opinions that the reconstruction was “glorifying war.”¹¹⁸ The area’s sense of place was being changed in a way incongruent with the wishes of the area residents using the area recreationally and not as a site of war history fixed in the year 1813.

An editorial appearing in the *Toledo Blade* in 1973 boldly commented on the OHS’ “utter disdain for citizen feelings” through its destruction of the trees and the popularly used picnic grounds. Presumably a local resident, Lloyd Hill called for restoring the trees to the site to protect the recreation spot. He questioned OHS’ mission of serving the public if it refused to recognize the public’s outcries over the desecration of the public grounds. Hill ended his letter with how he perceived the feelings of the community, alluding to the “very little enthusiasm” and “even less understanding” of the current restoration projects the fort’s grounds was undergoing. This confusion, Hill believed, led him to question the use of the public funds allotted for the restoration project.¹¹⁹ A similarly toned article, titled “Assault on Fort Meigs,” discussed another issue area residents experienced: the cutting off any visitation to the site during reconstruction. This announcement promoted further resentment toward the reconstruction process:

Is it not possible during the period of construction work to still permit people to come and enjoy as much of the site as feasible—let bikers ride through the roadway and children run over the grassy ramparts and adults inspect the interesting work under way—without feeling they are trespassing or committing some even more horrid sin?¹²⁰

This “people-be-damned attitude” was underlined by Joseph Thatcher’s defense of the cutting of trees. An associate curator of the OHS, Thatcher felt the “trees wouldn’t be used for anything

¹¹⁸ “The Struggle and the Glory,” *Bend of the River* (Maumee, OH), May, 1976, 18.

¹¹⁹ Lloyd J. Hill, “Letter to the Editor,” *Perrysburg Messenger-Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), August 30, 1973.

¹²⁰ “Assault on Fort Meigs,” *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), August 26, 1973.

other than shade” and that the loss was, again, for the more important sake of historical accuracy. Because of the outrage caused from the tree cutting and removal of the picnic area, three Maumee officials involved with Fort Miami’s separate projects promised that no trees would be removed from Miami’s grounds. They promised to plant trees at the site instead, in hopes of avoiding any similar public relations catastrophe as experienced at Fort Meigs.¹²¹

The Citizen’s Committee of Fort Meigs, however, saw the felling of trees for sake of historical accuracy in a different light—one closer and sensitive to the area residents’ perspective. Barber, the committee’s chairman, related the group’s disgust with the construction workers’ actions. Previous to any reconstruction work, the Citizens Committee had purposely discussed saving as many trees as possible with OHS and the construction workers, who, in turn, agreed with the goal. Despite these preliminary talks, OHS construction workers proceeded with destroying 80 trees on Fort Meigs’ grounds. Committee members, according to Barber, understood that some tree removal was needed, but that historical accuracy could have been altered to save many of the trees. The committee wished to protect the area’s greenery and picnicking atmosphere to accommodate the wishes of area residents who enjoyed it, and to not take it away for the sake of history.¹²² Porter’s decision to cut down the 80 trees in lieu of the Citizen’s Committee and residents’ wishes became known as “Porter’s Folly.”¹²³

Other problems followed the proposed monument relocation, the removal of the trees and picnic grounds, along with the poor dealings with the public. Financial issues and land ownership problems emerged as the price tag for Fort Meigs’ reconstruction plans rose to a total of \$575,000 because of the long delays and engineering problems. The reconstruction project had received an initial \$160,000 from Ohio’s 1965 bond issue; in 1969, it received an additional

¹²¹ “Quest for Historical Accuracy at Fort Includes Central Heat, Souvenir Shop.”

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

bond issue of \$425,000 to help cover costs—a bond that was to end in two years time as a biennium. Before the bond ended, \$54,972 was issued for the purchase of 1,908 logs and 41 timbers for construction of stockade walls and four remaining blockhouses.¹²⁴ Along with these fluctuating money concerns, an issue that had riddled the fort's memorializing efforts of the 19th and 20th centuries resurfaced. Land ownership problems occurred again in the late 1960's when a Toledo Real Estate developer acquired portions of the fort's western and southern grounds. The land was eventually sold to another group in Toledo, and this group sold it to the OHS. This land shuffling, though successful in the end for the reconstruction cause, cost the project a year of wasted time.¹²⁵

Perhaps the most daunting engineering issue the reconstruction faced concerned the road that bisected Fort Meigs' grounds. The highway represented a safety challenge to future tourists and posed as an obvious historical inaccuracy. This issue of Route 65 delayed the fort's reconstruction completely for an estimated two year as construction could not resume until after the road's removal and relocation. Financial problems delayed this endeavor, as Fort Meigs' funds were dwindling. Though the issue of the road came up several times before 1970, it was ignored. A 2.7 mile section of the road was finally moved 600 feet to the south of the fort grounds with funds raised by the local Perrysburg Council, a total of \$51,496. Other money was allotted by the council for the road's improvement, along with a diversion of Crooked Creek that needed to happen before the road's relocation. Pressure-treated and preserved logs were ordered from the Hoge Lumber Co. of New Knoxville, Ohio during the road's relocation. These logs were to be used to finish the remaining projects after the highway's removal. The logs were stored on the grounds, left to sit as a reminder of the delay. The stagnant work, represented by

¹²⁴ John Grigsby.

¹²⁵ Karilon Jacobs.

the stacked logs, became criticized by an observant local journalist.¹²⁶ A further snag followed these hurdles. The first contractors—A. Bentley and Sons—were unable to become recertified in time to finish the construction of the blockhouses after the creek and road projects were finished. A new contracting bid was awarded to the Rudolph-Libbey Company and these workers completed the work. These engineering issues delayed the reconstruction a further four years.¹²⁷

After ten years of false starts, hurdles, red tape, and tangled politics, a reconstructed Fort Meigs existed on the bank of the Maumee River. The fort officially opened on August 1, 1975 at 10 a.m. The OHS settled on an admission cost of \$1.00 for adults, while children (12 or under) accompanied by an adult received free admission. Other children paid fifty cents.¹²⁸ A few picnic facilities became available once again to area residents and visitors; however, these remained outside the fort's structure, nearer to the newly built front parking lots instead of inside the structure. Official dedication ceremonies occurred in May 1976 to coincide with the anniversary of Fort Meigs' first siege of May 1813. The fort's final reconstruction included a parking lot, seven blockhouses, restroom facilities, exhibit facilities, a quartermaster building, elevated traverses, seeded grounds, walkways, and landscaping. Five cannon batteries, the reopening of an original well dating from before General Harrison's 1840 presidential rally campaign, along with the new picnic facilities were included as attractions to visitors. A gift shop was planned for one of the blockhouses.¹²⁹

The established fortification, finally erected after 10 years of trampled toes, political red tape and work delays, dredged up memories for some of Perrysburg's inhabitants with long connections to Fort Meigs and its grounds. Alongside these old memories, new memories and

¹²⁶ John Grigsby.

¹²⁷ Karilon Jacobs.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

connections to the fort began forming in the area's younger residents. These growing attachments promoted a deeper sense of place during Fort Meigs' beginning years of operation.

One woman, an early resident of the area, wrote to a local Perrysburg newsletter in 1976, sharing her memories and personal knowledge of Fort Meigs' grounds and post-war history. Mrs. Wicks, as she explained in her letter, knew "Uncle Timmy" (Timothy Hayes) personally as a child, and remembered him as a "kind old gentleman who wore a long gray beard and had a merry twinkle in his shining blue eyes." She remembered Hayes as a man who kept a careful eye on his grazing cattle to not wander into other farmer's fields. Mrs. Wick's father, she described, was asked by the Hayes to take over some of their family's fields for cultivation when the brothers reached old age. Her father farmed the Hayes for years. Mrs. Wicks fondly described Fort Meigs' land from her childhood, an area she walked on during the school and summer months of youth:

An old rail fence separated the flats from the old Fort Meigs and I as a child traversed every foot of that hallowed ground. The fort and a large tract of ground on the opposite side of the road was owned by two brothers, Thomas and Timothy Hayes, the latter being a bachelor. Each spring and through [sic] the summer months their cattle were driven over onto the Fort to graze on the luscious grass that grew there. The animals had free access to the sparkling clear river water that flowed near by. At that time there were no factories to pollute the streams.¹³⁰

Another long time resident, a F.W. Perrin, shared his longtime memories of the grounds and his sense of place to the fort established through his childhood discoveries of Fort Meigs' war artifacts. Perrin made his first find at the age of eight on a shore by the fort. This discovery

¹³⁰ Mrs. Robert Wicks, "Memories of old-old Fort Meigs and grazing cows," *Bend of the River* (Maumee, OH), May, 1976, 3.

piqued his lifelong interest in collecting local war artifacts. His years of archeological finds included uniform buttons, arrowheads, coins, and an actual pistol. Perrin, age 97 at the time of the interview, referred to the Hayes brothers familiarly as those “nice Hayes boys,” a comment which suggested Perrin’s knowledge of the fort’s early postwar history. Perrin planned to donate his collection of the artifacts the man had gathered at the fort grounds since his childhood.¹³¹

Other citizens of the Fort Meigs’ area as well participated in archeological excavations of the fort’s grounds. In the 1970s, a local citizen and history enthusiast, David Karsteadt dug up artifacts with his wife Debbie and three other enthusiasts. During the reconstruction process, the use of construction equipment excavated the fort’s soil, exposing some artifacts and moving others closer to the surface within range of metal detectors. After seeking permission from the state of Ohio, Karsteadt excavated War of 1812 objects such as cooking utensils, nails, uniform buttons, and arrowheads. The items were used for another local historical group, the Maumee Valley Historical Society, a group that owned part of Fort Meigs’ grounds.¹³²

Professional archeological digs occurred on Fort Meigs’ land after completion of the reconstruction. In the summer of 1977, an archaeology class from Defiance College of Ohio excavated a 20 by 30 foot section of a bomb proof area—an earthen and probable wooden constructed shelter built by General Harrison’s men to defend against British cannon ball attacks. The items found in this and previous excavation attempts by Defiance students were taken back to the college, catalogued, and sent to Columbus, Ohio. The items were safely stored at the Ohio History Society (OHS) building.¹³³ These and other artifacts found in future archeological digs remained available at the OHS archives for patrons, while others became incorporated in Fort Meigs’ exhibits.

¹³¹ “A Lifetime of Loving the Fort,” *Bend of the River* (Maumee, OH), May, 1976, 19.

¹³² “Two real diggers hit Fort Meigs,” *Bend of the River* (Maumee, OH), May, 1975, 9.

¹³³ “DC Students Complete Stint at Meigs,” *Defiance Crescent-News* (Defiance, OH), August 23, 1977.

These excavation activities, along with the shared memories, reflected the growing sense of place people attached to the fort. Despite this growing attachment, staff became concerned about some local resident's lack of interest in the completed fort. Part of this disinterest stemmed from a new generation of residents who were not aware of their local history or of the War of 1812. Another source of the disinterest originated from the clashes between the older residents and the OHS and work crews during the reconstruction. Fort Meigs years of operation from 1980-2003 became a period of reconnection with area residents. During this period, the staff increased fort activities, experienced changes in leadership, and oversaw the makeover of fort buildings and the creation of a visitor's center.

Chapter 5

1980-2011: Operational Survival

“For many, we are the “crown jewel” of the community and a point of pride. It helps define what Perrysburg is and helps to create a sense of place.”

-Rick Finch, Site Manager of Fort Meigs, 2011

Fort Meigs' years of operation from 1980 to 2003 encountered further challenges to continue fort operations now underway since the opening in August 1975. Struggles of keeping the site open, well maintained, publicized and inviting to old and new visitors presented themselves as the site's buildings and displays aged and funding slowly dried up. Static museum displays, ones in need of updates and attractive appeal became an increasing concern. Maintenance of the wooden fort became necessary in the 1980s after a decade and a half outside exposure to the elements. In 1981 the state of Ohio cut their budget to the Ohio Historical Society (OHS), limiting funds to the 50 sites the OHS maintained.¹³⁴ Fort Meigs' physical deteriorations, coupled with the financial cuts, threatened its operational survival to the point of closure. As with previous efforts to memorialize, protect, and ensure the site's stability, aid flooded in from grass root efforts to stop the impending closure. Relief came from the bottom up to ensure the fort's longevity as a sense of place too important to close.

In 1980, a new site manager came to the fort at the cusp of these growing problems—Larry Nelson. Before the 1981 cuts, Nelson reported sufficient pool of employees, a staff including eight interpreters, a district manager, a site manager, and four employees to maintain the fort and the ground's 60 acres. After the 1981 financial cuts, Nelson was left with three year round employees—a site curator, a site manager, and one maintenance worker. Fort Meigs, though finally reconstructed, faced an unknown future in a now modern day Ohio. The reconstructed wooden fort, buildings, and landscaping, began to show unmistakable signs of wear and tear and a growing need of proper care.¹³⁵

One of the first issues Fort Meigs faced as a public history site lay in confronting an entirely different matter: its spotted reconstruction period. The turmoil leftover from the fort's

¹³⁴ Paula Davis, "Fort Meigs strives to provide new experiences," *Sentinel-Tribune* (Bowling Green, OH), July 27, 1989.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

long reconstruction formed a barrier in attracting the older generations of Perrysburg to Fort Meigs' attractions. These older residents still remembered when they were barred from entering the grounds, an area they used as a park. This restricted access occurred under the OHS's administrative powers in the 1960s and 1970s during the fort's reconstruction. When construction workers and the OHS decided to raze the community picnic area and cut down 80 trees on the site, the citizens were personally offended. Some residents opposed reconstruction plans because of these early actions and claimed that the process was an invasion of public space and an action not serving the public, despite any mission statements of public service the OHS claimed.¹³⁶

Because of these lingering memories, some of the older residents of Perrysburg ignored the finished Fort Meigs. One of the original members of the Fort Meigs Citizen Committee and a longtime resident of Perrysburg, Hilda Bentley, commented on the subject in June of 1989, 14 years after the fort's opening. She confirmed these attitudes of the older generations of Perrysburg as indeed leftover wounds still present from the patchy reconstruction period. The older residents, she explained, "thought it was their park" and that they believed the persons behind the reconstruction "were destroying their picnic grounds."¹³⁷ Bentley suggested that another, younger generation needed to know about Fort Meigs to continue promoting the fort's activities.¹³⁸ This way, fort operations could continue and another generation could foster an appreciation of the site.

Despite these challenges with financial cuts, maintenance issues, and leftover memories of the reconstruction, people did come to visit the fort for the events and history it offered. Some of these visitors became active volunteers and willingly gave their time to help recreate Fort

¹³⁶ Lloyd J. Hill, "Letter to the Editor," *Perrysburg Messenger-Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), August 30, 1973.

¹³⁷ Paula Davis, "Many local residents ignore Fort Meigs," *Sentinel-Tribune* (Bowling Green, OH), July 28, 1989.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Meigs' history through historical reenactment. These volunteers became important to maintaining the site in the face of the financial challenges and helped lessen the effects the financial cuts brought to fort operations.

The site curator of the fort in 1989, Michael Morell, commented not only on the volunteer's importance to maintaining the site, but on the importance of Fort Meigs to the volunteers. Some of these volunteers stayed for extended periods of time, learning extensively through their training and historical acting about the site's history and sense of place to the area. One volunteer, working then as a seasonal interpreter at the fort, became interested in history from interning at Fort Meigs as an undergraduate student. Douglas DeCroix pursued this interest developed at the fort and completed a masters degree in history, going on to doctoral studies. Morell commented that some of the volunteers like DeCroix "practically grew up here" at Fort Meigs in their formative years of youth. A female volunteer, Sabrina Weber of Perrysburg, started volunteering at age twelve. Weber presented herself proudly to the interviewer as "one of the first girls to do artillery and infantry" at Fort Meigs alongside the male volunteers.¹³⁹

The volunteers, outside of common tours or historical acting, also greatly helped to carry out Fort Meigs' more extensive events. Functions such as nighttime lantern tours, the Harrison Rally Days, and Fourth of July celebrations were all listed by Morell as functions the volunteers helped make possible.¹⁴⁰ These events ushered in larger amounts of people compared to typical tours, and thus brought more funds to the fort. Without the volunteers, these events would have been severely hampered. The volunteers for the functions dressed in period costumes, choosing roles such as soldier, officer, camp follower, chaplain or medic that reflected a person or duty in the war period. Some volunteers worked on related tasks of the war, such as doing laundry with

¹³⁹ Paula Davis, "Volunteers bring fort to life," *Sentinel-Tribune* (Bowling Green, OH), July 26, 1989.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

period appropriate equipment or demonstrating the proper loading and firing of guns and cannon in battle reenactments. Others led historic tours during these events, describing the fort and the history through historical acting. All this work completed by volunteers like Douglas DeCroix and Sabrina Weber helped to attract, entertain, and educate visitors in a time the fort was struggling to stay financially and operationally afloat.

Despite this dedicated volunteer pool helping to bring visitors to the fort, problems remained in the site's structural care and finances. In 1989, Fort Meigs received \$175,000 from the OHS to help improve declining fort structures. This money was allotted to the blockhouses that housed museum displays. All of the blockhouses, according to Larry Nelson, contained damage in the form of dry and fungus rot and needed new roofing, ceilings, and flooring because of the extensive damage from exposure.¹⁴¹ However, funds were used before every blockhouse received the renovations it needed and two—those not housing museum displays—were left in their declining conditions. Other options to finish the renovation and to allow a stable future were needed. In 1992, this growing turmoil came to a climax: the OHS announced Fort Meigs' imminent closing.¹⁴²

Shortly after hearing these announcements in 1992, Perrysburg residents reacted swiftly to rescue their sense of place. Fundraising drives, ones designed and held by the local community, raised enough money to delay the fort's closing. These grass root efforts raised awareness of the fort's problems and raised awareness about the fort's predicament. Debates concerning fort leadership emerged from the near miss for Fort Meigs, along with a clear call for a stable plan of maintenance and care. State leaders and local officials became attracted then

¹⁴¹ Paula Davis, "Fort Meigs strives to provide new experiences."

¹⁴² National Park Service, "Fallen Timbers, Fort Miamis, Fort Meigs: Special Resources Study," (Draft), July 1996, 6.

involved in the issues and added to the discussion of the fort's future.¹⁴³ Four years after the fort's almost closure, a plan came from these discussions to create a structured future for Fort Meigs. On February 23 and 24 of 1996, the OHS Board of Trustees expressed official interest to affiliate Fort Meigs, along with Fort Miami and Fallen Timbers, with the National Park Service.¹⁴⁴

The plan to affiliate Fort Meigs and the neighboring forts began around 1995 when the National Park Service (NPS) conducted a resource study of Fort Meigs and Fallen Timbers from two groups' request: the City of Maumee and the Maumee Valley Heritage Corridor Inc. The study focused on the sites' eligibility to be designated as NPS affiliated areas. The requirements for affiliation included a site's recognized national significance and meeting the NPS' criteria of sustainability and feasibility. The three forts needed to also represent a cultural or natural theme not already represented adequately through other NPS sites.¹⁴⁵ The affiliation hoped to bring national notice to the three sites and to provide long-term protection and management.¹⁴⁶ This shared affiliation was hoped to provide a context and continuity to the area's history, bringing the three separate sites together under a shared NPS banner.¹⁴⁷ The three sites were found to meet the services and became eligible for affiliation. The Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Government (TMACOG)—“a voluntary association of local governments in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan”—reflected the area's supportive feelings for the affiliation. The council's vote on June 19, 1996 resulted in 18 yeas, 0 nays, and 1 abstained vote.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 9-12.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Executive Summary.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments “A Resolution of the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments in Support for National Park Service Status of the Fallen Timbers Battlefield, Fort Meigs, and Fort Miamis,” resolution letter, June, 19, 1996.

In 2000, four years after the beginning affiliation efforts, both Fallen Timbers and Fort Miami received National Park status and became listed as historic sites under the NPS banner.¹⁴⁹ Fort Meigs, however, never became affiliated. According to the present day site manager, Rick Finch, the OHS decided not to become affiliated to avoid NPS' policies and procedures. Consequently, the control of Fort Meigs' financial struggles and degradation of the site remained unaddressed.¹⁵⁰ These financial and maintenance issues only increased as time went on and the OHS, because of the local demand for better care of their sense of place, investigated other ways to save the site.

Another strategy to help renovate Fort Meigs followed the failed NPS affiliation. Fort Meigs was drafted to become one of eight 'gateway sites' for Ohio through the Gateway Initiative. This plan was one carried over and developed from the failed National Park affiliation study.¹⁵¹ Because of the victories at the fort in the War of 1812, Fort Meigs was chosen as the gateway to Ohio's military history. Other military forts were listed as satellite sites under Fort Meigs and included Fallen Timbers, Fort Laurens, Fort Recovery, Fort Amanda, Fort Jefferson, and the McCook House.¹⁵² Other sites in Ohio received different themes depending on the facet of Ohio history each represented. The Hayes Center in Fremont, for example, was listed as the political leadership gateway of Ohio history; Fort Ancient in Lebanon was pegged as Ohio's gateway of prehistoric Indian heritage; while Cedar Bog in Urbana was listed as Ohio's gateway to natural history. The Gateway Initiative hoped to "place sites in the broader context of Ohio history" by organizing them under the gateway themes.¹⁵³ By placing these individual histories

¹⁴⁹ "Battle of Fallen Timbers-The Toledo Metroparks-The Battlefield Today," *Fallen Timbers Battlefield Today*, <http://www.fallentimbersbattlefield.com/today.asp>.

¹⁵⁰ Rick Finch.

¹⁵¹ National Park Service, 6.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵³ Ohio Historical Society, "Fort Meigs—Ohio's Gateway to Military History," (proposal booklet), 2-3.

into Ohio's overarching history, the initiative would provide a comprehensive depiction of the state's history, both pre and post-statehood.

Specific plans for Fort Meigs within the Gateway Initiative included expansive renovations, additions, and display updates across the board. A focus on distance learning and interactive technologies were included in the renovation plans, along with new exhibits in four of the fort's blockhouses. Most notably, a full reconstruction of the fort, along with ground restoration and other repairs were included in the plans.¹⁵⁴ In these ambitious plans for Fort Meigs included an 8,000 square foot museum and visitor center to house some of the new displays. This museum, according to the present site manager, was to "house exhibits on the history of all conflicts affecting Ohio," and thus become home to a history outside of Fort Meigs' War of 1812 time period.¹⁵⁵ The projects were scheduled to begin July 2001 with a finishing date of June 2002; the opening of the renovated fort and exhibit renovations was scheduled for later November of 2002.¹⁵⁶ An amount of \$8,700,000 was estimated to complete these renovations at Fort Meigs alone.¹⁵⁷

Similar to the NPS affiliation project, the Gateway Initiative plans to rescue Fort Meigs and provide a stable future failed. The plan was dropped according to Finch around 2001 when the CEO of the OHS—Gary Ness—retired, ending his two decades of service. Ness was replaced by Bill Laidlaw who resumed the role. Finch explained the falling out of the project due to a lack of funding and the termination of the initiative due to the CEO replacement.¹⁵⁸ Fort Meigs' future appeared uncertain as it entered into a new century after these two aborted rescue attempts.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 3-5.

¹⁵⁵ Rick Finch.

¹⁵⁶ "Fort Meigs—Ohio's Gateway to Military History," 6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵⁸ Rick Finch.

After the failed proposals of the NPS affiliation and the Gateway Initiative, Fort Meigs future appeared bleak and its closure a surer possibility. As 2003 neared, the site was given yet another chance at a future through a history prior to its own: Ohio's 200th anniversary of statehood. Ohio's bicentennial in 2003 offered Fort Meigs a third chance at survival through appropriated state funding to mark the birthday. Fort Meigs, under the OHS' directions, became one of the three top priority projects for the OHS' historical preparations.¹⁵⁹ The OHS received \$6.2 million in state monies to rebuild the entirety of the wooden fort and its structures, along with building the museum and visitor center proposed in the Gateway Initiative.¹⁶⁰ Fort Meigs' future, because of this funding appropriated for Ohio's Bicentennial, became promising. Fort Meigs sense of place, underlined by grass root efforts to save the floundering fort, energized the OHS' efforts to prepare the fort for 2003. Through these efforts initiated by the community, the renovations ushered in greater numbers to the fort and finally secured the site's immediate survival.

New exhibits at the fort reflected the renewed efforts to draw in visitors and to connect the history intellectually and personally across age levels. One unique new blockhouse exhibit included a "wheel of fate" for visitors to spin. One spin on the wheel showed a visitor which common period disease or condition they received, such as mumps, battle wounds, or frostbite. Located next to the wheel was a display case containing period medical care items. The display case showed what limited medical care the soldiers had at the fort to alleviate the health problems the wheel of fate presented. Adjacent to this corner of medical history included a spacious captain's tent, juxtaposed to a much smaller tent meant to shelter three grown men. Interactive push buttons as well were included in this blockhouse, an interactive technological

¹⁵⁹ Rebekah Scott, "Face-lift makes old Fort Meigs new again," *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), April, 17, 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

feature designed for younger visitors learning best through touching objects. When pressed, the buttons played music of the time period of the War of 1812, such as the recognizable morning reveille. These interactive displays, placed next to traditional artifacts, catered to the age levels visiting the updated Fort Meigs. These displays encouraged Fort Meigs sense of place to the local area and northwest Ohio under a modern, relatable guise.

War of 1812 items discovered in fort archeological digs were included in the new museum and blockhouse displays. Period cannon balls, uniform coats and buttons, and powder horns were taken out of the OHS Columbus archives and put into cases for public view.¹⁶¹ Archeological digs during the fort's renovations unearthed hundreds more artifacts available for the displays, many from prehistoric times. A find relevant to Fort Meigs' War of 1812 history came from two unearthed horse skeletons. The horses were thought to have been killed during one of the sieges on Fort Meigs and later buried on the grounds.¹⁶²

The construction plans for the museum and visitor center were shrunk to a smaller 3,000 square feet, compared to the original 8,000. The exhibits, instead of focusing on all of Ohio's history refocused primarily on Fort Meigs' War of 1812 history. Only the history on the 60 Years War for Ohio, a history directly related to the fort, was added.¹⁶³ The appropriated money from the Bicentennial funds paid for the entire stockade wall of the fort to be rebuilt, upgrades to old exhibits, construction of the museum and visitor center, renovations to the block houses, new museum exhibits, and funding for a one year archeology study at Fort Meigs. The entire site of

¹⁶¹ Rebekah Scott.

¹⁶² Robin Erb, "Fort Meigs renovation yields peek at the past," *The Blade* (Toledo, OH), August 3, 2001.

¹⁶³ The 60 year war (1754-1814) refers to the set of six conflicts for control of the Great Lakes region. These conflicts included the French and Indian war, Pontiac's Rebellion, Lord Dunmore's War, the American Revolution, the Northwest Indian War, and the War of 1812.

Fort Meigs was shut down from 2001-2003 to complete the extensive project and archeology study. The fort reopened with all of these changes ready for the public on May 5, 2003.¹⁶⁴

In 2004, a year following the opening of the renovated Fort Meigs, Larry Nelson retired as site manager. Rick Finch took over as site manager in April of 2005, replacing temporary site manager Adam Sakel. Since Finch took over site manager duties, the fort has gone through further episodes of change as the fort entered into the twenty first century. Some smaller changes included the addition of six acres to the Fort Meigs' grounds, bringing the total acreage to 70 acres. Finch also experienced the elimination of two seasonal jobs and increased emphasis on local community relations. Greater numbers of workshops and small-interpretative programs were created to continue fostering positive relations with the public. These proposals promoted Fort Meigs' sense of place to the local community as they were designed to foster and nurture positive public relations. These events included hands-on activities, such as fashion shows of war time period clothing, laundering period practices, blacksmithing demonstrations, the making and dining of War of 1812 period food, and how to style one's hair in the fashion of the war period.¹⁶⁵ Lectures and discussions on the fort's history also took place through the fort's Round Table discussions. These history focused lectures, ones presented by various speakers and local professors, catered to those of the public wanting a deeper knowledge of Fort Meigs' and other early American histories.¹⁶⁶

Perhaps the most drastic change to fort operations during the first decade of the new century occurred at the end of 2009. On December 16 a vote was held to partially withdraw OHS control over Fort Meigs' operations. The plan was a response to the debilitating effects of the

¹⁶⁴ Rick Finch.

¹⁶⁵ "Fort Meigs – Yesteryear's Essentials," *Event Schedule*, <http://www.fortmeigs.org/yesteryear/>.

¹⁶⁶ "Fort Meigs – Military History Roundtable," *Fort Meigs Military History Roundtable*, <http://www.fortmeigs.org/roundtable/>.

economic recession that began in the U.S. around December 2007. From the recession, the OHS found itself in a similar financial situation as before Ohio's bicentennial. This time, instead of attempting to shut down several sites, the society turned to independent groups to save sites from closure. New partnership agreements were drawn up that allowed site operational freedoms; the society planned to save money through eliminating overhead costs of operating the scattered state sites from Columbus.¹⁶⁷

For Fort Meigs alone, \$350,000 was needed for annual operations. With the new partnership, the OHS would contribute \$125,000 leaving Fort Meigs staff and volunteers to raise the remaining \$225,000. In the proposal, Fort Meigs would keep all income from admission, rental, and program fees, along with grant monies and all sales from the museum and bookstore. The Fort Meigs Association, a locally created non-profit group, accepted the proposal and took over the financial responsibilities left to the fort. After the vote in favor of the new partnership, the OHS turned over control of Fort Meigs beginning on January 1, 2010. The Fort Meigs Association consisted of members from 2002 who worked to raise funds for the fort as part of the Fort Meigs Cabinet. This local group once again reflected the sense of place the community reflected by the repeated efforts to ensure the fort's survival.¹⁶⁸ Fort operations, as with the near closure in operations in 1992, were saved once again by local fundraising efforts and labor.

In 2011, Fort Meigs is operating better since 2005 compared to the previous half of the decade. From 2005-2009, a 20% growth in attendance was reported for Fort Meigs. Due to the economic recession, attendance dropped in 2010 but has risen in 2011 so far by 2%. The Fort Meigs staff is hopeful that the improving trend will continue as the economy continues to

¹⁶⁷ "Fort Meigs, 2 other landmarks under management," *Valley Central* (Rio Grande Valley, Texas), December 17, 2009, <http://www.valleycentral.com/news/story.aspx?id=391544>.

¹⁶⁸ Heather Miller, "Ft Meigs soon under local control," *FOX Toledo News* (Toledo, OH), December 9, 2010, <http://www.foxtoledo.com/dpp/news/local/Fort-Meigs-soon-under-local-control-hm-120909>.

recover. Financially, Fort Meigs is doing “as good as anyone can be at this time,” according to Finch. About \$70,000 a year is needed in fundraising or grants to offset any deficits the fort accrues through operations. Finch reported a steady level of volunteers, but feels that overall staff numbers remain insufficient for maintaining the site. The lack of permanent staff members especially presents a challenge to the fort in lieu of the five special events the fort holds year round; these special events still remain as the primary source for revenue and visitor attendance.¹⁶⁹ Four permanent employees work at Fort Meigs in 2011, including a site manager, a programs manager, an operator of the museum store, and one maintenance worker to maintain the fort’s 70 acres.¹⁷⁰

In 2011, Finch and his staff are working on preparations for another bicentennial—the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. As with Ohio’s Bicentennial, renovations and additions to the fort and museum are highlighted in the celebration plans, this time in the area of technological upgrades. In reaction to the commonplaceness of technology in the 21st century, bicentennial efforts have included plans to digitize Fort Meigs’ document and artifact collections. Other modernizing attempts entail a blending of introduced technologies with traditional, live historical interpretation. By introducing these technologies to explore history, Fort Meigs would reach an audience familiar with technology—both on and off site. On site, the technology would encourage a greater interaction and comfort between the histories by using familiar means to explain the information a visitor may not be familiar with. Off site, those interested in Fort Meigs’ history would be able to access the fort’s documents and online exhibits of artifacts. These efforts, as with the varied museum displays, again hope to accommodate the public by introducing modern ways of learning the fort’s history.

¹⁶⁹ Rick Finch.

¹⁷⁰ “Fort Meigs-Staff and Employment,” *Staff*, <http://www.fortmeigs.org/employment/>.

These ideas for changes to Fort Meigs, as before, depend on adequate funding through local and state support. Current funding for fort operations comes from the \$125,000 stipend with the OHS, along with revenue earned onsite and through private donations through the Fort Meigs Cabinet.¹⁷¹ In the spring, Finch and his staff hope to start their major campaign—The Campaign for Fort Meigs. The staff plans to raise \$1.5 million through this fundraiser. The money would be used for new museum exhibits, onsite improvements, and aid in the cataloging and conservation of artifacts uncovered at the fort in archaeological excavations. The money would also assist in the site's long term operation and help cover future annual operational costs.¹⁷²

Fort Meigs' latest chapter of history thus ends on a positive note full of modern possibilities for successive generational visitors. When the fort's closing appeared imminent both in 1992 and later in 2009, local community members rushed to save the fort, bringing attention to the fort's survival to both local and state government levels. Although beginning plans to rescue the fort through the NPS affiliation and Gateway Initiative failed, Fort Meigs received an extensive renovation to its degrading structures through Ohio Bicentennial funds. Because of the community's adamant support for fort operations, the OHS made Fort Meigs a top priority site in bicentennial renovations. In 2011, Fort Meigs' four employees work busily to prepare the fort for its war anniversary.

Because of its sense of place to Perrysburg and surrounding citizens, Fort Meigs survived through its 200 years of battles, battles in historical consciousness, ground memorials, reconstruction efforts, tangled public relations, fort maintenance, finances, and ongoing site operations. This sense of place, evident through the two centuries of memorializing and

¹⁷¹ Rick Finch.

¹⁷² "Fort Meigs-The Campaign for Fort Meigs," *The Campaign for Fort Meigs*, <http://www.fortmeigs.org/campaign/>.

preservation efforts, will hopefully build and bring the fort into a third, fourth, and even fifth century. Fort Meigs will then continue to share Ohio's early military history through all of its features underscored by the imposing wooden fort, educating successive generations about early northwest Ohio. With each visitor, Fort Meigs provides a basis of identity and furthers a sense of place of for many northwest Ohio visitors.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Sense of Place

“[Write] me as soon as you get this. I want to hear from you all very much and I want to know who is a Live and who is not. I shall take a good deal of pains to [write] to them all as soon as I receive a Letter from you. ...Give my Love to Mother, if a Live and all friends with Respect, I am your Loving Brother. I would [write] more but the paper is too small.”¹⁷³

-Captain Samuel Cushing's letter to family
following the first siege at Fort Meigs, 1813

¹⁷³ P.L. Rainwater, “The Siege of Fort Meigs,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Sept., 1932), 264.

Captain Samuel Cushing ended his letter after the first siege of Fort Meigs requesting word of his family's welfare. The captain inquired of their safety after seven months of service, 200 miles from home. The letter marked the beginning of Fort Meigs' role in the War of 1812 and its development as a sense of place to northwest Ohio. The first siege ended in America's favor because of the fortification's protection against enemy fire. After Independence Day celebrations, a second American victory followed. The last siege drove frustrated English and Native American troops permanently out of the area. After the enemy retreat, the grounds of Fort Meigs were abandoned and the entire wooden fortification was dismantled except for a northwest corner. In 1814, the Treaty of Ghent was signed and America reaffirmed its independence. The war was over and early American life continued.

At this point the future of Fort Meigs was uncertain. The fort's history could be retold to incoming settlers and carried onto future generations, and the land could be memorialized in for the buried American soldiers. The fort could become recognized thus as a sense of place—a marker of explanation for the area's history in time and space, and as a source of identity and historical connectivity for local people. The fort's history and role in the War of 1812, reversely, could also be easily forgotten. Incoming settlers could develop the land for their needs, destroying the grounds and its associated history. The 800 soldiers buried at Fort Meigs were left unmarked for a century, and reflected a decline in historical consciousness. The decision to preserve or forget depended on the locals.

A community labeled wizard initiated and led preservation efforts of Fort Meigs alongside one of his brothers. Timothy Hayes, a farmer of the area, first relayed the history of the grounds to any picnicker or visitor coming to the scenic spot. For an exchange of a lunch, he passed on the history to any interested passerby and prevented any plowing to the grounds and

soldiers' graves. Following Timothy Hayes and his brother's death, the fort's grounds and story began to decline at the end of the 19th century. Local efforts began to push for protecting the grounds and to finally memorialize the soldiers. In 1908, nearly 100 years following the war, a granite shaft was erected in the soldiers' honor. An estimated 7,000 arrived for the dedication events. The attention became the needed boost to continue memorial and conservation efforts of the grounds. The community had made their decision: Fort Meigs was too important, as a sense of place, to leave to the erosion of time.

In the 20th century, the grounds became a traditional spot for picnickers and park-goers and an area to celebrate American military victories. Local committees were formed to ensure the upkeep of the land, efforts buoyed by state and local funds. These efforts focused on beautifying the landscape for visitors rather than in preserving the fort's actual history. In the late 1950s, the idea arose to rebuild the fort and to transform the site into a place of educational knowledge and venue of Ohio's War of 1812 history. In 1965, a reconstruction project was finalized. Two senses of places clashed within the community when the project began, one tied to community use and the other attached to historic preservation. Fort Meigs' sense of place was underscored by the 10 years of determined work.

The reconstructed Fort Meigs opened in August of 1975. Five years later, the staff found themselves struggling to continue operations into the 1980's. Financial and employee cuts, along with a growing need of maintenance and museum updates, began to cripple the historic site. These issues culminated in a possible closing of the fort—both in 1992 and later in 2009. At both times, grassroots efforts saved Fort Meigs from closure. In 1992, local residents held fundraising drives and drew local and state government attention to the fort's condition. In 2009, a local nonprofit committee raised funds for Fort Meigs, this time for new partnership agreements with

the OHS. In 2011, the fort continues to depend on local support and caters to the public through tours, historical activities, educational seminars, battle reenactments, and fundraisings.

The 200 years of local efforts to preserve Fort Meigs shows a sense of place develops from the bottom up within communities and not from the top down. As with Orange's treatment of WWI, the communities surrounding Fort Meigs did not accept a traditional understanding of the War of 1812. Instead of accepting the war as a lesser conflict smudged in-between the American Revolution and the Civil War in textbooks, the community attached importance to their area's role in the conflict and preserved their military history. Fort Meigs' sense of place created a historical identity specific to the area of northwest Ohio, one that increased in importance with successive generations.

Fort Meigs' sense of place to northwest Ohio lends further evidence to the public's interest in history. Unlike studies decrying American ignorance and disinterest in history, the fort's visitors and volunteers offer contradictory evidence. As Fort Meigs' history and sense of place are intertwined, those who attach importance to the site also attach importance and interest to the fort's history. A sense of place, as at Fort Meigs, shows that people are personally involved in history and donate their time and money to the preservations of histories important to them. From this, a type of loyalty forms from the site attachment. A sense of place grows in strength overtime, and as in Fort Meigs' story, intensifies when the place is interfered with or changed.

Efforts to ensure Fort Meigs' operations continue as the War of 1812's bicentennial approaches. Preparations will again be dependent on locally raised support through fundraising, visitor fees, and grant monies. Fort Meigs' communities have safe-guarded the fort's history for

nearly two centuries years. This sense of place will hopefully strengthen through future generations and ensure the fort future anniversaries.

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Appendix A

Photographs



Figure A-1: A young boy playing on the grounds of Fort Meigs, ca. 1920. *Image courtesy of Toledo Lucas County Library "Images in Time."*



Figure A-2: Aerial view of Fort Meigs, ca. 2000. *Image courtesy of Courtesy of Fort Meigs/Ohio Historical Society*

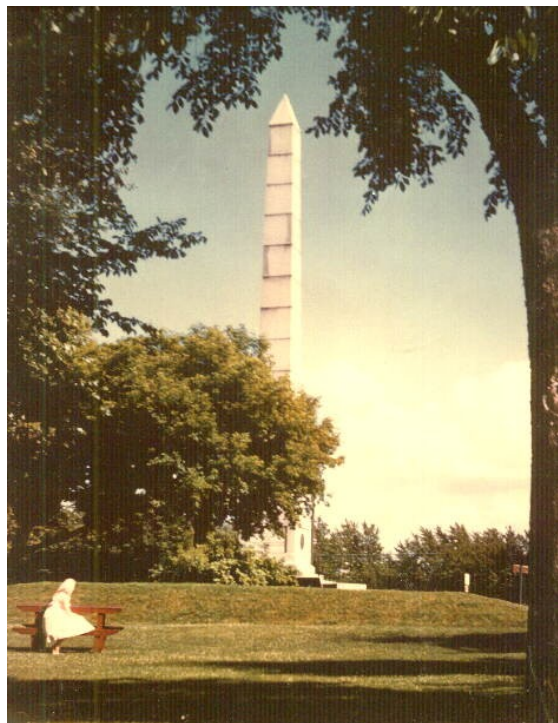


Figure A-3: Picnicker at Fort Meigs' grounds, ca. 1960. *Image courtesy of Toledo Lucas County Library "Images in Time."*



Figure A-4: Visitors at 1911 memorial, 1911. *Image courtesy of Toledo Lucas County Library "Images in Time."*



Figure A-5: Young visitors learning military drills, 2008. *Image courtesy of Courtesy of Fort Meigs/Ohio Historical Society.*



Figure A-6: Reenactors shooting muskets, 2008. *Image courtesy of Courtesy of Fort Meigs/Ohio Historical Society.*