BLADENSBURG BATTLEFIELD, WAR OF 1812 INTERPRETATION SCOPING REPORT PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

ANACOSTIA TRAILS HERITAGE AREA, INC.

PARKER STRATEGY GROUP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2024, Parker Strategy Group (PSG) was contracted to assist the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA) in gathering community research to scope potential changes or additions to the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site and to produce a final document (report) which contains a detailed outline of a comprehensive new interpretative plan for the Battle of Bladensburg. For the purpose of this report, the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site refers to the portions of the county-owned and operated Bladensburg Waterfront Park (BWP) and surrounding areas that hold historic interpretation elements related to the Battle under the American Battlefield Protection Program (NPS ABPP) designation rather than the official National Park Service National Register Historic District designation.

To assess the community's knowledge and interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg, PSG utilized a community survey, interviewed key members of the community, and helped host a community meeting to capture the qualitative and quantitative insights that the community could offer. In addition, PSG completed a literature review of the current best practices and themes emerging from the practice of historical interpretation. Finally, PSG highlighted three case studies of historic sites that commemorate battles from the late-18th and early-19th centuries and share similarities to the Bladensburg area and surrounding communities.

Taken together, the following research provides potential roadmaps for future considerations around the Battle of Bladensburg's historic interpretation.

OUTLINE OF COMPREHENSIVE NEW INTERPRETIVE PLAN FOR THE BATTLE OF BLADENSBURG

Creation and implementation of new interpretive theme

Creation of a "Battle of Bladensburg: Rising from Adversity" thematic approach to historic interpretation, incorporating the following elements:

This theme would highlight the Battle of Bladensburg as a story that allows visitors to learn from failure and loss of the Battle itself, while also utilizing the wide variety of historic events that occurred in the Bladensburg area (already featured in current signage). The theme would also help connect contemporary Bladensburg and the surrounding communities to the area's history. This theme would include:

1. Inclusion of multiple perspectives that highlight underrepresented voices from the early 19th century, with attention paid to non-combatant perspectives during the Battle.

2. Bridge 20th century history of the Bladensburg area with the history of the Battle of Bladensburg and the early 19th century, with special attention paid to newer communities within Bladensburg and making connections between contemporary Bladensburg.

3. Utilize the natural landscape of the BWP, including the Anacostia Tributary Trails System bike trail and the Anacostia River, to add location-based signage that pertains to the Battle of Bladensburg and surrounding historical timeline.
   a. For example, having signs along the Anacostia Tributary Trails System bike trail that provide location-based signage along with basic facts about the Battle.
   b. The natural landscape can also be used to highlight a variety of historic occurrences that were due in part to the natural landscape, such as providing routes of escape for enslaved individuals via the Underground Railroad. A potential example of this is presented below.
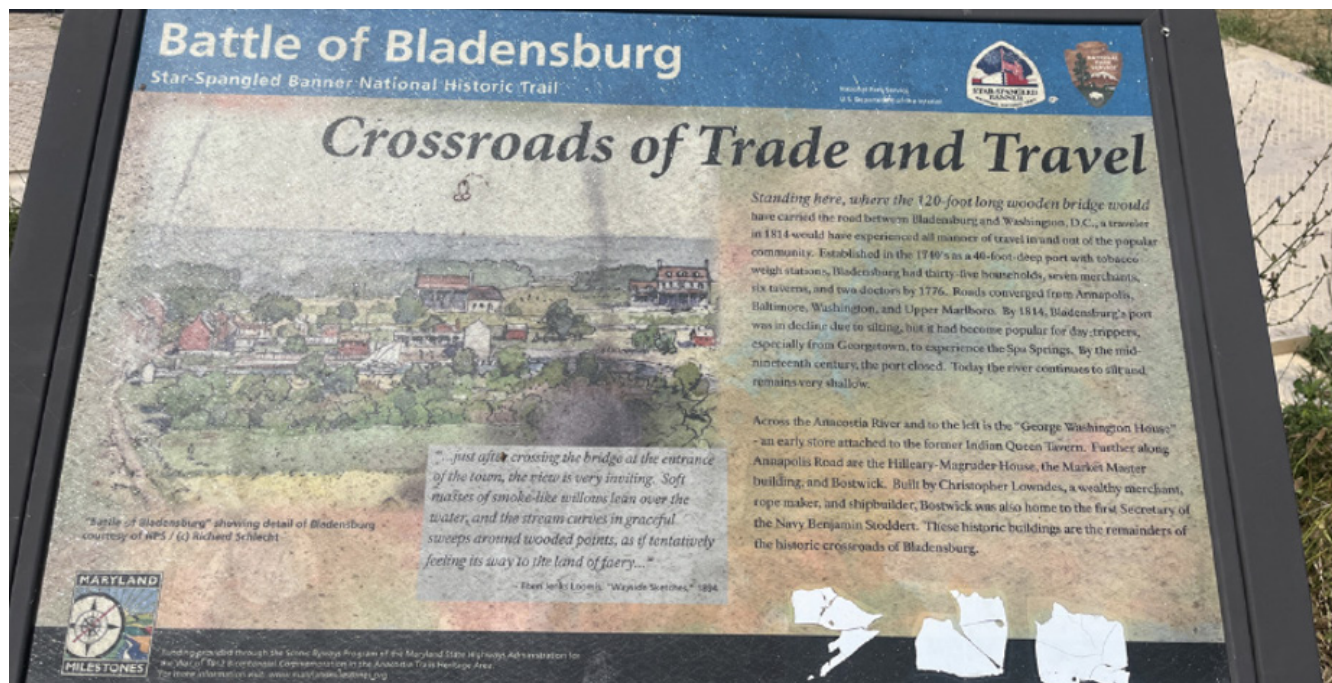
Example of current signage:

Crossroads of Trade and Travel

Standing here, where the 120-foot-long wooden bridge would have carried the road between Bladensburg and Washington, D.C., a traveler in 1814 would have experienced all manners of travel in and out of the popular community. Established in the 1740s as a 40-foot-deep port with tobacco weigh stations, Bladensburg had 35 households, six general stores, six taverns, and two doctors by 1776. Goods converged from Annapolis, Baltimore, Washington, and Upper Marlboro. By 1814, Bladensburg's port was in decline due to silting, but it had become popular for day-trippers, especially from Georgetown, to experience the Spa Springs. By the mid-19th century, the port closed. Today, the river continues to silt and remains very shallow.

Across the Anacostia River and to the left is the "George Washington House," an early store attached to the former Indian Queen Tavern. Further along Annapolis Road are the Hilleary-Magruder House, the Market Master building, and Bostwick. Built by Christopher Lowndes, a wealthy merchant, rope maker, and shipbuilder, Bostwick was also home to the first Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert. These historic buildings are the reminders of the historic crossroads of Bladensburg.

Quote: "…just after crossing the bridge at the entrance of the town, the view is very inviting. Some lofty masses of smoke-like willows lean gracefully over the water, and the stream curves in graceful sweeps around wooded points, as if temptingly feeling its way to the land of faery…" —Eben Jenks Loomis, Wayside Sketches, 1894

New signage example:

Crossroads of Trade and Travel

Right where you're standing, there once was a 120-foot-long wooden bridge that would have carried the road between Bladensburg and Washington, D.C. Established in the 1740s as a 40-foot-deep port with tobacco weigh stations, Bladensburg had 35 households, six general stores, six taverns, and two doctors by 1776.

Beside this paragraph: An icon-based illustration on how deep 40 feet is using 6-feet-tall stick figures stacked on top of one another. Then have how deep it is today next to that stack.

Goods converged from Annapolis, Baltimore, Washington, and Upper Marlboro. By 1814, Bladensburg's port was in decline due to silting, but it had become popular for day-trippers, especially from Georgetown, to experience the Spa Springs. By the mid-19th century, the port closed. Today, the river continues to silt and remains very shallow.

Across the Anacostia River and to the left is the "George Washington House," an early store attached to the former Indian Queen Tavern. Further along Annapolis Road are the Hilleary-Magruder House, the Market Master building, and Bostwick. Built by Christopher Lowndes, a wealthy merchant, rope maker, and shipbuilder, Bostwick was also home to the first Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert. These historic buildings are the reminders of the historic crossroads of Bladensburg.

Instead of quote:

Transportation to Freedom

With its advantageous location along the Anacostia River, there was once an Underground Railroad route that ran right through Bladensburg in the 1850s. On March 22, 1856, an enslaved man named Tom Matthews escaped from E.A. Jones, who lived near Bladensburg. The reward to return Tom Matthews to Mr. Jones was $300 — which is equivalent to more than $10,000 in today's money. The details of the escape were chronicled by William Still, an African American abolitionist who worked in Philadelphia as part of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. The members of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society gave Tom supplies to reach his ultimate destination: Canada, and the promise of freedom.

Revitalization of current signage around the Bladensburg Waterfront Park (BWP)

- **Design the "Battle of Bladensburg: Rising from Adversity " theme and apply to all current and perspective signage.**
- **For signage that is critical to the interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg, reinforce key facts about the battle and the aftermath to the community.**

Example of current signage:

Storming the Bridge

A wooden bridge just upriver became the focal point on August 24, 1814, when American and British forces clashed in the Battle of Bladensburg. The British approached from the east, clarifying their intent—to invade Washington. The Americans formed three defensive lines: the first here to protect the bridge, the second along present-day 40th Avenue, and the third at Fort Lincoln Cemetery at the District line. At 1:00 p.m., the British stormed the bridge.

Quote (left): "The Americans will draw up three lines about the edge of a hill. The river [or creek] below was occupied by the invaders for one and the little town of Bladensburg, which was burning, served as their center." – Eyewitness Account Image Caption: "Battle of Bladensburg" (Richard Schlecht illustration). [illegible]

Breakout box: Heat of Battle

More than (unintelligible due to vandalism)…had marched for four days carrying loaded packs in near 100-degree heat. Brig. Gen. William H. Winder commanded about 6,000 Americans, including 1,000 regulars, 400 Chesapeake Flotilla crewmen, 114 marines, and inexperienced militia.
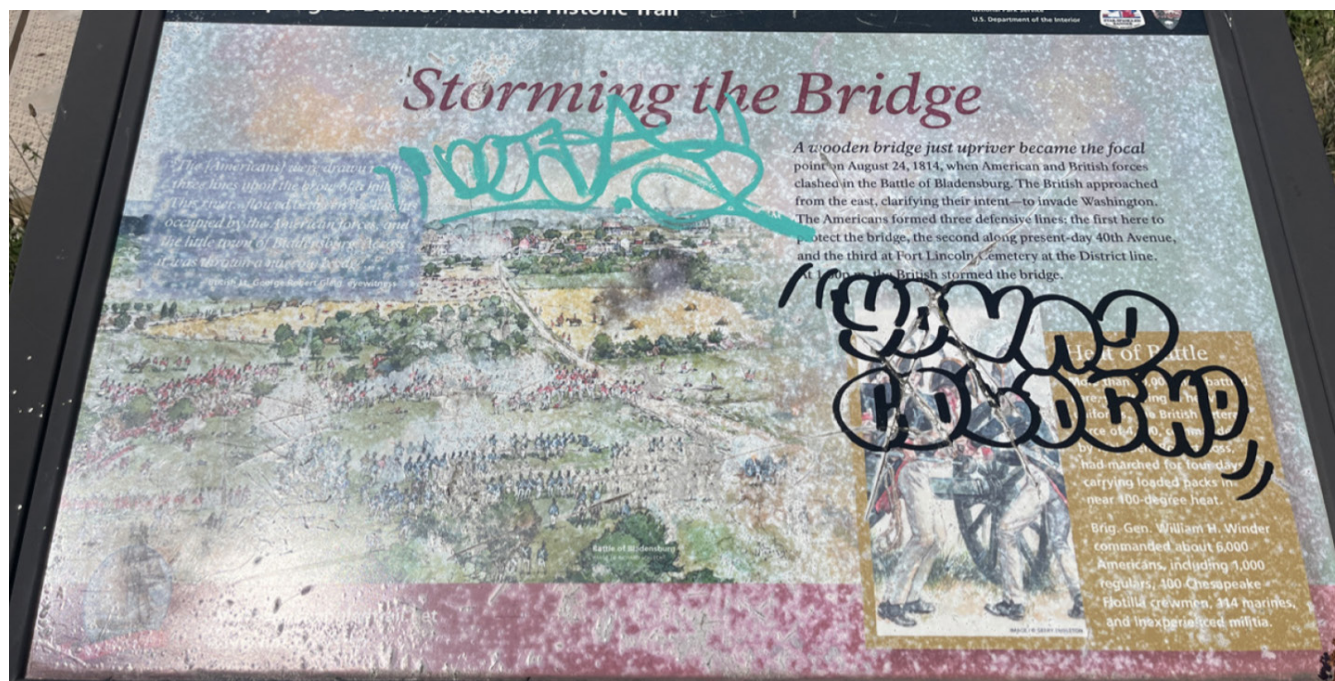
New signage example:

The British Storm the Bridge

On August 24, 1814, British and American forces clashed at the Battle of Bladensburg. A wooden bridge, located just upriver from where you stand, became the focal point of the battle. The British approached from the east with the intent of moving to invade and capture Washington, D.C.

In response, the Americans formed three defensive lines: the first here to protect the bridge from the British invaders. A second line was formed along present day 40th Avenue, with the third defensive line located at Fort Lincoln Cemetery—right near the boundary of Washington, D.C. At 1:00 p.m. on August 24th, the British stormed the bridge.

Quote (left): "The Americans will draw up three lines about the edge of a hill. The river [or creek] below was occupied by the invaders for one and the little town of Bladensburg, which was burning, served as their center." — Eyewitness Account Image Caption: "Battle of Bladensburg" (Richard Schlecht illustration). [illegible]

Changes to picture: leave the illustration but add a superimposed map of current-day Bladensburg, highlighting the bridge, the line along 40th Avenue, and the Cemetery with a "you are here" icon where the sign is compared to the battle illustration.

Breakout Box: Heat of Battle

The heat from the fires raging through Bladensburg because of the battle was not the only thing making the soldiers sweat. The British soldiers, numbering more than (whatever that number is) and much more experienced than the Americans, had already marched for four days carrying loaded packs in near 100-degree heat. Imagine yourself on a hot summer day hiking for days and then having to fight a battle!

Despite the heat, the British were able to defeat the superior number of American troops. Brig. Gen. William H. Winder commanded about 6,000 Americans, including 1,000 regulars, 400 Chesapeake Flotilla crewmen, 114 marines, and inexperienced militia members.

Ensure that signage at surrounding historic attractions (e.g., Bostwick House, Indian Queen Tavern) exhibit same theme and connect to contemporary Bladensburg.

Example of current signage:

Casualties of War

The Hilleary-Magruder House was likely one of the many sites in town where more than 200 British and American soldiers wounded in the Battle of Bladensburg were taken for treatment and convalescence. Built in 1742 by William Hilleary, and later the home of a Scottish tobacco merchant, the house was occupied by medical doctors from 1803 to 1863.

Quote (left): "I...paid a hasty visit to the wounded...in their apprehension of the evil treatment

from the Americans,....they had done injustice to that people; who were found to possess at least

one generous trait...that of behaving kindly and attentively to their prisoners." -British Lt. George Robert Gleig

Breakout box: Makeshift Hospital

Both sides generously treated wounded soldiers. The Ross House (then located across the street) served as a field hospital and was known locally as the "Old Brick Hospital." At least 18 British officers were reportedly treated there.

New signage example:

Bladensburg Lends Aid
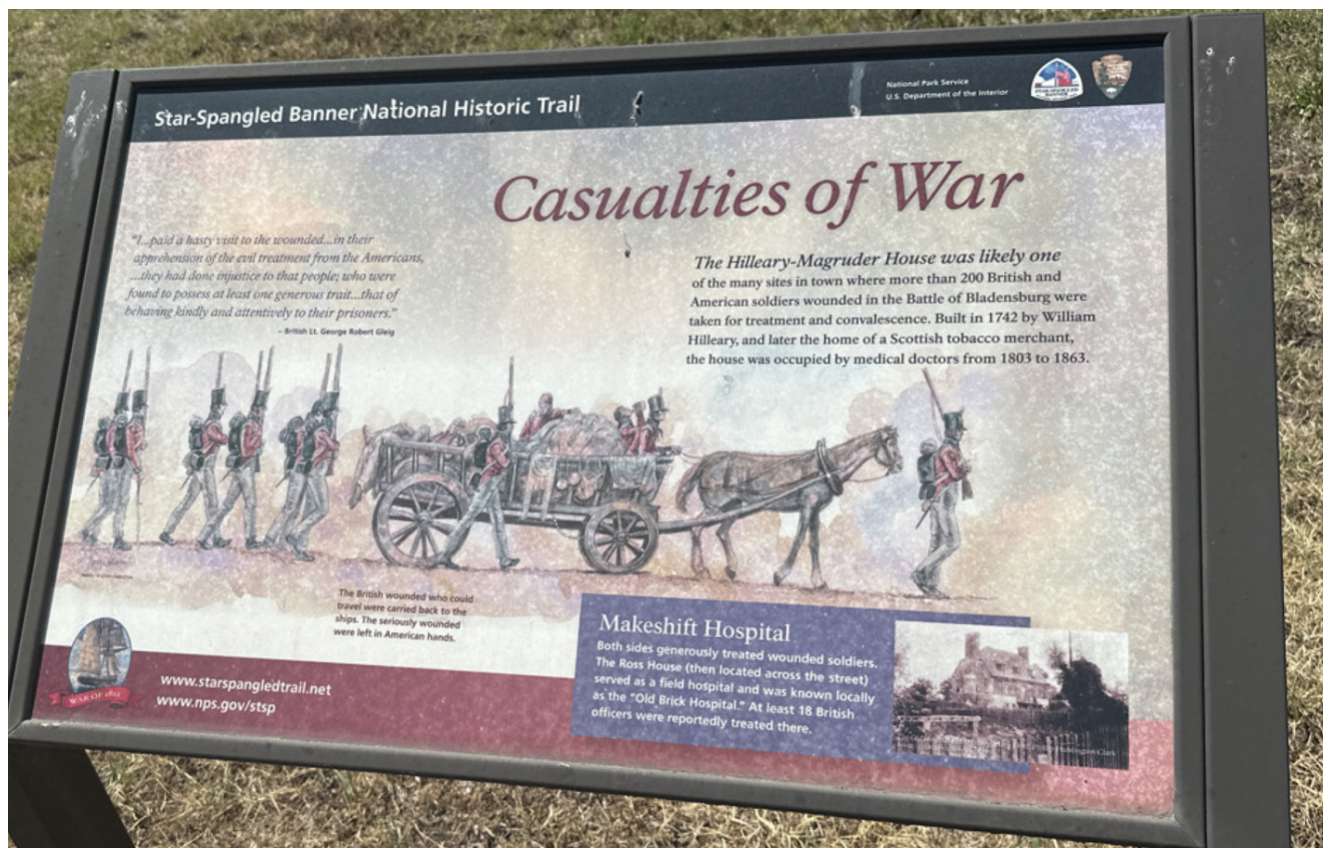
The Hilleary-Magruder House was likely one of the many sites in town where soldiers wounded in the Battle of Bladensburg were taken for treatment and recovery. More than 200 soldiers from both the American and British sides were wounded during the battle, but the medical professionals in Bladensburg lent a helping hand to the injured. Built in 1742 by William Hilleary, the house was occupied by medical doctors from 1803 to 1863 – spanning from before the War of 1812 until midway through the American Civil War.

Quote (left): "I...paid a hasty visit to the wounded...in their apprehension of the evil treatment from the Americans,....they had done injustice to that people; who were found to possess at least one generous trait...that of behaving kindly and attentively to their prisoners." -British Lt. George Robert Gleig

Creation of a network of historic tours using the STQRY application

In addition to the popular Anacostia River Public Boat Tours, the public's desire for additional tours can expand the tourism attractions associated with the Battle of Bladensburg. In the public research detailed next, residents in and around the Bladensburg area desired both tours in modern attire and a "living history" tour where the guides are dressed in era-appropriate attire. A creation of a network of tours, in conjunction with community partners, can help achieve the goal of raising awareness of the Battle of Bladensburg while stimulating the local economy due to an increased number of visitors. **The STQRY standard membership, which would cost $2,295 annually, would allow for 10 separate tours to be uploaded and displayed to visitors. Through the STQRYguide features, users would be able to access any tour, geofenced "alerts" or real-time engagement with historic interpretation elements, and the ability to interact with the ATHA-generated mapping of historic elements present in the Bladensburg area through a custom map generating process. The following tour suggestions do not represent the total amount of iterations possible for the network, but rather reflect the desires of visitors based on the community research in this report.**

1. **Creation of an audio tour for bike trail enthusiasts within the STQRY app**
    Utilizing the Anacostia River Trail within the Anacostia Tributaries Trail System, create an audio tour that bicyclists can listen to along their ride. If cyclists begin in Bladensburg or near the BWP, the tour could be titled "The British take D.C.: A guided bicycle tour of the Battle of Bladensburg." This tour would be set as one digital file, with the guided tour using the geofencing capabilities of the application to guide their journey. The tour would take cyclists through the Battle of Bladensburg, noting the facts of the battle and taking the cyclists through tales of other major historic buildings and themes already existing in the interpretive elements. This tour can be housed on the STQRY application with QR code access laden throughout the bike trail near the BWP with instructions on how to download the application.
2. **Living history tour at Bladensburg: Colonial Ropemaking at the Rope-Walk Pavilion**
    Building on the already-existing Rope-Walk Pavilion and previous iterations of colonial ropemaking at the BWP, along with the interpretive signs that address the ropemaking industry in the Bladensburg area, this vocation is an excellent entry point for the "living history" tour that the public desires. Hosted once per month, the members of PG Parks and ATHA can host a "Colonial Ropemaking" tour option, which would be an add-on to the Riverboat tour and/or other emerging tour options. Using the STQRY application, ATHA and allied groups could record a session of ropemaking and have that audio tour available for folks not wanting or unavailable for the in-person tour. The previous colonial ropemaking demonstrations that were held at the Rope-Walk Pavilion can be replicated and recorded on the STQRY application, with an option to replace that recording with a demonstration from newer iterations of the program as this attraction evolves. Having a staff member from PG Parks or ATHA dressed in early-19th century attire, new iterations of the tour can use tools such as the following instructional guide (courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg) to take visitors through the rope making process and have them make their own rope.

Making Cordage or Rope

Introduction:
Rope is the product that was essential to daily life in a Powhatan village. It was used to make fishnets and lines, baskets, ceramics, and was used in clothing and the manufacture of textiles. Most importantly, rope was used during the house building process to lash together the yehakin's wooden frame and to sew the woven mats onto the wooden frame.

Rope, also called cordage, was made of the inner bark of trees, animal tendons, and plant fibers. Powhatan women probably gathered most rope-making materials and made most of the rope needed in their own work. The use of rope in a Powhatan village would have been extensive and rope making may have been an activity that occurred throughout the year, possibly even on a daily basis.

Most of the documentation that we have about Powhatan rope comes from the written accounts of the early 17th-century Englishmen. Because the material used to make rope is natural and decomposes easily, it usually does not survive archaeologically. Rope is, however, archaeologically documented in the form of impressions on ceramics, which survive from the time period.

Primary Source Accounts of Rope Making:
"Betwixt their hands and thighs, their women use to spin, barks of trees, deare sinews, or a kind of grasse they call Pemmanaw, of these they make a thred very even and readily. This thred serveth for many uses: As about their housing, apparel, and also they make nets for fishing, for the quantity as formally braded as ours. They make also with it lines for angles."

Source: John Smith, A Map of Virginia (1612). In The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580–1631) Vol. I,
p. 163–164.

". . . their Cordage, which they make of their naturall hemp and flax together with their Cunning dressing of that and preserving the whole yeare great Litches or bundells of the same to be used upon any occasion; and of their girdells, which they make of silke grasse, much like St. Francis Cordon [the girdle used by the monks of the Franciscan order is of twisted cord, and knotted]."

Source: William Strachey, The History of Travelle into Virginia Britania (1612). (Wright & Freund, eds.), p. 75.
Materials:
• Raffia (this is not native to Virginia, but is the most similar commercially available plant material)
• Piece of cordage
• Optional: examples of baskets or other material culture made with rope

Strategy:
1. Describe the importance of rope to the Powhatans using the introductory material and any outside research.
2. Arrange visitors in small groups. Allow students a few minutes to read and discuss the questions.
3. Demonstrate Rope Making Method 1 for visitors, then allow them to attempt to make rope using this method on their own.

Method 1:
Fold a long piece of raffia in half. The two lengths of fiber extending from the fold should be twisted separately in the same direction. This can be done by twisting each fiber separately with the fingers, or by asking two visitors to each twist one end of the raffia while the third visitor holds the center loop. Then carefully twist the center loop in the same direction as the previously twisted fibers. This will twist the two separately twisted fibers into one single cord. Continue down the length of fiber. Additional raffia may be spliced into the piece of rope by folding the new piece and placing the center at the point where the two fibers separate, then continue the twisting process.

1. Demonstrate Rope Making Method 2 for visitors, then allow them to attempt to make rope using this method on their own.

Method 2 (thigh rolling):
Fold a long piece of raffia in half. Lay the two folded lengths on your thigh. Using your hand, roll the two lengths on your thigh until the two lengths twist into the cord. This is the most historically accurate method of rolling cordage.

3. **The "Battle of Bladensburg: Rising from Adversity" tour**

The **"Battle of Bladensburg: Rising from Adversity"** tour would encompass all historic interpretive elements currently available in the Bladensburg area, beginning at the Indian Queen Tavern. Much like walking tours in other locations that use themes rather than linear storytelling (such as the Constitutional Walking Tour of Philadelphia), the tour would focus on the theme of Bladensburg throughout American history, with special attention paid to underrepresented stories and tales of resilience. Led initially by ATHA staff, the tour would begin with a discussion of Bladensburg emergence as a port city in colonial Maryland, along with discussion of Jacob Coxey's "army" of unemployed during the 1894 marches due to economic depression. Rather than a linear tale of the Battle of Bladensburg, this tour would represent the ever-evolving role that Bladensburg played in American history leading to its role as community key to the greater Washington, D.C. area. The tour would take visitors through the history of indigenous communities, the colonial era, including the Battle of Bladensburg, the role of Bladensburg in the Underground Railroad, and ending with discussions of the Bladensburg WW1 Memorial Peace Cross.

Visitors would then cross the street into the BWP and taken onto an interpretive Riverboat tour with the PG Parks, and end with the colonial rope making tour and activity. A virtual version of this tour would be recorded and uploaded to the STQRY application and accessible at any point throughout the interpretive elements via QR code. This more expansive tour will utilize the geofencing capabilities of the STQRY application to prompt visitors to download the app and enter the tour at all ATHA-generated GIS map of interpretive elements (see appendix C), any identified elements from community partners, and major attractions at the BWP and surrounding Bladensburg-area historic houses.

With STQRY's ability to support augmented reality through the STQRY Builder tool, the "Battle of Bladensburg: Rising from Adversity" tour can also include then vs now pictures and elements to illustrate to visitors the changes in the physical landscape, showcase the scale of the Battle of Bladensburg, and portray no-longer-possible elements (i.e. a full-size ship in the river). These features will not only succeed in the historic interpretation goals of this project but also work to engage new audiences that are more adept at using smartphones and mobile applications. STQRY's capacity to display content in multiple languages (including options to upload translated content if ATHA or community partners only have access to a primary source/document) will also help New Americans or visitors with English as a Second Language (ESL).

4. Student-focused tours

School-based groups and educators are an important constituency for the BWP and the historic interpretation elements surrounding the Battle of Bladensburg. Utilizing either student voices or celebrity appearances, the creation of a student-focused tour could be created in conjunction with local educational entities (K-12 and/or University-level) to cover learning objectives and provide younger visitors with a unique experience that connects with their experiences. This tour would align with the theme of making learning opportunities clearer to educators and present it in a way that engages a younger audience effectively, a topic that was explored deeply in the community stakeholder meeting (detailed below).

The creation of the student-focused tour would begin by taking themes and ideas from the video that engaged younger audiences at the visitor center. The themes and concepts explored in the older video would serve as a starting point, since visitors and staff recall students interacting favorably with the video but would expand to include underrepresented groups and additional historical insights that have emerged since the original video. This tour should include multiple uses of augmented reality, geofenced notifications and tour stops, along with living history videos/demonstrations. This tour would be best constructed in conjunction with educators and community leaders in the youth advocacy sector.

5. Walk the Battle tour

Another tour offered within the STQRY application could be a journey into military history, which would focus more on troop movements and war science of the time. At the beginning of the tour, the visitor would pick the "British" or "American" version of the tour, which could also be geofenced at particular areas, to take visitors through the literal movements of troops during the Battle of Bladensburg.

From the "British" version of the tour, the visitors would be taken into the Bladensburg area as a British soldier, full with information on where the British originally landed, how they viewed this war with the Americans within the larger context of that time period's British history, and what marching to Washington, D.C. would mean for the war efforts. Visitors would be taken by the virtual British soldier "tour guide" through the Battle, eventually with a victorious march to our nation's capital.

From the "American" version of the tour, visitors would be stationed in defensive positions and experience the approaching British regulars firing their rockets to inspire fear in the American soldiers. As the battle unfolds and the American defeat seems to be at hand, the visitors in the tour would "retreat" back toward the BWP and the other historically preserved houses in the area, where they would learn more about the battle's aftermath (including caring for the wounded at The Hilleary-Magruder House).

Each of these perspectives would offer different perspectives, give visitors basic information on the battle itself, and introduce an augmented reality component of the various troop movements and illustrations of the rockets used in the battle. This attraction would require some visitors to make multiple trips to fully experience this tour, which would attribute to cultural tourism goals.

The Battle of Bladensburg in Already-Established Applications

The majority of respondents from the community survey desired a mobile application (app) to guide their historical interpretive experience. In addition to the creation of an app using STQRY dedicated to the Battle of Bladensburg and surrounding historically relevant areas, the Battle of Bladensburg can also advocate to add Bladensburg to already-existing apps. There are multiple avenues to introduce the Battle of Bladensburg and other historic interpretive elements near the city to already-existing applications. For instance, Strava, an app for running, cycling, and hiking, could be a great place to introduce a hike mimicking the invasion of Washington, D.C. via Bladensburg or a bike path with similar aims.

There are many additional ways for BWP, ATHA, partners to meet the public desire with an addition in the app AllTrails, Kevin Costner's Autio history/story/travel app, and many more. For AllTrails, ATHA could submit a hike path that begins in Bladensburg and ends in Washington, D.C., taking hikers through the British army's march from Bladensburg to the White House (which was burned by British troops during the War of 1812). For the ambitious hikers, folks could also begin at Benedict, MD where British troops initially landed with aims to take Washington, D.C. If Bladensburg were to be added to the Autio app, walking tours and vehicular tours alike are guided through the history of Bladensburg with special attention paid to the Battle of Bladensburg. During this tour, drivers and/or walkers can experience the wide swath of history that touched Bladensburg.

Recommended Planning Action Steps:

To actualize the recommendations in this document and to efficiently carry the historic interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg into its next era, action steps have been broken into short-, medium- and long-term steps:

Short-term (1-3 months) action steps:

1. Create regional working group for comprehensive improvements to the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site.

To ensure buy-in from all available partners and a process for decision-making within the group, the formation of a regional working group will be helpful to make changes to the Battle of Bladensburg historic interpretation and to keep relevant stakeholders engaged with the long-term project. In this step, key stakeholders will be identified and invited to the working group (recommendation: having multiple people per organization is best practices for the working group) and given roles within the structure of the working group.

2. Add a Battle of Bladensburg section to the PG Parks website (and other partners within the working group).
3. Re-establish contact with the team of reenactors that perform at the Riverdale House Museum.

Each year in August, a reenactment of a Battle of Bladensburg encampment is portrayed at the Riverdale House Museum. This effort should be featured as a virtual tour/attraction within the STQRY, but in the near-term, re-establishing contact with this group to bring them into the regional working group along will be critical to obtaining buy-in and for scheduling future collaborations. One such collaboration that should be scheduled in the near-term is to record the reenactment that takes place in August.

4. Record any current tours for posterity.

Any current aspects of the tour experience that occurs around the Battle of Bladensburg should be recorded either for use in the STQRY application or for future content generation. Recording the Riverboat tour, for example, would be of great importance.

5. Create and populate an inventory of historic interpretation items.

Any current or former materials should be catalogued, including the condition of each item, to establish and maintain a list of historic interpretation items that each member of the regional working group owns. This will assist with future efforts to update the interpretive elements and will be housed to serve any member of the regional working group.

6. Set an initial meeting with STQRY about their platform, pricing, and plans.

Medium-term (3-6 months) action items:

1. Creation of the Battle of Bladensburg Regional Working Group subcommittees

A governance structure, including committees should be agreed upon by the members of the regional working group. These groups should be created within the working group and populated by the end of month 3 of the planning process. The subcommittees should meet weekly to start and decrease as needed. As a starting place, we recommend the following subcommittees with the following responsibilities:

    A. Executive Committee

This committee would consist of the leaders of the working group's member institutions. This group would be responsible for long-term strategic goals and decision-making.

    B. Communications Committee

This group would consist of communications experts from each member institution, and their primary role would be to create, organize, and execute any collaborative effort that involved community outreach.

    C. Grasstops Committee

This group would consist of the well-connected members of the regional working group, for their efforts would be directed toward engaging community and industry leaders toward shared goals of the working group.

    D. Grassroots/Advocacy Committee

This committee, likely the largest of the subcommittees, would be geared toward engaging the public at the grassroots level to increase turnout to events, awareness of interpretive efforts, and to increase attendance of tours and attractions. This group will likely work in conjunction with the Grasstops committee for many of its goals.

    E. Fundraising Committee

For any future endeavors or attractions that require additional capital, a fundraising c committee would be responsible for any grant writing, planning and hosting fundraising events, and establishing a fund for small-dollar donations to flow into once source. While each member institution of the working group will undoubtedly have their own fundraising goals, it is important to have a separate account for Battle of Bladensburg fundraising to live and grow for security reasons and to monitor specific fundraising efforts for the Battle of Bladensburg.

2.   Purchase of and initial programming of STQRY application

In the medium-term, STQRY should be purchased, and initial recordings of tours (gathered in the previous step) should be uploaded. Member institutions of the working group should be consulted about their additions to the STQRY application library. The more buy-in to the application ATHA can create in this step, the possibility for cost-sharing in future annual membership payments/expansion of the service rises.

Long-term action items:

1.   Update of damaged and/or outdated signage.

2.   Unveiling of new interpretive efforts.

To highlight the hard work of propelling the Battle of Bladensburg historic interpretation into its next era, once the new network of tours are created and uploaded to the STQRY application and the signage updated, the regional working group will hold a press conference unveiling these efforts to local news and stakeholders. The press conference will be followed by social media posts, op-eds, and notification via member institutions' listservs.

3.   Explore possibilities of hiring additional personnel to support the ongoing efforts at modernizing the historic interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg.

PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To collect community survey responses, PSG and the ATHA worked collaboratively to achieve the desired response rate utilizing multiple outreach strategies. First, PSG purchased a random list of 10,000 consumer emails of residents in Prince George's County and Washington, D.C.-based specific zip codes: 20018; 20019; 20706; 20710; 20712; 20722; 20737; 20740; 20743; 20781; 20782; 20784; and 20785. Outreach to this population occurred on a regular and recurring basis until the survey closed. The initial outreach email was sent on September 27, 2024, with reminder emails sent every three days until November 30, 2024. In addition, the community survey was advertised through official ATHA communications such as the organization's email listserv, social media channels, and printed posters with a scannable QR code strategically placed around BWP and surrounding areas. Finally, PSG and ATHA utilized a community festival on October 5th, 2024 at BWP to conduct in-person intercept community surveys. Through this combination of outreach efforts, PSG obtained a strong survey sample of 606 respondents, which surpassed the goal of 385 survey responses and the corresponding confidence interval of 95% +/−5% (full explanation of sampling logic available in Appendix A). The community survey was deployed from September 27, 2024 until November 30, 2024. The community survey was also translated into Spanish to encourage participation and promote accessibility by for the Spanish-speaking members of the surrounding community. The Spanish version of the survey was deployed from October 27th until November 30th, 2024.

Data analysis followed shortly after the collection of the survey responses. For the open-ended or free response questions in the survey, all responses were coded for emerging themes. PSG used a two-pronged coding methodology: "open coding" and "focused coding" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 172). "Open coding" refers to going through research notes (or, in this case, individual answers to free response survey questions) "line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 172). "Focused coding" is the more "fine-grained, line-by-line analysis on the basis of topics that have been identified as being of particular interest" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 172). By using this two-part methodology for coding free response questions, PSG categorized these responses into groups of related or similar answers.

PSG also conducted multiple key informant interviews and one community meeting where additional data was gathered. In the key informant interviews, the list of participants was chosen by ATHA with outreach and interviews conducted by PSG. Each interview was recorded and transcribed with permission from the interviewee. The interviews were designed to be open-ended to allow free responses, with a common discussion guide as a framing device for each interview (attached in Appendix B), ensuring that a baseline set of questions was asked in each interview.

For the community meeting, hosted by ATHA and PSG in the Prince George's County Memorial Library System's Bladensburg Branch meeting space on October 22, 2024, a weekday evening with meals provided. At the meeting, a series of data collection methodologies were employed: each participant was given a written exercise and asked to react to preliminary survey results along with other survey and free response questions. The analysis of this data mirrored the methodology of the community survey, including the coding process for the free response questions.

This project was funded in part by the National Park Service Battlefield Interpretation Grant for scoping, planning, and development of a new interpretive plan for the Battle of Bladensburg. The ATHA is one of 13 Heritage Areas certified by the State of Maryland under the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. Heritage Areas contribute to the state and local economy through tourism. ATHA has been directly involved in the historic interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg for more than 20 years.

DATA ANALYSIS

Community Survey

Key Takeaways
- Respondents reported being familiar with the Battle of Bladensburg, but when prompted for deeper understanding of the battle, those same respondents were inconsistent regarding basic facts about the battle.
- The BWP has been visited by the majority of survey respondents recently (in the last six months), with the trail network and recreational rentals being the most memorable features. Notably, the Battle of Bladensburg interpretive signage and riverboat tours were not far behind, indicating the BWP being remembered by visitors as a historic site.
- When asked what they would like to see added to the BWP's historical interpretive elements, respondents identified a free mobile app and additional historical tours.

The community survey provided multiple insights into the current historic interpretation elements around the Battle of Bladensburg and how the public uses the BWP. The survey design was led by PSG with collaborative help from ATHA staff and leadership with four primary research areas that questions helped to explore:
1. What is the community's general understanding regarding the Battle of Bladensburg?
2. How are the historic interpretation elements within the community to commemorate the battle consumed and remembered?
3. How does the community use the BWP (and its offerings) and what would they like to see in the future?
4. How does the community feel in general about changes to a historic site's or museum's historic interpretation?

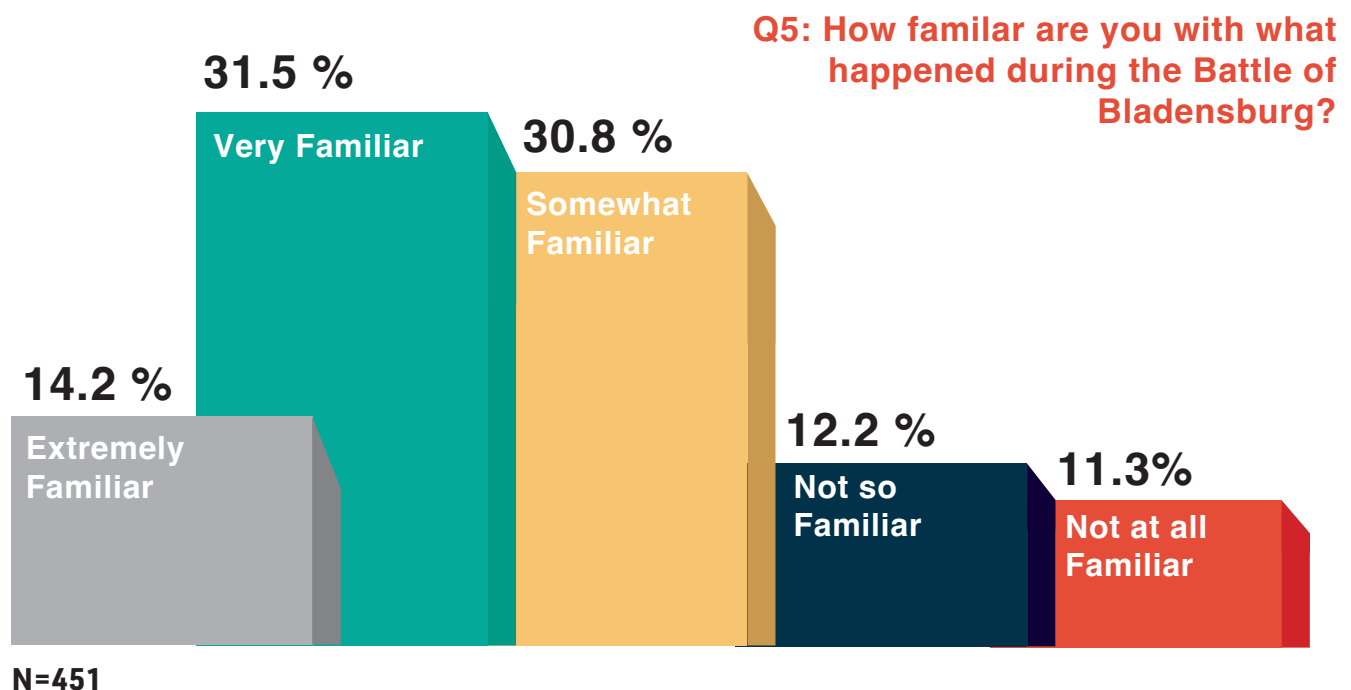Using these research areas, PSG designed an online survey (paper version for intercept surveys) with 25 total questions — including demographic questions and a chance to win a random drawing as an incentive. The average time to complete the survey was just over eight minutes (eight minutes, 13 seconds), which was slightly below the estimated time of nine minutes that the PSG had identified before the survey was live.

Research Area One: What is the Community's General Understanding Regarding the Battle of Bladensburg?

The community survey included six questions aimed at our first research area (general understanding regarding the Battle of Bladensburg). First, the survey utilized a standard Likert familiarity question (ranging from "extremely familiar" to "not at all familiar") with answer options utilized in the tourism and research development industry (Vagias, 2006). That question was followed by a free response question that asked respondents to provide their most familiar detail of the battle. Then, the survey included three "true or false" questions using basic historical facts around the Battle of Bladensburg. The responses to the questions in this research area were mixed and demonstrate an incomplete understanding around the Battle by community members.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of respondents reported being "very" or "somewhat" familiar with the Battle of Bladensburg. Given the responses to the other questions within this research area, discussed next, this assertion by the respondents is not necessarily born out of the data. The Dunning–Kruger effect from psychology might help explain this phenomenon on most surveys, when people overrate their understanding or competence around a content area or ability to complete a task (Duignan, 2024). Respondents might also have suffered a bit from social desirability bias, where respondents tend to give more "socially desirable" responses instead of ones that reflect their true feelings or knowledge (Grimm, 2010). After all, few people have the confidence and inclination to admit they might not know something.

Three-quarters of respondents reported being very familiar or somewhat familiar with the Battle of Bladensburg

31.5 %
Very Familiar

30.8 %
Somewhat Familiar

14.2 %
Extremely Familiar

12.2 %
Not so Familiar

11.3%
Not at all Familiar

Q5: How familar are you with what happened during the Battle of Bladensburg?

N=451

When then prompted for a free response regarding a standout detail from the Battle of Bladensburg (Q6), the emergent codes from the responses and the proportion of the total were as follows:
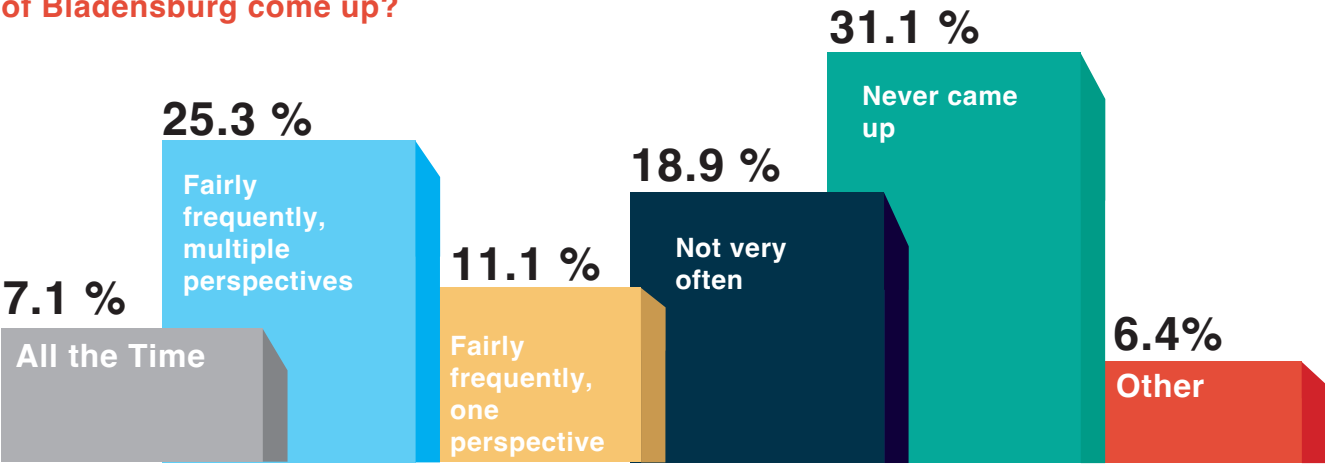
- Americans lost the Battle, with few or incorrect details—34.8%
- Detailed response about the Battle and the subsequent effects of the American loss—22.7%
- Mention of specific historic actors (e.g., Commander Barney) and other aspects of Maryland history—12.5%
- No response or "don't remember"—8.2%
- Americans lost with no further detail—6.2%
- The Battle took place during the War of 1812 with no details on the Battle—5.7%
- The location of the Battle (or portions of the Battle)—5.4%
- Incorrect war identification/incorrect resolution of the Battle—4%
- Related to the Star-Spangled Banner—0.3%
- Other—0.2%

These responses demonstrate multiple important takeaways regarding the public's general knowledge of the Battle. First, the fact that the Battle was a loss for the American side is generally known by the public with differing degree of details. If we combine the percentage of the coding categories that include the Battle being a loss for the Americans, those groups account for **63.7% of free responses**. Second, the significant percentage of respondents who tied their most solid memory or fact from the Battle of Bladensburg to specific historic actors or aspects of Maryland history (12.5%) provides additional insights into what respondents remember from the interpretive elements and memory of the Battle. Of the 44 responses in this category, 34—or 77.3%—mentioned a specific male general or male member of government by name. This lends to the "great man" version of historic interpretation, where a top-down approach to understanding historic events is common. While this is not the topic of the majority of interpretive elements at BWP, this finding illustrates that the public's connection between the Battle of Bladensburg and Maryland/local history is limited to this version of historic interpretation. Lastly, the number of respondents who named a specific location in relation to the Battle (e.g., the Anacostia River, Bladensburg Waterfront Park, etc.) and those who identified the Battle within the Star-Spangled Banner narrative were very low—5.4% and 0.3%, respectively. This is significant for a few notable reasons. First, the low percentage who identified a specific location in the community is notable because of the BWP's proximity to the historic battlefield along with the popular Anacostia Tributary Trails System bringing many visitors in along important geographic features. Second, the minimal response linking the Battle of Bladensburg to the Star-Spangled Banner is notable because of the work that was done to include the Battle into the Star-Spangled Banner narrative by the National Park Service and other organizations around the War of 1812 bicentennial celebration. These differences have a variety of potential causes, one of which may be the respondents' experience learning about the Battle of Bladensburg in their schooling experience.

When asked how often the Battle of Bladensburg was mentioned in their schooling experience and beyond, the most selected response (31.1%) was that the Battle never came up. This is further evidence that the first question regarding respondents' familiarity with the Battle of Bladensburg was a victim of a somewhat biased response. The second most selected response (25.3%) was that the Battle came up fairly frequently, with multiple perspectives. This perhaps helps to explain why, in the free response question, there were many responses that offered detailed memories/analysis of the Battle. It also demonstrates the difference in curriculum within the variety of schooling experiences of the respondents – who include those that were educated in Maryland as well as other places. This survey data supports a main assertion during the community meeting (discussed in more detail next) that for most students in the public school systems surrounding Bladensburg, the Battle of Bladensburg is not discussed with much detail or emphasis despite its importance to the area.

Nearly one-third of respondents report the Battle of Bladensburg never coming up. Conversely, a quarter reported the Battle coming up fairly frequently with multiple perspectives.

Q7: Thinking about your experience in school and beyond, how often did the Battle of Bladensburg come up?

7.1 %
All the Time

25.3 %
Fairly frequently, multiple perspectives

11.1 %
Fairly frequently, one perspective

18.9 %
Not very often

31.1 %
Never came up

6.4%
Other

N=450

Nearly 7 out of 10 respondents answered correctly that the Battle was not fought between American and Indigenous forces.

Q8: True or False: The Battle of Bladensburg was fought between the Americans and Indigenous (Native) forces.

32.6 %
True

67.4%
False
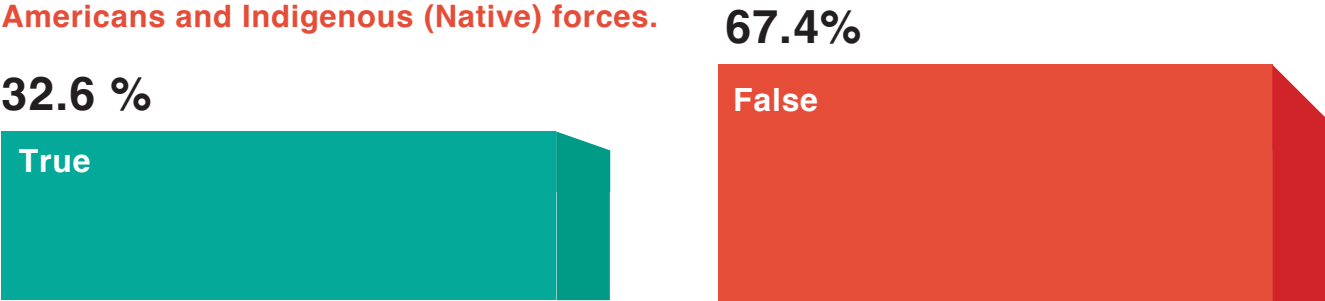
N=445

This section of the survey then concluded with a series of three "true of false" questions that tested the basic understanding of key facts regarding the Battle of Bladensburg. The first question's (above) correct answer was false, that the Battle did not occur between American and Indigenous (Native) forces but rather the British and Americans. By and large, a solid majority (67.4%) answered correctly that the assertion in the question was false. The incorrect answers for this question (32.6% of respondents) were a significant portion, but could be somewhat explained by the involvement of Indigenous forces in multiple conflicts across the War of 1812.

The second "true or false" question focused on the reason the Americans lost. Namely, the Americans lost due to poor command, communication, and tactics during the Battle. The Americans were not, in fact, defeated because of deficient numbers; superior in number of troops were one of the few advantages on the side of the Americans for the Battle. The correct answer, therefore, is false (50.8% of responses). The fact that this question yielded the closest response between the three "true or false" questions is notable; while a majority know that the Battle of Bladensburg was a loss for American troops, the reason behind the loss is quite muddied for the survey respondents.

Only half of the respondents correctly identified that it was the British that were outnumbered, not the Americans.

Q9: True or false: One of the main reasons the Americans lost the battle was because enemy troops outnumbered the Americans on the battlefield.

49.2 %

True

50.8%

False

N=445
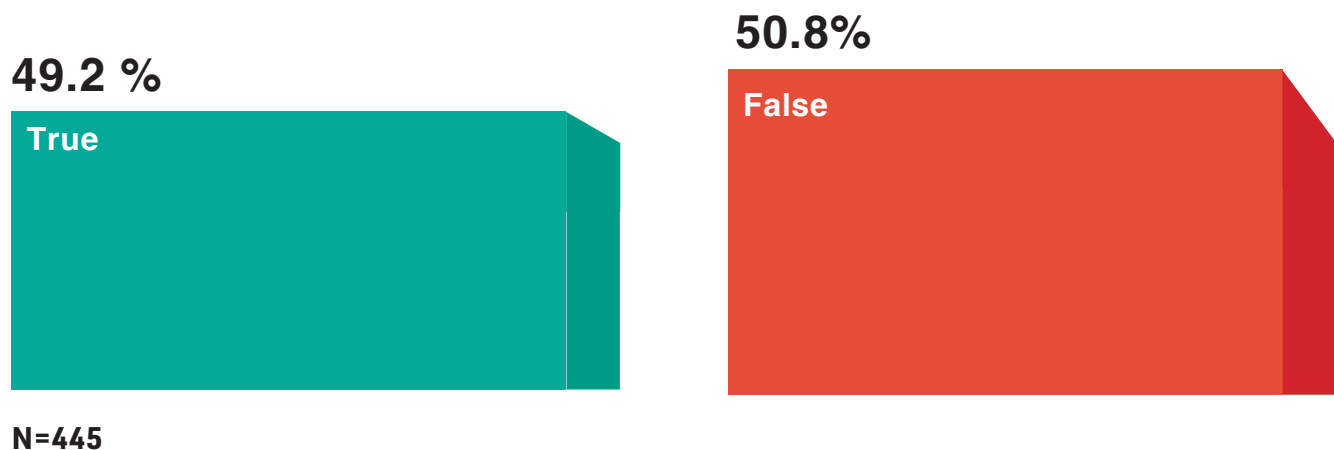
The final "true or false" question uses arguably the most well-known connection between the War of 1812 historic narrative and the Battle of Bladensburg: the burning of the White House. To this question, respondents are the firmest in their correct response with 84.3% answering correctly that the answer is "true."

There are a series of important takeaways regarding the respondents' answers to the questions comprising the survey's first research area. While many respondents rate themselves as having some significant familiarity with the Battle of Bladensburg, the questions that check for that understand paints a more complicated picture. Most respondents know that the Americans lost the Battle of Bladensburg, and that loss led to a larger strategic and symbolic loss with the sacking of Washington, D.C. and the burning of the White House. The details beyond those facts surrounding the Battle are muddled for our respondents. Vast differences in the exposure to the Battle of Bladensburg in school and beyond may contribute to the confusion on the reasons for the American loss and who exactly the Americans were fighting.

These findings provide some important insights for future considerations around the related interpretive elements. **Some of the basic facts around the Battle of Bladensburg — such as who the enemy was along with why the Americans lost and what lessons were learned from the loss — are still needed.** There are obvious limits to what a historic site or museum can tell visitors, even within the military history aspects of the Bladensburg narrative. However, these findings can offer a starting place for future considerations around the interpretive elements regarding the Battle.

Greater than 8 in 10 respondents correctly identified that the loss at Bladensburg led to the burning of the White House.
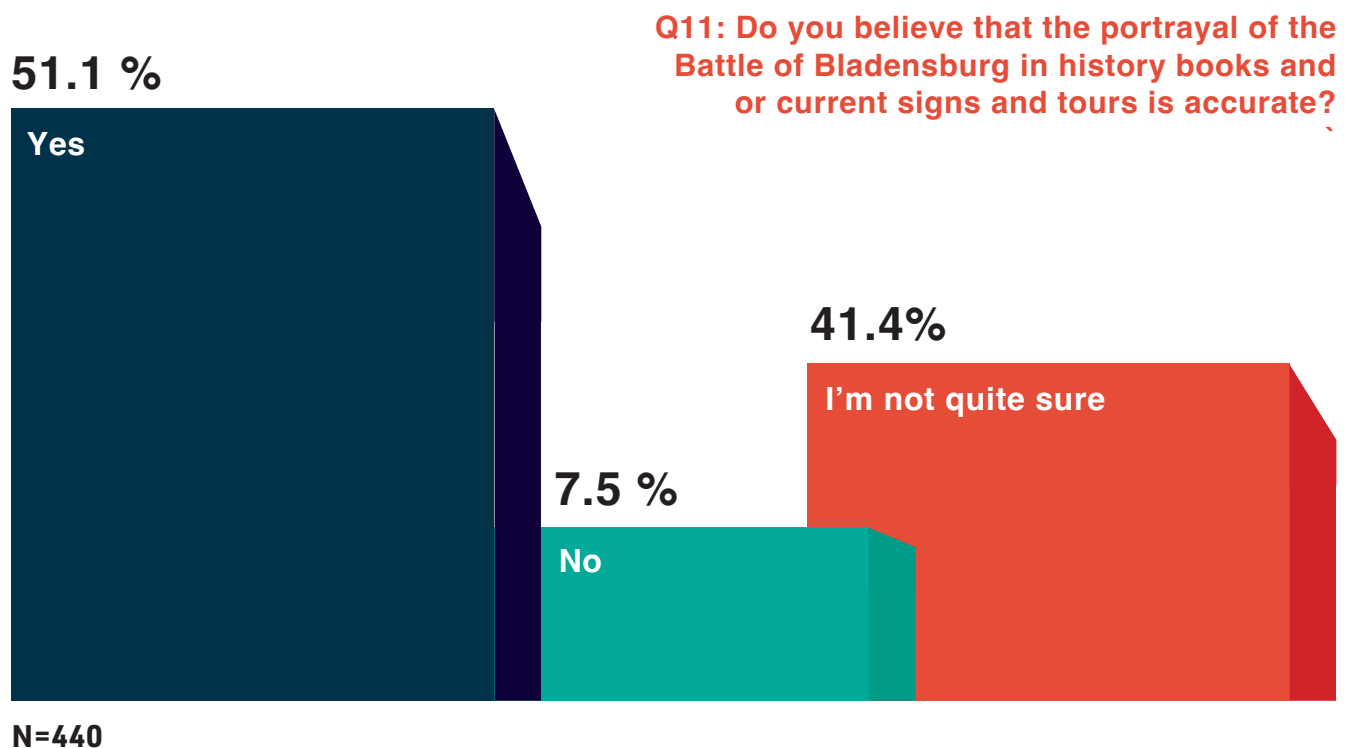
Q10: True or false:The Americans losing the Battle of Bladensburg led to the burning of the White House in Washington, DC.

84.3 %

True

15.7%

False

N=445
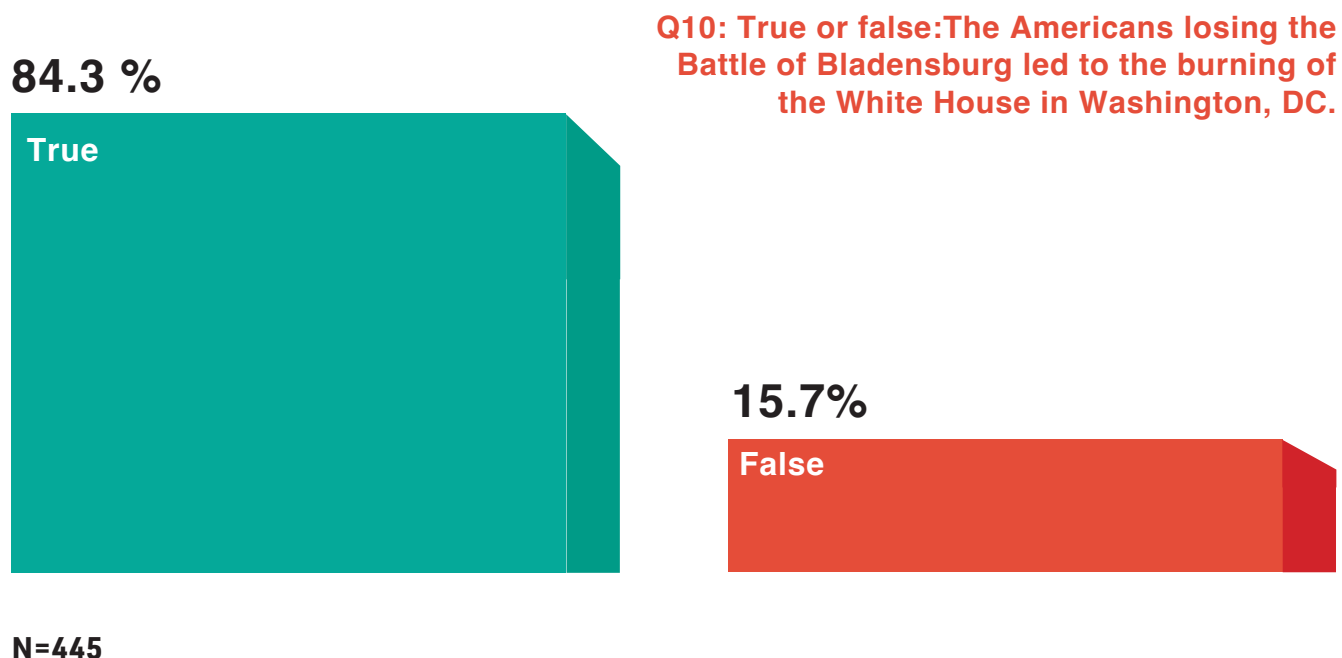
Research Area Two: How Are the Historic Interpretation Elements Within the Community to Commemorate the Battle Consumed and Remembered

Moving onto the questions within the second research area (How are the historic interpretation elements within the community to commemorate the Battle consumed and remembered), respondents were given three questions to ascertain their understanding of the current interpretive elements. First, respondents were asked whether the portrayal of the Battle in history books and the current interpretive elements were accurate. The perceived accuracy in historic interpretation is often a subjective experience by the visitor, who brings with them a variety of previous educational opportunities, political persuasions, and personal biases to their experience at a historic site or museum. Additionally, in a recent analysis from NPR, historical markers across the country have inaccuracies and biased versions of historical events, giving skeptical visitors some reason to look at historical interpretation elements with a somewhat critical eye (Sullivan & McMillan, 2024). When it comes to the interpretive elements at the BWP (signage and tours) and how the Battle of Bladensburg is portrayed in history books, the survey respondents shared some of this skepticism. While a slight majority (51.1%) answered "yes" to the question of accuracy, a sizable plurality (41.4%) was "not quite sure." That said, only a small minority (7.5%) answered "no." This initial question on the interpretive elements currently available indicates a fairly notable amount of trust in the accuracy of the signage and tours available at the BWP.
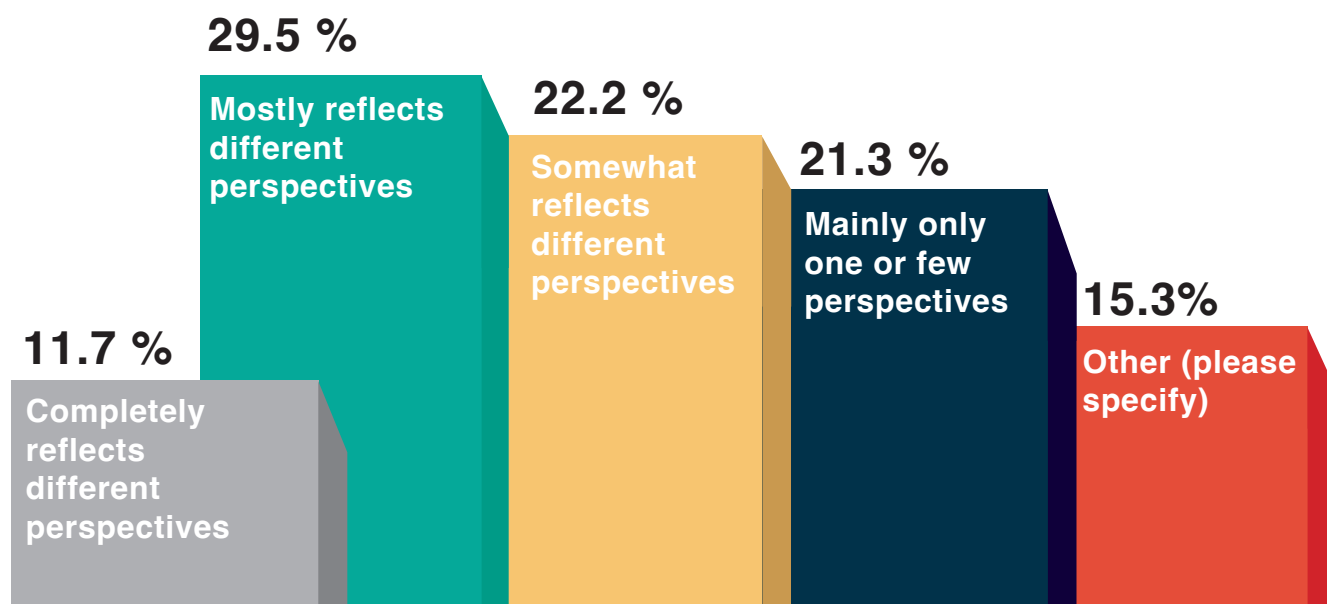
One-half of the survey respondents believe the Battle of Bladensburg interpretation is accurate, with 4 in 10 being not sure.

Q11: Do you believe that the portrayal of the Battle of Bladensburg in history books and or current signs and tours is accurate?

51.1 %

Yes

41.4%

I'm not quite sure

7.5 %

No

N=440

Respondents were then asked whether different perspectives (cultural, racial, class-based, gender, etc.) are reflected in the way the story of the Battle of Bladensburg is currently told. This question revealed a wide range of responses from the survey sample. The most popular response was that the current story of the Battle "mostly reflects different perspectives," but that answered only garnered 29.5% of responses. "Somewhat reflects different perspectives" and "mainly only one or very few perspectives" portrayed were close behind — with 22.2% and 21.3% of the answers, respectively. Only 11.7% of the respondents believed that the story "completely reflects different perspectives." Having the story "mostly reflect different perspectives" for the respondents is encouraging and indicates that a sizable part of the community surveyed here views the historical narrative around the Battle of Bladensburg as working toward or successfully engaging multiple perspectives. Not only can this engage a wide range of audiences at a historic site or museum, but it also reflects the macro-level trends in the discipline of history where social history or a "bottom-up" view of historical events is more widely explored and encouraged (Koman, 1994).

3 in 10 respondents believe the story told about the Battle of Bladensburg mostly reflects different perspectives.

Q12: Are different perspectives reflected in the way the story around the Battle of Bladensburg is currently told? (Example: different cultural, racial, class, or gender viewpoints)

29.5 %
Mostly reflects different perspectives

22.2 %
Somewhat reflects different perspectives

21.3 %
Mainly only one or few perspectives

15.3%
Other (please specify)

11.7 %
Completely reflects different perspectives

N=447

Finally, when asked which perspectives are the most underrepresented in the current story of the Battle of Bladensburg, the most popular response from the community survey was "Black or African American perspectives" at 30.8%. There was a sizable gap between the top answer and the next two popular choices. "Indigenous perspectives" and "the relevance of the Battle" were the second- and third-most popular choices at 14.3% and 13.3%, respectively. Other answers followed closely behind.

3 in 10 respondents identify Black or African American perspectives as being most underrepresented.

Q13: Which perspectives do you think are most underrepresented in dicussions about the Battle of Bladensburg?

30.8 %
Black or African American Perspectives

14.3 %
Indigenous Perspectives

11.3 %
Economic Class Perspectives

13.3 %
Relevance of Battle

10.3%
Non-military Perspectives

10.8 %
The relevance of the battle

4.1 %
None of the above

5.1%
Women's Perspectives
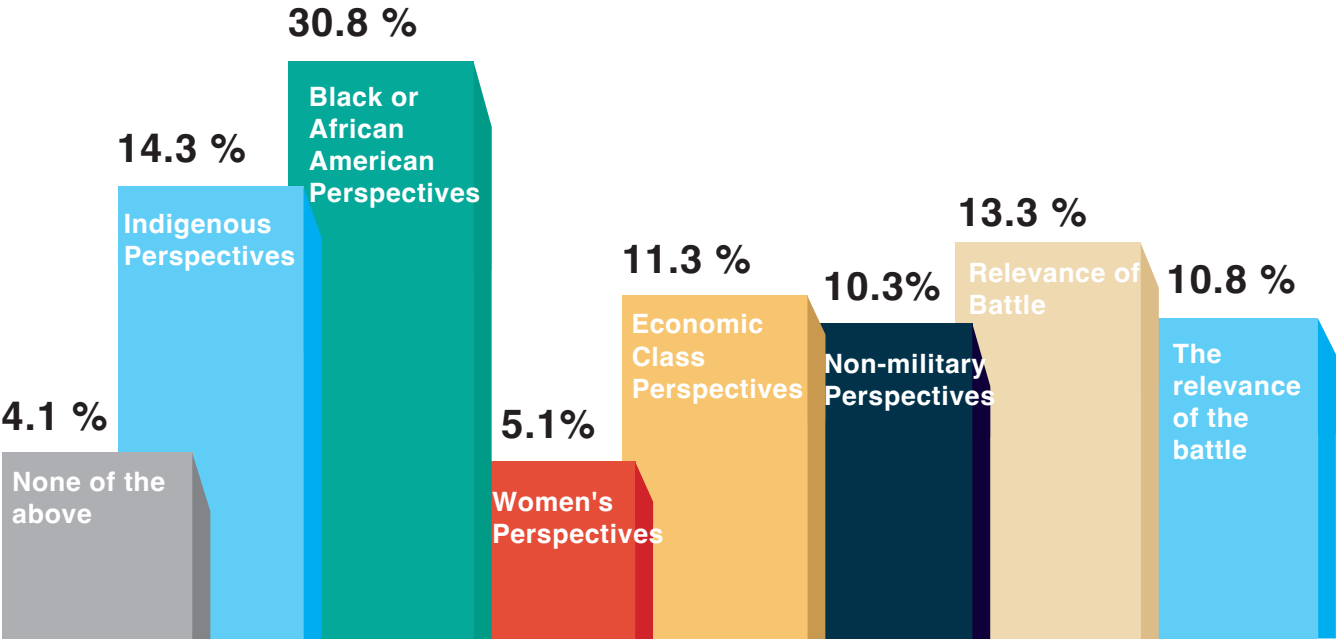
N=435

The responses to these three questions provide some insight into the survey's second research area (How are the historic interpretation elements within the community to commemorate the Battle consumed and remembered). First, the majority believe that the current interpretive elements and the way the Battle of Bladensburg is portrayed in history books is accurate, with a strong plurality viewing the narrative critically or not having enough information and exposure to render a verdict. When prompted to think about the perspectives included in the current narrative, the results reveal that 43.5% of respondents believe that the current narrative has some work to do to reflect different perspectives (adding together "somewhat reflects different perspectives" and "mainly only one or very few perspectives"). When adding the "other" category of responses – the majority of which indicated respondents being unsure or not having enough information to decide – the percentage of respondents wishing for more variety of perspectives rises to 58.8%. Respondents identified Black and African American perspectives as being the most notable missing perspective from their experience with the Battle of Bladensburg commemoration, with room for growth regarding a variety of additional perspectives as well. For future considerations to modify or add to the historical interpretive elements around the Battle, this research area provides some potential starting points and areas for further exploration.

Research Area Three: How Does the Community Use the Bladensburg Waterfront Park (and Its Offerings) and What Do They Want to See in the Future?

The survey then asked respondents to focus on the BWP and what they would like to see in the future at the park related to historic interpretation. The first question, toward the beginning of the survey itself, asked respondents to report when their most recent visit to the BWP. The most popular response at 30.8% of total responses was "in the past two to six months," followed closely at 27% by "in the past month." Not too far behind the top two responses at 20% was "between six months and one year ago." This fairly equal distribution between three of the six possible responses shows that the survey responders do not overly represent people who visit the BWP regularly, but include people who have certainly been exposed to the interpretive elements present at BWP.

More than one-half of the respondents have visited the BWP in the past six months.

Q3: When was your most recent visit to Bladensburg Waterfront Park?

27.0 %
I've visited in the past month

30.8 %
I've visited in the past 2-6 months

20.0 %
I've visited between 6 months and 1 year ago

14.2 %
My most recent visit was more than a year ago

6.4 %
I've never been to Bladensburg Waterfront Park

1.5%
Other (please specify)
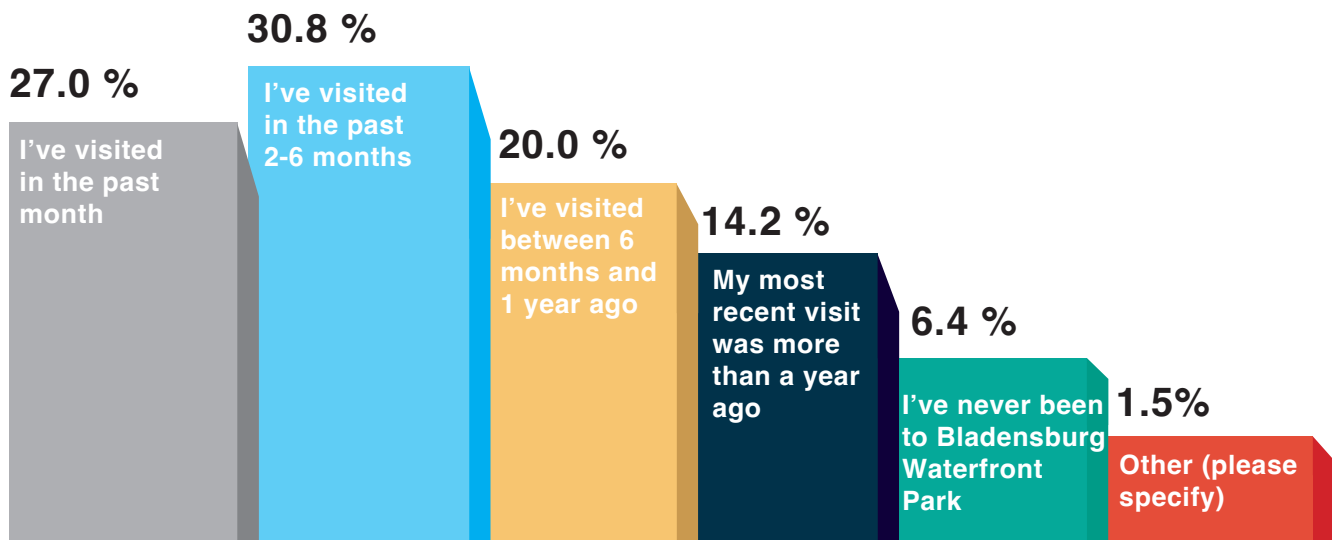
N=471

Building on the timeline of the most recent visit, the survey then asked respondents to check off all of the attractions and interpretive elements — both historic and other recreational options — that they remember from that most recent visit (Q4). This set of questions helps determine the most memorable and sought after aspects of the BWP. This question, unlike the majority of other questions in the survey, allowed respondents to check off as many answers as they would like.
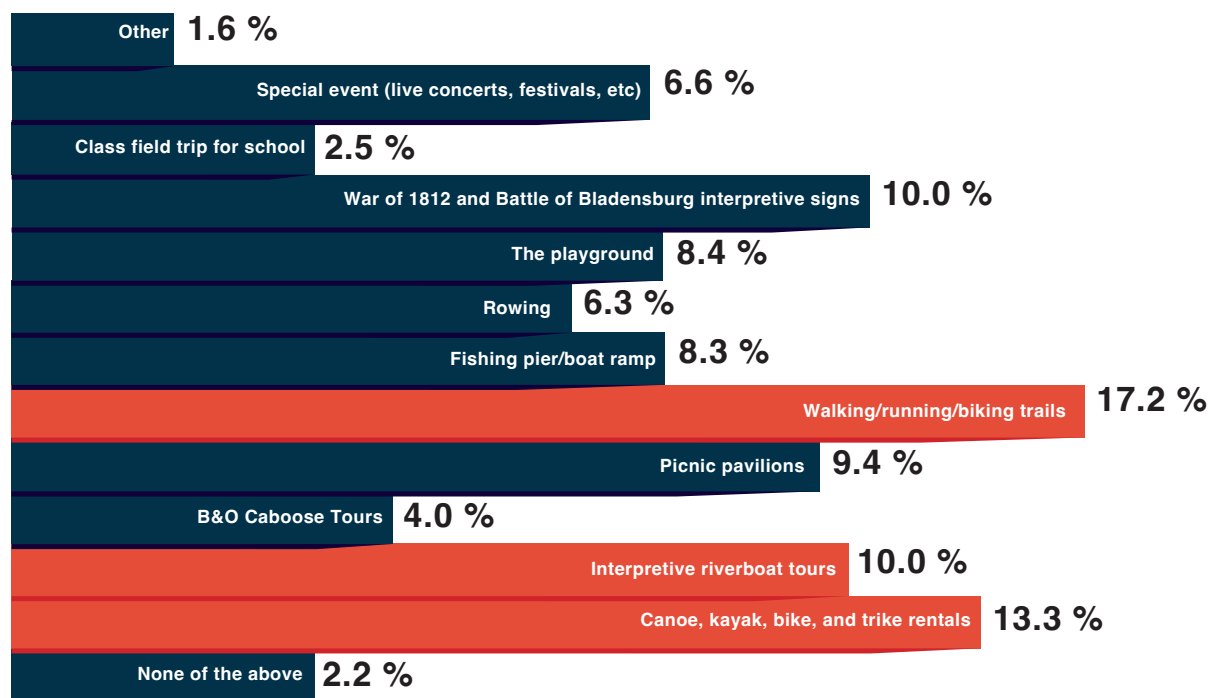
Number 1 Response: Coming in first place with 17.2% of the total responses was "walking/running/biking trails." This is not necessarily surprising; given the popularity of the Anacostia Tributary Trails System and the natural landscapes that lend to the BWP being a destination for outdoor activities, along with the physical landscape being key to the Battle of Bladensburg and the interpretive elements to remember it, ways to interact with the area near the Anacostia River remain popular.

Number 2 Response: In second place, with 13.3% of responses, were the "canoe, kayak, bike, and trike rentals" again emphasizing the outdoor activities that attract people to BWP.

Number 3 Response: The only other response to garner double-digit percentage response from our survey was a tie between "War of 1812 and Battle of Bladensburg interpretive signs" and "interpretive riverboat tours" at 10% each of the total response. This is notable because, while the outdoor-related activities were ahead of the interpretive signs and the riverboat tours, from what folks remember, are a memorable part of the experience for these visitors.

The question then arises: if the interpretive elements are a memorable part of the experience at the BWP — especially when given so many options to choose from in the survey — why is the knowledge about the Battle and the perspectives presented mixed? There is likely no one answer to this question; one could argue that the interpretive signs and the riverboat tours are something that people remember and connect to, but the aesthetics of the signage or the narratives written and shown on the signs and during the tours can be altered to include additional perspectives and reinforce the importance of the Battle. Perhaps the two sets of elements could be more linked together thematically to create a deeper experience. For example, utilizing a multi-entrance heritage network (such as the Battle of Brandywine Interpretive Plan, outlined in the case study section of this report) could link the two sets of elements under a collective theme or similar heritage centers and/or signage. Or perhaps adding additional signage on the Anacostia Tributary Trails System to further engage the bikers, hikers, and runners with the interpretive signage at BWP and the tours. This particular question helps to start the conversation of what comes next at BWP.

Q4: What do you remember from/have done during your previous visit(s) to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park? Check all that apply.

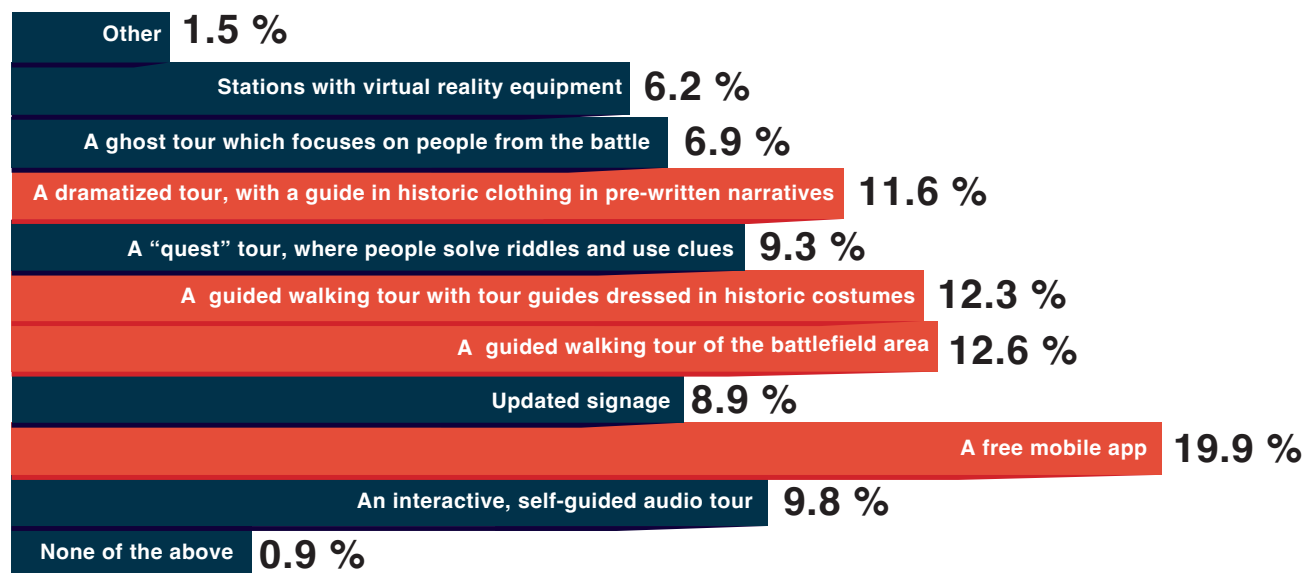| Category	Percentage
Other	1.6 %
Special event (live concerts, festivals, etc)	6.6 %
Class field trip for school	2.5 %
War of 1812 and Battle of Bladensburg interpretive signs	10.0 %
The playground	8.4 %
Rowing	6.3 %
Fishing pier/boat ramp	8.3 %
Walking/running/biking trails	17.2 %
Picnic pavilions	9.4 %
B&O Caboose Tours	4.0 %
Interpretive riverboat tours	10.0 %
Canoe, kayak, bike, and trike rentals	13.3 %
None of the above	2.2 %

N=1294

The final question posed in research area three asked participants to wave their fictional magic wand and identify **what top three additions** they would want to see added to the interpretation at the BWP and other areas associated with the Battle. The options were presented using a list of commonly used historical interpretive additions that other sites have or have added recently. Out of the list (which included the free response option of "other"), the top response of what respondents would like to see was:

"a free mobile app that helps visualize the Battle and other historical buildings" at 19.9%. This is notable not only because it's the top answer, but also because the Battle of Bladensburg has had an accompanying mobile app in the past. Mobile apps are a popular interpretive element across many historic sites, but quality varies, and the cost of maintenance can be prohibitive to said quality. A reinvigorated app could be something to pursue, as long as proper planning and development of strategies to keep the app downloaded onto individual devices is in place. Ideally, a historic site does not want a mobile app that is deleted once you leave the site. While a difficult task, adding features or aspects to an app that keeps it on the device of the visitor could increase repeat visitations and deepen understanding of the historic events highlighted within the app.

Following the app, there were a cluster of three options for what visitors would like to see at BWP that had a similar response rate. The second-most selected answer (12.6%) was a "modern, guided walking tour of the battlefield." The option of a "modern, guided walking tour of the battlefield with tour guides dressed in historic costumes" was a close third place at 12.3%. The difference between the two tour options would be the "living history" nature of having the tour guides dressed in time period-specific garb. Finally, the last option in this cluster was "a dramatized tour" (11.6%) where guides and staff would be not only clothed in historically specific garb, but also have pre-written narratives and adventures to take visitors through in character. This end of the "living history" spectrum requires the interpretive elements to be totally immersive, with the guides not only dressed to look the part but have the knowledge to speak in the way person from the time would speak and have narratives to guide the visitors through rather than a purely information transfer. Regardless of the type, visitors seek a guided tour that takes them through the Battle and its aftermath. That type of tour has and continues to be done at BWP, but there is something missing from the visitor experience that is being identified in this "magic wand" question.

When asked to identify three options of elements to add to BWP, respondents identified a free mobile app, a guided walking tour (both with guides in historic attire and modern attire), and a dramatized tour with narratives.

Q17: If given a magic wand, what are the top three things that you would want added to the current Battle of Bladensburg historic site?

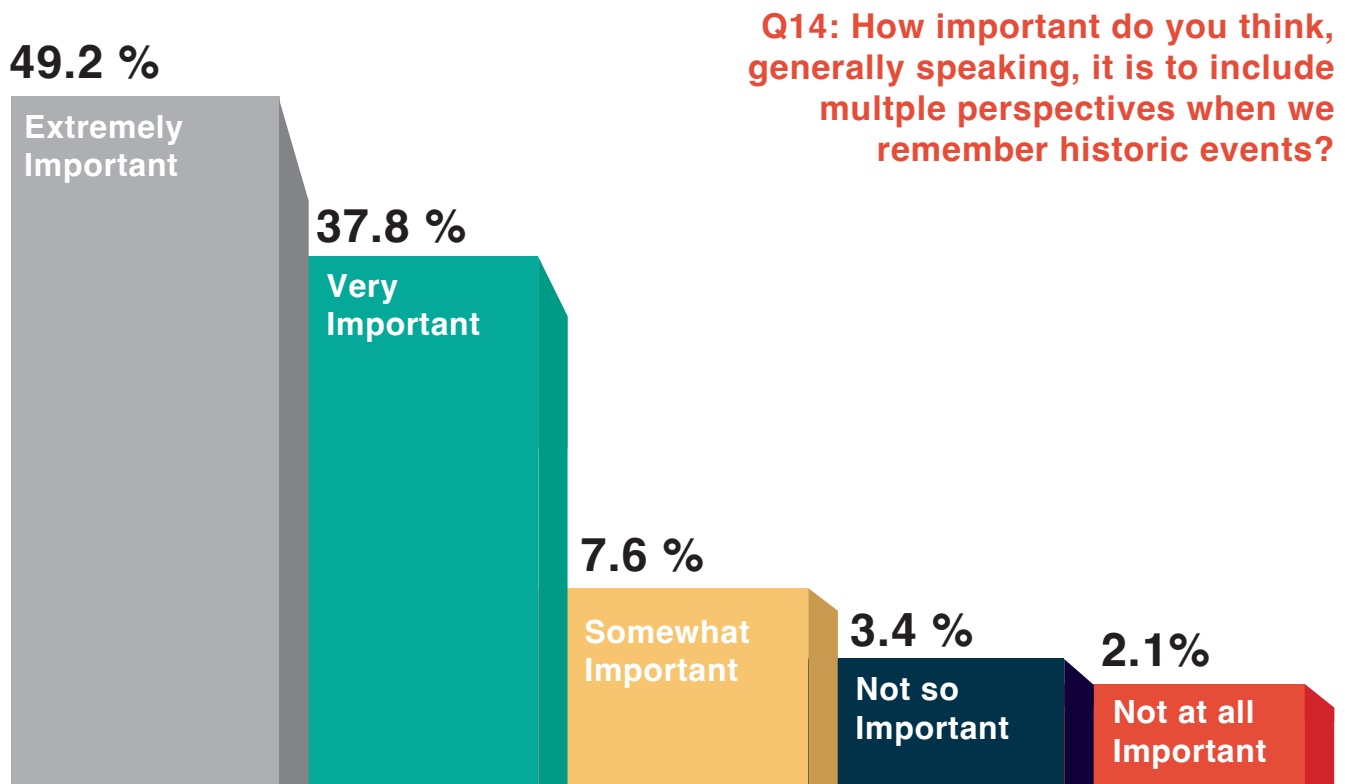| Option	Percentage
Other	1.5 %
Stations with virtual reality equipment	6.2 %
A ghost tour which focuses on people from the battle	6.9 %
A dramatized tour, with a guide in historic clothing in pre-written narratives	11.6 %
A "quest" tour, where people solve riddles and use clues	9.3 %
A guided walking tour with tour guides dressed in historic costumes	12.3 %
A guided walking tour of the battlefield area	12.6 %
Updated signage	8.9 %
A free mobile app	19.9 %
An interactive, self-guided audio tour	9.8 %
None of the above	0.9 %

N=1123

Research Area Four: How Does the Community Feel in General About Changes to a Historic Site's or Museum's Historic Interpretation?

Given the number of questions regarding changing or adding to the historic interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg-related sites, it was important to ask the same group of community members how they felt about changing historical narratives when new perspectives are uncovered and/or a site modernizes. This ensures at least some level of buy-in from the community if future changes or additions are made. To begin, the survey asked respondents to react to a Likert scale question on how important including multiple perspectives is when remembering historic events. Using answers that ranged from "extremely important" to "not at all important," the top answer was indeed "extremely important" at 49.2%. The second most-selected option was "very important" at 37.8%. With all other options receiving minimal responses, it's clear that the public is comfortable with including multiple perspectives in historic interpretation.

Looking at the top two responses, 87% or nearly 9 out of 10 responses believe it important to include multiple perspectives in historic interpretation.

Q14: How important do you think, generally speaking, it is to include multple perspectives when we remember historic events?

49.2 %
Extremely Important

37.8 %
Very Important

7.6 %
Somewhat Important

3.4 %
Not so Important

2.1%
Not at all Important

N=437

Going beyond inclusion of multiple perspectives, the survey asked participants how much they agree or disagree with changing narratives over time as new evidence or perspectives emerge. Again, the community responded with a resounding "yes." The answer of "strongly agree" and "agree" garnered 40.1% and 38.8% of the total response, respectively. Again, this question confirmed that the community is comfortable with changing narratives.

8 out of 10 respondents agree or strongly agree that ways to remember historic events should change when new evidence emerges.

40.1 %
Strongly Agree

38.8 %
Agree

15.4 %
Neutral

3.2 %
Disagree

2.5%
Strongly Disagree

Q15: Do you agree or disagree that the ways we talk about and remember historic events should change over time as new evidence or perspectives emerge?
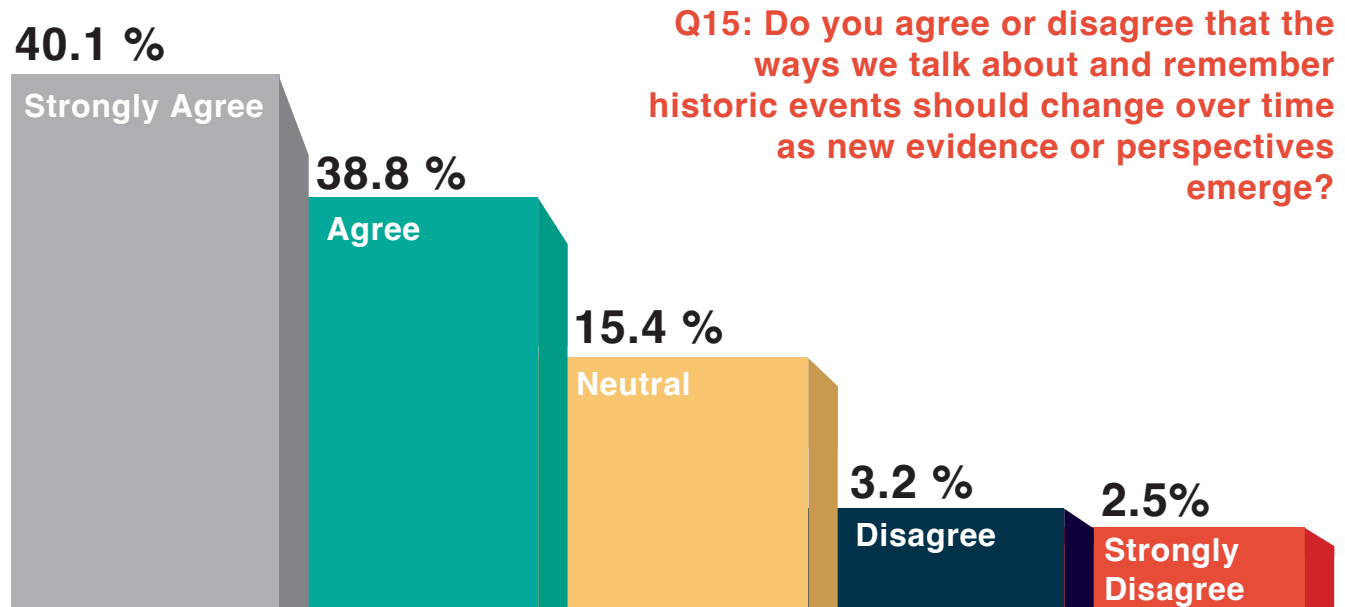
N=436

The survey then asked an open-ended question (Q16) asking participants to identify an instance where their understanding of a historical event/memory had changed given new information other than the Battle of Bladensburg. This question was aimed at narrowing down what changes in historical narrative they had been exposed to and, as the other questions in this section indicate, are comfortable with changing. Utilizing the same coding system as the previous open-ended question, there were ten codes that emerged from the data. The emergent codes from the responses and the proportion of the total were as follows:

- Examples from 20th century history, mostly Cold War-related—22.4%
- Changes in narratives to consider minoritized groups, mostly Black or Indigenous narratives—19.1%
- European history in the 18th and 19th centuries, with a particular attention paid to the Battle of Waterloo/Napoleon—16.4%
- No response or "don't remember"—13.6%
- American Revolution and/or the founding of the nation—13%
- The American Civil War—8.8%
- The narrative of Christopher Columbus—4.5%
- Spanish-American War—0.9%
- Maryland history—0.9%
- History of organized labor—0.3%

The top coded category being history of the 20th century — with a particular focus on the Cold War and America's role during that time period — is not necessarily surprising given the recent nature of those events. Many of the responses also reflected on personal relationships with this time period, such as having a parent that served in Vietnam. Having changing narratives based on emerging perspectives from minoritized groups was significant and reaffirms the findings of previous survey questions about missing perspectives around the Battle of Bladensburg specifically. Some surprising findings from this question include European history and Maryland history. The inclusion and prevalence of European history might reflect some of the demographic biases that factor into a primarily online survey. Socioeconomic factors that affect access to computers and internet, as well as other sociological factors that lead to additional online surveys completed by more non-Hispanic white and Asian participants may have factored into this high of a response for 18th and 19th century European history (Jang & Vorderstrasse, 2018). Finally, the small number of responses identifying something from Maryland history offers another opportunity for future considerations around the historical interpretation elements. Earlier survey questions regarding the amount of exposure respondents had to narratives around the Battle of Bladensburg in school and beyond provided a split between the Battle never coming up and being presented frequently with multiple perspectives. Further, when asked for details on the Battle, most could only identify basics (i.e., Americans lost, and burning of the White House). With so few identifying a changing narrative from Maryland history, future considerations for alterations or additions to the interpretive elements could use this localized perspective.
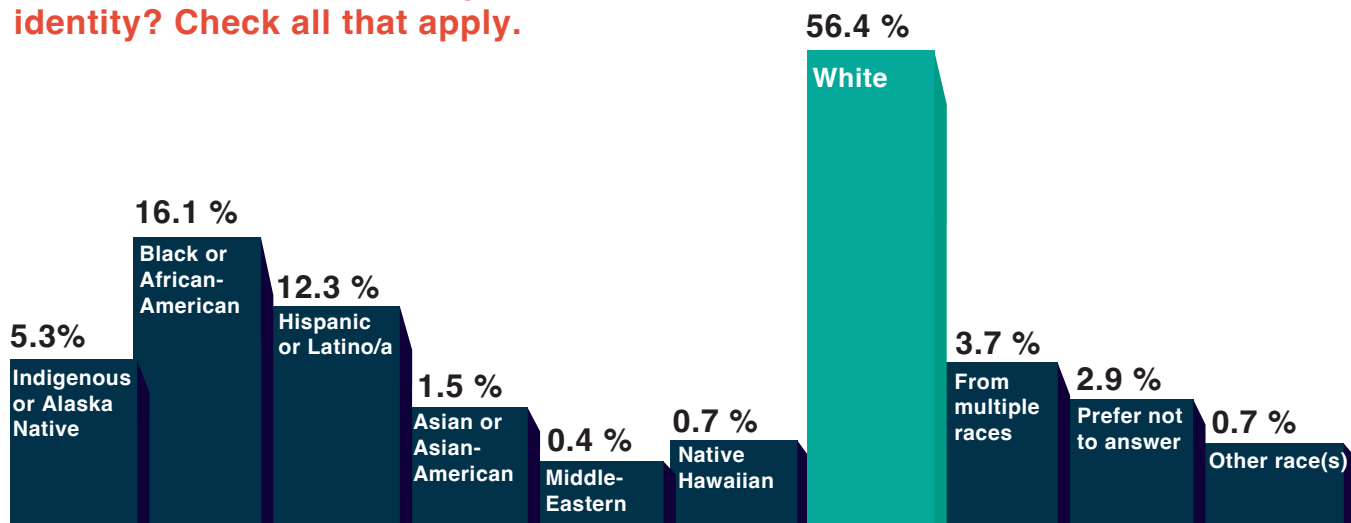
SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey ended with a series of demographic questions to ascertain the makeup of the survey sample compared to the area's general population statistics. When asked to report their racial identity, the sample had a slight majority of white participants at 56.4% of the overall sample. Non-white participants made up 40.7% of the total sample, with 2.9% preferring to not answer. A full disaggregated breakdown of the reported racial demographics can be viewed in the chart below. The largest non-white demographic groups were Black or African American and Latino/a participants, which aligns with the largest minoritized groups in Prince George's County and Washington, D.C. (QuickFacts: District of Columbia, n.d.; QuickFacts: Prince George's County, n.d.). The white participant proportion of the sample outpaced the area demographics slightly, but when considering the addition of Washington, D.C. and outreach via the ATHA email listserv, this difference from the Bladensburg city demographics is understandable.

Survey respondents were also asked to provide their gender identity. The majority of the survey participants identified as female, comprising 65.7% of the survey sample. Males were the second-most selected gender identity at 27.1%, with small percentages of other options comprising the remaining percentage. The proportion of the population in Prince George's County and Washington, D.C. identifying as female is 51.6% and 52.6%, respectively, meaning the survey sample is slightly more female-identifying than the general population (QuickFacts: District of Columbia, n.d.; QuickFacts: Prince George's County, n.d.). The full gender identity breakdown can be found next.

Over half of the survey respondents identify as white, and nearly 4 in 10 identify as a Person of Color.

Q19: What best describes your racial identity? Check all that apply.

- 5.3% Indigenous or Alaska Native
- 16.1 % Black or African-American
- 12.3 % Hispanic or Latino/a
- 1.5 % Asian or Asian-American
- 0.4 % Middle-Eastern
- 0.7 % Native Hawaiian
- 56.4 % White
- 3.7 % From multiple races
- 2.9 % Prefer not to answer
- 0.7 % Other race(s)

N=454

Two-thirds of the survey respondents were female.

65.7 %
Female

1.6%
Gender expansive

0.7 %
Gender fluid

0.4 %
Gender non-conforming

0.9 %
Gender-queer

27.1 %
Male

0.7 %
Nonbinary

0.4 %
Two-spirit

0.2 %
Transgender

2.0 %
Prefer not to answer

0.2 %
Another gender identity
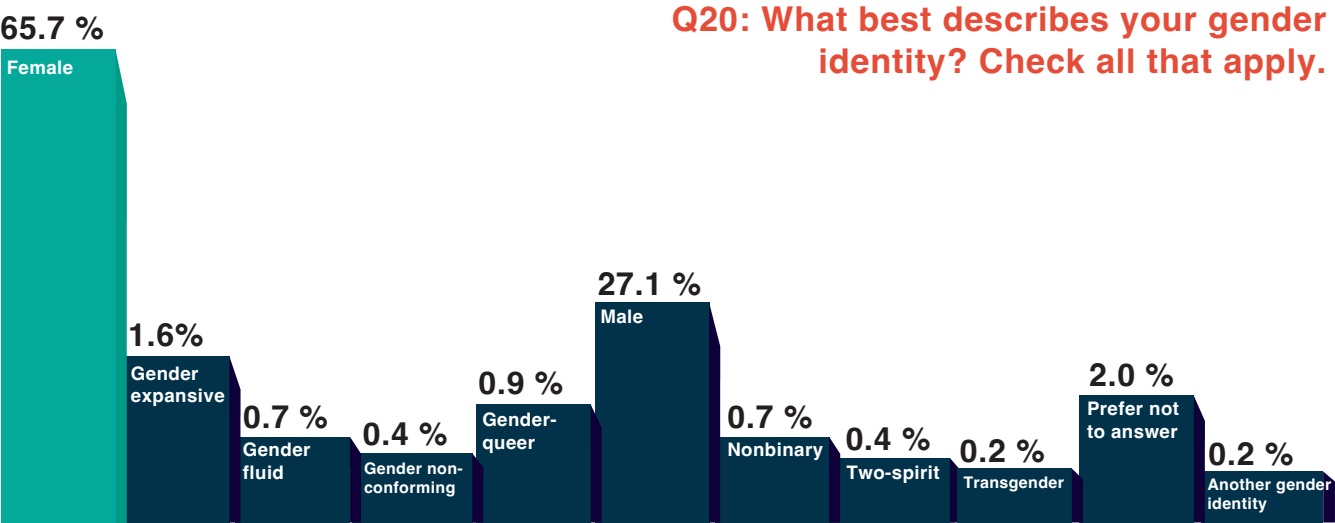
N=446

To ensure that the demographics of the survey fully represents the local perspective, the survey also asked for the home zip code of the participants (Q18). Providing the zip code rather than home address or city of residence is often viewed as less intrusive, therefore more likely to be divulged in a survey. The zip codes that were tied for the top responses were 20781 and 20782, which are both near the BWP. The full zip code breakdown of the survey participants can be viewed in the following maps with the blue pin on the map representing the BWP.

| Color	Zip Codes	Percentage of Sample
Blue	20781; 20782	17.2%
Green	20785; 20722; 20783; 20710; 21201	21.4%
Red	20737; 20712; 20784	9.4%
Purple	20770; 20018; 20740; 20743; 20715; 20847; 20772; 21044; 20002; 20774; 20716; 20901; 20748; 20814; 21146; 20707; 20866; 20850; 20607; 20910; 20744; 21206; 21702; 21613; 20747; 21901; 20706; 21117	23.7%
Pink (some zips not pictured in maps)	20747; 20274; 20708; 20015; 20838; 20003; 20853; 44107; 92879; 90201; 89115; 76028; 32738; 14385; 21491; 39788; 20903; 20786; 20769; 20768; 20765; 73423; 33037; 98113; 20764; 20763; 20762; 20761; 20759; 20755; 20752; 20749; 20735; 92399; 21218; 22304; 21225; 20149; 20817; 21617; 21229; 20020;	31.5%
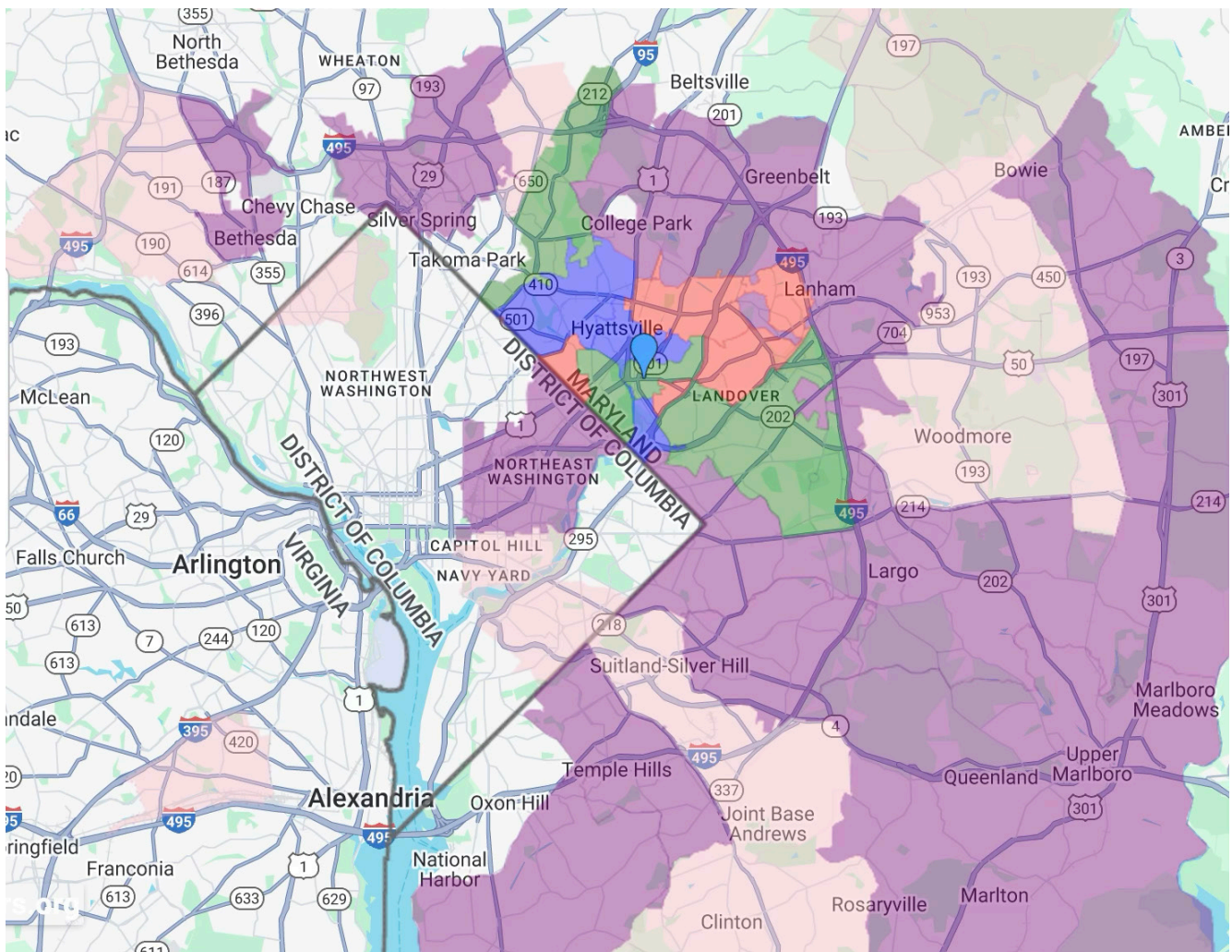
This zip code breakdown demonstrates that the large majority of the survey sample is within local communities with either direct access or drivable (by motor vehicle and bike trail) access to the BWP and the historical interpretive elements of the Battle of Bladensburg. The age breakdown of the survey sample yielded a vast majority of the respondents being young to middle-aged adults. The largest age bracket in the survey sample were participants between the ages of 25 and 34, comprising 36.1%. The second-most selected age bracket were ages between 35 and 44, at 25.6% of the total sample. This is encouraging for the survey results because it means the majority of our respondents are entering or are in their prime earning years career-wise along with being the age of recent or potential parents. These groups have a high potential to see a community asset such as the BWP as an entertainment and educational resource. Typically, online surveys (especially for localized community resources) are oversampled with older survey respondents, skewing some of the answers toward the experience of nearly or current retirement aged.

More than one-half of the survey respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44.

Q21: Which age range are you currently in?

36.1 % 25-34
25.6 % 35-44
14.1 % 45-54
9.6 % 55-64
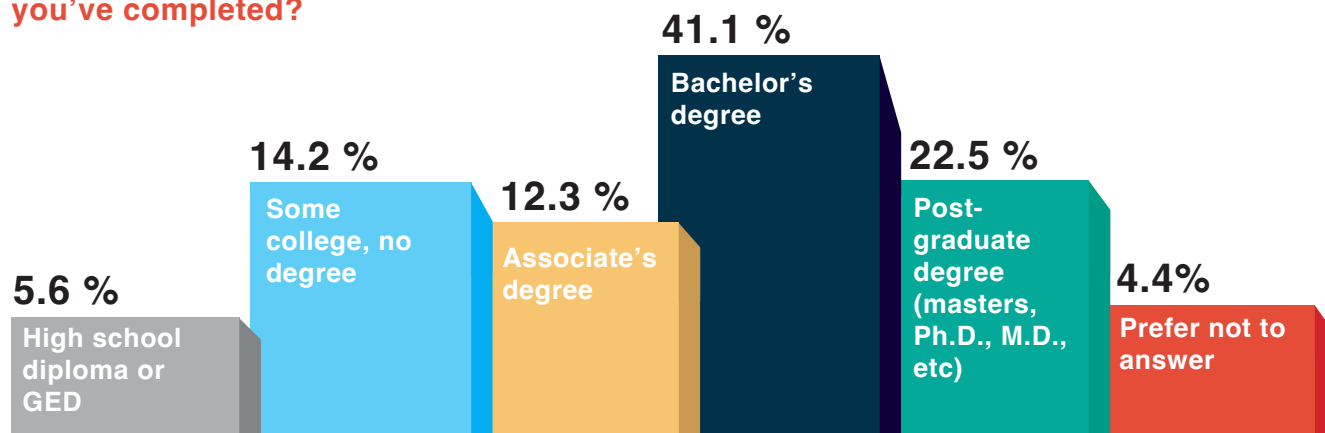**12.7%** 65+
1.9 % 18-24
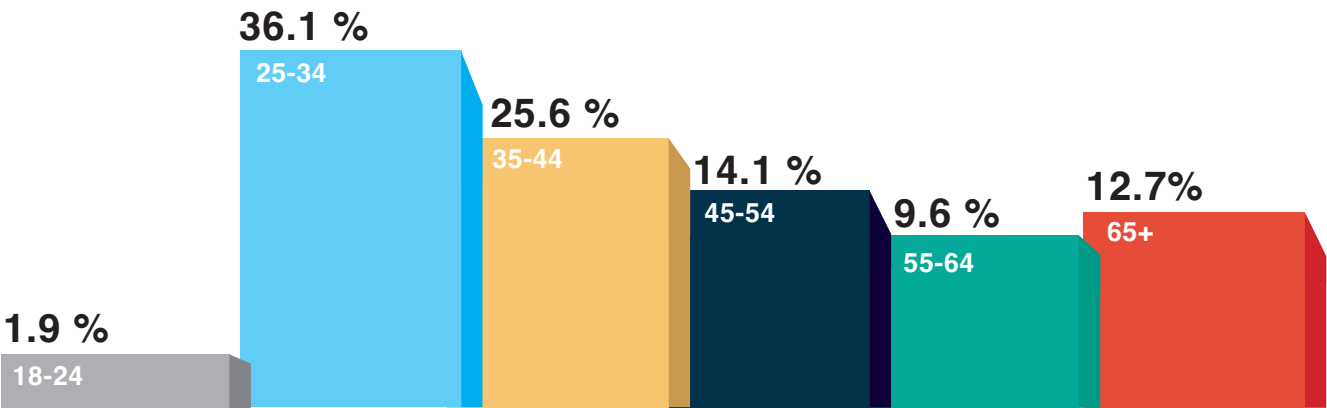
N=418

Finally, the survey concluded with three questions regarding the respondents' educational attainment and income levels. These questions are added to ensure the survey sample does not over-sample people with graduate levels of educational attainment or upper-class individuals who are not representative of the larger community. A strong plurality of respondents (41.1%) has obtained a bachelor's degree. This percentage is close to the middle of the bachelor's degree attainment between Prince George's County (36.1%) and Washington, D.C. (63.6%) (QuickFacts: District of Columbia, n.d.; QuickFacts: Prince George's County, n.d.). While the second-most selected education level was "post-graduate degree" at 22.5%, that selection only eclipsed "some college, no degree" (third-most selected) by 8.3%.

4 in 10 respondents have obtained a bachelor's degree.

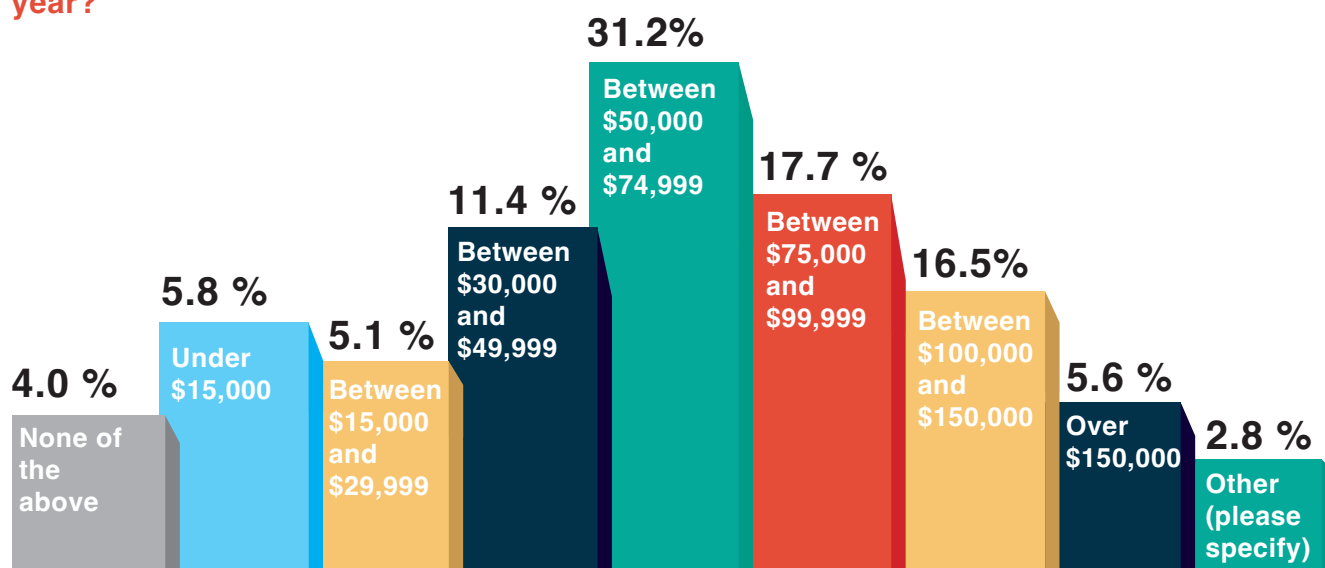**Q22: What is the highest level of education you've completed?**

5.6 % High school diploma or GED

14.2 % Some college, no degree

12.3 % Associate's degree

41.1 % Bachelor's degree

22.5 % Post-graduate degree (masters, Ph.D., M.D., etc)

4.4% Prefer not to answer

N=431

Interestingly, the reported income range that the respondents reported most was "between $50,000 and $74,999," which is far below the median incomes of both Prince George's County ($100,708) and Washington, D.C. ($106,287) (QuickFacts: District of Columbia, n.d.; QuickFacts: Prince George's County, n.d.). This demonstrates that while the educational attainment numbers of the survey sample may have been a bit higher than the average resident of the areas surrounding the BWP, the income levels are below or near the median income, indicating that the sample is not skewed to an upper- or upper-middle class experience.

3 in 10 respondents reported an annual income between $50,000 and $74,999.

Q23: What is your current income range per year?

4.0 % None of the above

5.8 % Under $15,000

5.1 % Between $15,000 and $29,999

11.4 % Between $30,000 and $49,999

31.2% Between $50,000 and $74,999

17.7 % Between $75,000 and $99,999

16.5% Between $100,000 and $150,000

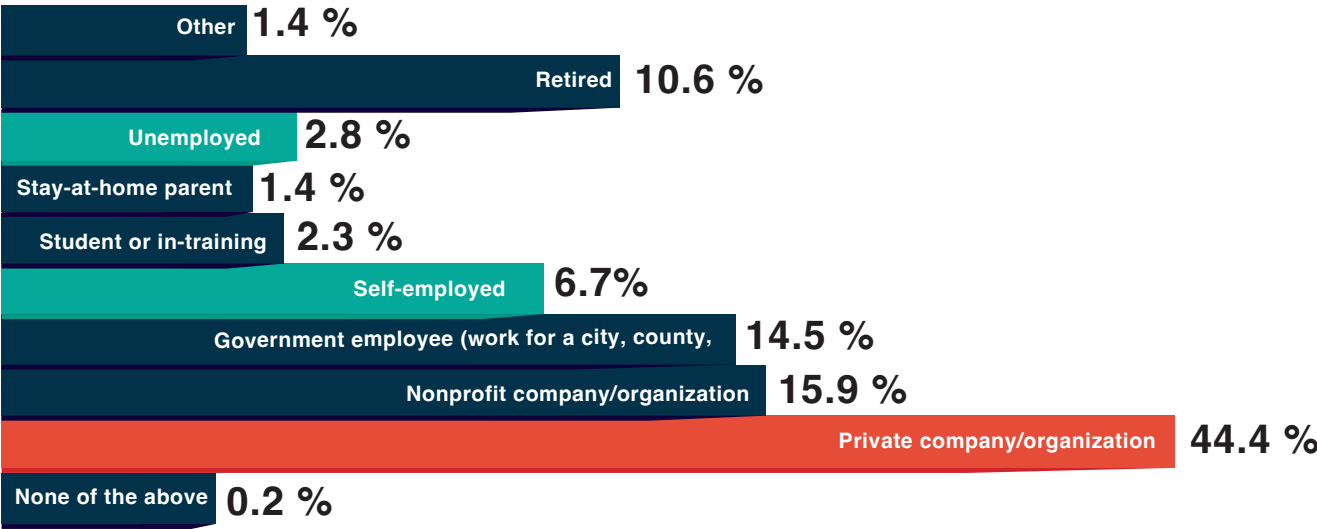**5.6 %** Over $150,000

2.8 % Other (please specify)

N=430

Finally, when asked what best describes their current employer (in regard to business type), the "private company/organization" selection carried the way with 44.4% of total respondents. "Nonprofit company/organization" and "government employee" rounded out the top three, with 15.9% and 14.5%, respectively. This indicates that the survey did not over-sample government employees who may have had more of a role with or affinity toward the work of ATHA or the National Park Service considering the area's close proximity to major government employers and agencies.

Greater than 4 in 10 respondents work in the private sector, with 3 in 10 working in government or nonprofit sectors.

Q24: What best described your current employer?

Category	Percentage
Other	1.4 %
Retired	10.6 %
Unemployed	2.8 %
Stay-at-home parent	1.4 %
Student or in-training	2.3 %
Self-employed	6.7%
Government employee (work for a city, county,	14.5 %
Nonprofit company/organization	15.9 %
Private company/organization	44.4 %
None of the above	0.2 %

N=435

Survey Conclusion

The survey data reveals many areas of further exploration for the ATHA team and other organizations related to the historic interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg. The survey respondents, while knowing some of the Battle's details and story, showed inconsistency in the questions that sought to check for understanding. Additionally, participants desired more diverse perspectives in the Battle of Bladensburg interpretive elements with special attention paid to Black or African American perspectives. These findings can serve as a starting point for future considerations to alter or add to the interpretive elements.

When asked for what additions visitors would like to see to the BWP, the top answer was a free mobile app that provides additional historic interpretation (i.e., guided pathways, additional narrative, etc.). There was a previous mobile app that was utilized at the Battle of Bladensburg historic sites, but due to costs—both financial and time needed for upkeep—led to the app being something not used or identified by the visitors in the survey. A mobile app is a normalized technology for visitors to historic sites, but the development and maintenance of an app is an ongoing investment of time, effort, and costs to create a mobile app experience that visitors will return to will need serious consideration.

Finally, if an additional historic tour is added to the Battle of Bladensburg, there is some difference in opinion from the survey respondents regarding the nature of that tour. In almost identical responses, visitors indicated a desire for a guided tour with modern themes and attire by the guides; a guided tour with the guides in attire from the time of the Battle; and a dramatized tour, will narratives for visitors to follow in a reenactment-type tour. Each of these options require different considerations around themes, presentation, and the skills of the tour guide.

Key Informant Interviews

Key Takeaways
- Inclusion within the historic interpretation around the Battle of Bladensburg has been viewed with mixed results, with room for additional inclusionary practices available.
- Connecting themes and aspects of future tours/signage from the BWP and the historic houses will grow the potential of all the historic sites.
- Physical changes to the landscape and challenges to infrastructure prompts outside-the-box thinking with additional interpretation such as use of a mobile app and augmented/virtual reality to overcome those challenges.

Part of the qualitative data collection included interviews with key leaders of the community, ranging from content experts to former and current government officials. A list of key informants was identified by ATHA staff, with outreach to potential interviewees conducted by PSG. Seven interviews over Zoom and each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes were conducted by PSG . Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed with permission from the interviewee.

Three distinct themes emerged from these interviews, which coincided with some of the findings from the community survey:

Theme one: Inclusion

Many of the interviewees mentioned how the Bladensburg interpretive elements have been striving toward increased inclusion of narratives from the Black historical experience. Many participants mentioned the War of 1812 Bicentennial celebrations in the mid-2010s, which aimed to bring more attention to the contributions of the Black community within Maryland history. Former Governor of Maryland Martin O'Malley recalled that theme within the planning and execution of the celebration. Samuel Parker – of a local community nonprofit the Aman Memorial Trust, agreed: "approaching that Bicentennial, both in Baltimore and Bladensburg, we wanted to honor the role that Black people had in the United States of America...there are very few images of a Black person in uniform on any monument commemorating the Revolutionary War. We wanted to highlight the role that African American people played in the defense of Baltimore." That sense of inclusion has helped to guide the historic interpretation work in Bladensburg. Ed Day, the Chief Historic Preservation Officer of PG Parks, said "we've used the Bostwick House as a backdrop for jazz concerts, wine tastings, reenactments, everything. But then there was the issue of slavery, and we had a known slave story there. After fleshing out some details, I reached out to a descendant of the slave in the story and had him fill in some familial details in the story. It is really important that being inclusive is not just a fad. Being inclusive should be your standard operating procedure and that inclusion makes the history more genuine to people." Making history meaningful and genuine to a community is a key component of a successful historic site or museum.

This inclusion can be useful to a nation's story, especially in the United States. "It's a powerful story of e pluribus unum that attracts people from cultures all around the world. The Battle of Bladensburg is also a powerful message of humility, and we should realize every day that this experiment of democracy is vulnerable to attack, and we should use it to realize we can never take our country for granted. For all its imperfections, its promise is a very powerful thing worth fighting and dying for." –Samuel Parker, Aman Memorial Trust.

That inclusion has not always been felt by everyone, however. Julie Schablitsky, Chief of Cultural Resources and Chief Archaeologist for the Maryland Department of Transportation, noted that the biggest perspective missing from the current interpretation is Black history, which matches the findings from the community survey. Michelle Hedgepeth, a Town Administrator in Bladensburg, remembered "I had just moved to Maryland when so much of the history was about the Star-Spangled Banner. I think at that time (2012) African Americans were a little turned off by the Star-Spangled Banner with the protests in sports around the anthem. The focus to them wasn't about inclusiveness, it was about the Star-Spangled Banner, we were just not thinking about that at the time."

The increasing Latino/a population in the Bladensburg area has also raised questions about connecting the Battle of Bladensburg historic interpretation to that community's experience. "Without any connection to the colonial past here in Maryland, you're going to see a disconnect between that population and the historic site...that's why I think you also need history of the area from the 20th century where you can ask members of that community about their experience making the Bladensburg area their new home," remarked Schablitsky.
While this first theme of inclusivity has certainly guided the way for the current interpretive elements in Bladensburg, it is clear that further opportunities to increase that inclusivity remain.

Theme two: Lack of connection between interpretive elements

A theme emerged among many of the participants that cited the disconnect between the interpretive elements at the 18th and 19th century homes that have been restored and the BWP. Participants mentioned both geographical challenges along with thematic challenges that create a feeling of disparate monuments/attractions.

"Most of the time the Bladensburg Waterfront Park is advertised as a nice place on the water you can gather, but there's nothing that focuses all that activity to some form of historic context. They have festivals and it's fun but there's no connection, it's just a nice place to go, which misses an opportunity if you don't have someone there constantly reminding you what the linkage is." – Governor O'Malley, Leading with the attraction of the waterfront will continue to bring visitors that may not be interested in history, which is ultimately a positive for the BWP. **However, connecting the non-historic elements and events at the park thematically to some aspects of 19th century history—ranging from the Battle to geographic changes of the landscape—may go a long way to rectifying this gap in thematic resonance.**

There is also a physical barrier, naturally, between the historic elements at the BWP and the restored 18th and 19th century homes. "You can drive by the George Washington House but there's nothing to grab your attention other than the monument there. The problem is: how do you get somebody from that monument to just walk over to the waterfront? You have to figure out how to get there around the traffic circle...the George Washington house is connected right to the trail across the street, and it's a great gathering place, but it's not marketed as a connected feature...I've often thought that the decision to use the waterfront as a passive park was a mistake." –Governor O'Malley. The pesky traffic circle aside, Julie Schablitsky also echoed the physical disconnect between elements from her time working on the excavation of the area.

Some of the physical disconnect between elements is not fixable without a massive infrastructure project or some traffic calming elements that would make pedestrian crossings more tenable. Currently, there is no obvious pedestrian walkway that connects the Indian Queen Tavern (George Washington House) with the Peace Cross or the BWP. Even before crossing the busy area around the traffic circle, pedestrians Google-mapping the walking route between the two would first be guided to walk along the often-busy Baltimore Avenue, raising safety concerns. Having the city engage with ATHA to facilitate the placement of a pedestrian crosswalk with safety lighting would greatly improve the walkability of a connected interpretation. Closing the surrounding roads for events that connect the interpretive elements may also be an avenue to increase integration between the historic sites, but the temporary nature of such efforts would only bring temporary access. For a more permanent connection, pedestrian access is paramount. More connection between thematic elements, however, is something that future considerations around the historic interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg could incorporate.

Theme three: Challenges and opportunities with the BWP

The BWP is a massive cultural and community asset, providing both historic interpretation and natural landscapes for outdoor activities. Like any part of the natural landscape, however, the land comprising the BWP has certainly changed since the Battle of Bladensburg. Natural erosion, changes made to the environment by the Army Corps of Engineers, and climate change have all contributed to the land comprising the BWP not being in the exact physical condition that a soldier experienced during the Battle. This can lead to trouble within historic interpretive elements. For instance, even marking physical landmarks within a description from the Battle can confuse visitors if those landmarks no longer exist or exist in a different appearance. It can also make retracing the steps that soldiers took during the Battle or how everyday life was lived in the 19th century more difficult – even for the best of guides. Special interpretive events such as reenactments can also be more of a challenge with a changing environment.

Reenactments of the War of 1812 battles are already difficult, even without taking these physical landscape changes into account, as Ed Day discovered: "War of 1812 reenactors in America are somewhat scarce. A lot of them either go with the Revolutionary War or the Civil War. We tried to have a reenactment on the anniversary of the Battle but the rainy conditions that day drove down our visitor numbers. We pulled it off but the current geography at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park is no longer a great theater for reenactments."

Day was not the only one to cite the changes in the geography around the river as a challenge to historic interpretation. The Chief of Cultural Resources and Chief Archaeologist for the Maryland Department of Transportation, Julie Schablitsky, described if one "looks where the Battle of Bladensburg took place today, you can find a handful of bullets and buttons with a metal detector, but the problem is that it is impossible to reconstruct troop movements across the landscape" because of how much the geography has changed over the years.

This does not mean that future public interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg is impossible, it just requires some innovative solutions. Day and others were open to adding virtual reality stations or aspects of augmented reality into a mobile app. They all, however, acknowledged the high costs of the equipment and maintenance to make that happen. Given that ATHA has already begun a GIS mapping of historically relevant signage around the BWP, adding additional augmented reality to that mapping might provide a solution to the changing physical landscape and its effect on historic interpretation.

Community Meeting

Key Takeaways
- Overall, the participants at the community meeting mirrored findings from the community survey, with some inconclusive thoughts regarding the why behind the data.
- Including additional perspectives is a must for any future considerations around historic interpretation, especially when considering shortcomings in the school systems/curriculum.

To complete our community outreach, ATHA and PSG worked collaboratively to host a community meeting regarding the research being completed for this project. This was an effort to reach community members who had not been reached via the community survey or the key informant interviews. Rather, the community meeting was an opportunity for anyone in the surrounding community to attend and lend their perspectives to this project.
This was accomplished by utilizing social media advertisements, physical signage with QR codes for registration, and use of the ATHA listserv/newsletters. The meeting took place on October 22nd, 2024 at the Prince George's County Memorial Library System's Bladensburg Branch. The community meeting had 19 non-ATHA/PSG-related people in attendance.
The community meeting was led by PSG and was split into two parts: (1) introduction to the project and its goals; and (2) presentation of preliminary community survey data for reaction and discussion. To facilitate data collection, PSG created two activities for the community members to complete. The presentation and worksheets are available in Appendix B.

Worksheet Data

The first activity for the community meeting was a questionnaire with a variety of questions asking participants to react to some preliminary survey data. The first set of questions asked participants to rank their opinion on a Likert scale with the following labels:

1-Strongly disagree; 2-Somewhat disagree; 3-Neither agree nor disagree; 4-Somewhat agree; 5-Strongly agree

1. The community members somewhat agreed with what people reported remembering about the BWP.
2. There was no consensus on whether the discrepancy of reported and discerned understanding of the Battle matched their experience.
3. While considering different options from the ultimate top three choices, the participants agreed the most on the future interpretive elements to add.

Question	Average Rating on Likert Scale
Do the top three answers regarding what people remember from the Bladensburg Waterfront Park (trails, rentals, riverboat tours) reflect your own experience?	3.8
83.3% of respondents reported some familiarity with the Battle of Bladensburg. When presented with the series of true/false questions regarding the battle, two out of three questions had a majority answer correctly. The other was closer to 50/50. Does this reflect the general understanding that people have regarding the Battle of Bladensburg?	3.1
The top three responses to what respondents want to see in the future (mobile app, updated signage, and guided walking tour with costumes) matches my opinion for what I want.	4.1

The worksheet also contained two free response questions that asked participants to consider: (1) the inclusion of Black and African American experience; and (2) the discrepancy between frequency in the Battle's reference in school and beyond from the survey results.

Key Takeaways
- Additional signage and personal narratives were the main themes that emerged from the inclusion question.
- The way that history is taught (or not taught) in schools was the main culprit for the gap in how often the Battle of Bladensburg came up for people.

QUESTION:
Free response: the top ranked perspectives missing are Black/African-American perspectives. How can we better highlight those perspectives?

"

Information about the BOB should include stories of the surrounding communities and what lives were like in Bladensburg and Prince George's County was like for African American people

Paul Jennings. Who lives here? AKA nearest to the river at the time. Where were soldiers from? What battle happened immediately before and after? Were they the same soldiers?

"

Make more inclusive signs, read through war of 1812 claims for loss of enslaved,

look at roles, African American on US and British Side. Decentralize singular person narratives when possible.

"

Signage about their experiences and how the outcome affected

By including more Black/African American respondents by outreach different than electronic

A plaque that explains more about it. Incorporate it in the tour. Black tour guides in period costume.

The bicentennial sculpture is of three men--an unknown marine--then a Black American and a white male who were both identified. In fairness, I don't know much about anyone, regardless of race who were at the battle of

Wholly agree and puzzled that it wasn't considered but could be reflective of those planning and executing the information

"

Marines recruited black enslaved with freedom and uniforms. Indigenous pathways became early roads and wider roads followed.

You need to.

Understanding or immersive exhibits of life at the time would help. Not just reading or hearing stories.

Focus on personal narratives of African Americans who lived in and near Bladensburg rather than abstract concepts (i.e. % of enslaved people in the local population). I would even suggest we ask visitors to the Waterfront Park to speculate on how local people of color responded to or were impacted by the battle.

Talking about the freedom seekers, the colonial marines, native people, Latinos, and other groups that were impacted or participated in the Battle.

"

| N/A | N/A |
| N/A | ? |

Living historians have long been the best way to tell the stories of marginalized

"

Free response: what explains the top two responses regarding how often the Battle of Bladensburg came up in school and beyond being " fairly frequently and with multiple perspectives" and "it never came up?"

"The school curriculum only includes or requires a small portion of the war of 1812--and maybe not enough of the BOB

N/A   N/A

In my experience, battles studied in school were mostly battles that we won. Lost battles that were discussed tended to be very large and significant in terms of historical context

Maybe where you are from? I am not originally from MD and didn't learn about this battle (unless I just don't remember!) until I moved here!

I grew up in Aspen Hill, MD in the 60s-70s. I learned a lot, but I do not ever remember the Battle of Bladensburg ever being mentioned. The biggest topic covered in school was Vietnam which was the current future historical topic of my school years. Plus, many of my male classmates ended up going

It shows the dichotomy of experience in the community, education, school, and people interested in learning history.

People born here vs. people who moved here

These are reflective of school curricula less geared to local history and events often; treated as less to non-important.

Race and class. White people especially middle and wealthy white people tend to celebrate the battle.

The survey being distributed mostly locally."

There is going to be a skewed perspective based on race, gender, education, and economic states of participants.

School system American history curriculums vary terrifically from one to another.

War of 1812, ignored in the K-12 curriculum.

Perhaps some respondents had a history course or teacher who brought it up in those classes. The folks who never heard of it perhaps didn't take American history or government classes. Some of the respondents may never have gone to K-12 in the USA. They may have had education in another

People used to take info to the schools. Field trips are hard to organize. Bull run book example is good!

Burning of the Whitehouse

Older demographics of the respondents.

Finally, the participants were presented with two identical worksheets (also in Appendix B) that showed the image of a blank historical marker sign. First, participants were asked to draw/write/depict what they remember from the current historical interpretation of the Battle. The second worksheet asked participants to draw/write/depict what they would like to see in future considerations of interpretive elements.

Key Takeaways
- Community members reported basic facts regarding the Battle of Bladensburg (Americans lost, disorganized command leading to defeat, burning of the White House) from the current interpretation.
- Mirroring the community survey, participants want to see additional perspectives added to future interpretation.

"What I see"	**"What I'd like to see"**
England versus US in lines fighting. Impossible to visualize with all the change. Burned Washington.	Where the river was and how it affected the battle. Smell/sounds/smoke. Needs to move current roads and connect houses that existed at the time. Dolly Madison did not move the paintings herself, Paul Jennings did, who was a 15-year-old enslaved person. I cannot visualize how the flotilla got up the river. How did that happen? I would love
White house burning. Maps of the battle and troop movements.	What kind of place was Bladensburg before and after the battle? Who lived there, and what were some interesting things they did at the time of the battle?
Poorly trained American militiamen fled the battlefield in di`sarray when faced by veteran British soldiers.	Why this town looks this way today...and how it looked and felt back in 1812. Development over time.
Fighting for the United States of America. Pictures of soldiers in weapons and armor and participating in 1800s warfare.	Non-wealthy resident perspectives in their own

"What I see"	"What I'd like to see"
Panic!	Professionally prepared BOB visitor center with a nice video of the
U.S. Military defense not prepared to defend Washington. Barney's courage in resistance.	Indigenous people sites besides historic house." More faces than structures. Add women. British and U.S. focus
Colonial Marines. Enslaved families. Human story outside of the battle. Name change.	Good admiral (unintelligible) opinion of the ice cream. Dolly was planning to serve at the white house "victory banquet." Is this why he ordered the White House burned?
Jamie Madison hauling arse out of town like Josh (trusted something). Like Hawley through the Senate on Jan. 6, 2021.	Rosalie Calvert heard the cannons at the Calvert house. Did the Bladensburg residents desert the town?
The poorly trained and organized militia caved, and the White House was sacked.	Why should non-white residents care? Idea: "sometimes freedom wore a red coat!" and highlight black soldiers fighting for freedom on behalf of the British
Boring old white history.	More eye-catching @ port of Bladensburg related to the battle. Visual attention w/o safety compromise.
I don't know anything about the BOB, but it seems interesting.	Rendering of the port as it was then to visualize the scene and a rendering to show the difference from today.

"What I see"	"What I'd like to see"
How did large ships with a significant draft float in the Bladensburg harbor?! Currently during low tide, everything north of the port is dry now. Why was Bladensburg considered such an important battle?	See signage that is posted that has QR codes giving more info on the multiple aspects of it. Hear about involvement of African Americans.
Related to the Battle of Bladensburg British marched into Washington. Memorial at Ft. Lincoln the vista across the cemetery. Relationship to the queen family/St. Mary's chapel.	The British perspective
National change in the military structure. The loss of the battle was a good lesson.	Mixed-medium inclusive signage. Direct connection to other sites in the area.
Part of the war of 1812. Washington was burned.	Ghost of Stephen Decatur at the dueling grounds. I have no education about the Battle other than the signs at the Port of Bladensburg.
Led to burning of the White House	N/A
Old, exclusive signage that doesn't connect the current community to the past at all.	N/A

Conclusion of Community Engagement Data

This community engagement data provides a roadmap for future considerations around the Battle of Bladensburg historic interpretation. The current interpretive elements are enjoyed by the community, but there is a desire to take these elements into a new era.
Increasing the different perspectives highlighted in the historic interpretation is something that was identified in each of these community outreach efforts. While many of the participants — especially in the community meeting and key informant interviews — saw and recognize the efforts to highlight Black or African-American voices during the Bicentennial celebrations, this research highlighted that the community is looking for more efforts toward additional perspectives. A "One Bladensburg" approach, where the perspectives and contributions of multiple groups are highlighted to show how Bladensburg has progressed throughout American history could help drive these desired narratives. Devising one cohesive approach or theme could also assist with the disconnect between historic sites.

When looking ahead, this research also highlights the desire to add information to existing popular apps and/or a new mobile app and augmented reality to drive additional interpretation and help handle the changing physical landscape of the BWP and surrounding residential and recreational areas. Combining augmented reality into a mobile app is a practice that other historic sites and museums have used and continue to experiment with, giving a potential roadmap to the many governmental and community partners working in the area. Participants also desire an additional historic tour, albeit undecided about the final form of that tour.

Finally, the community loves and utilizes the BWP, both for educational purposes and recreation. This is an opportunity to promote further understanding of the historic importance of the area. Some communities in Bladensburg and the surrounding areas may not see themselves in the current interpretive elements, which leaves ample opportunities to engage more of the community while increasing the perspectives highlighted in the story of the Battle.

CASE STUDY: THE BATTLE OF COOCH'S BRIDGE

History and Context
War: Revolutionary War
State(s): Delaware
Duration of Battle: September 7, 1777
Historical Significance: The lone Revolutionary War battle that occurred in Delaware/the loss leading to the occupation of Philadelphia.
Main body responsible for historic site maintenance: Friends of Cooch's Bridge—501c3 nonprofit
Organizational Budget in 2023: $486,000
Historic Designation: Forthcoming

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Fifteen miles southwest of Wilmington, Delaware, along Old Baltimore Pike, was the site of the only Revolutionary War battle in the nation's first state. En route to Philadelphia after the successful capture of New York City, British troops along with German Hessian dragoons — led by General Cornwallis and General Howe — endeavored to divide the 13 colonies and end the rebellion by the colonists. This force took maritime transport from New York City to the Chesapeake Bay, with the ultimate plan of then heading north to capture the colonial capital. Simultaneously to this movement by the British, General George Washington and the Continental Army remained near New York until enemy troop movements and objectives became clear. Washington then marched his army south through Philadelphia and established a camp at Wilmington, DE (Clement, 2007; Martin, 1993; McGuire, 2006; Reed, 1965).

Needing additional reconnaissance on British troop movements, General Washington sent a contingent of nearly 1,700 soldiers — 700 men from Continental Army regiments and 1,000 from Pennsylvania and Delaware militias — to Iron Hill and Cooch's Bridge. While stationed there, the American troops spotted a small company of German troops heading toward Cooch's Bridge and sprung an ambush. The German troops quickly warned the larger British force, and the battle commenced (Clement, 2007). The battle lasted for a good part of the day, and the American forces fought until they ran out of ammunition. The battle continued for a short while with swords and bayonets, but ultimately the American force retreated back toward Wilmington and the rest of Washington's troops (Harris, 2014).

While this was a loss by the Americans, casualties reported on either side were low — less than 50 on each side (Boatner, 1966; Ward, 1941). Washington assumed that the next move by the British would be toward Philadelphia through Wilmington, so he moved his forces temporarily to Newport, DE (Harris, 2014). However, the British never made their way through Wilmington. Instead, General Howe took the bulk of the British forces north through Newark and then into Pennsylvania. General Washington then moved his army north and eventually camped at Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. Later, the two forces would clash near this encampment at the Battle of Brandywine — a loss by American forces that led to the occupation of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Martin, 1993).

The Battle of Cooch's Bridge, while a loss for the American side during the Revolutionary War, holds significant historical value to the state of Delaware and for the nation's battle for independence. Recently, the combined efforts of the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs and the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site have endeavored to preserve the physical site of the battle along with providing interpretive elements to the broader community.

Breakdown of Surrounding Communities

The Cooch's Bridge State Level Historic Site, as well as Iron Hill Park, are located between Newark, Delaware and Glasgow, Delaware along Interstate 95. Cooch's Bridge Historic Site and the surrounding land have been privately owned for decades and the area surrounding the site continued to urbanize to become part of the Greater Wilmington metropolitan area.
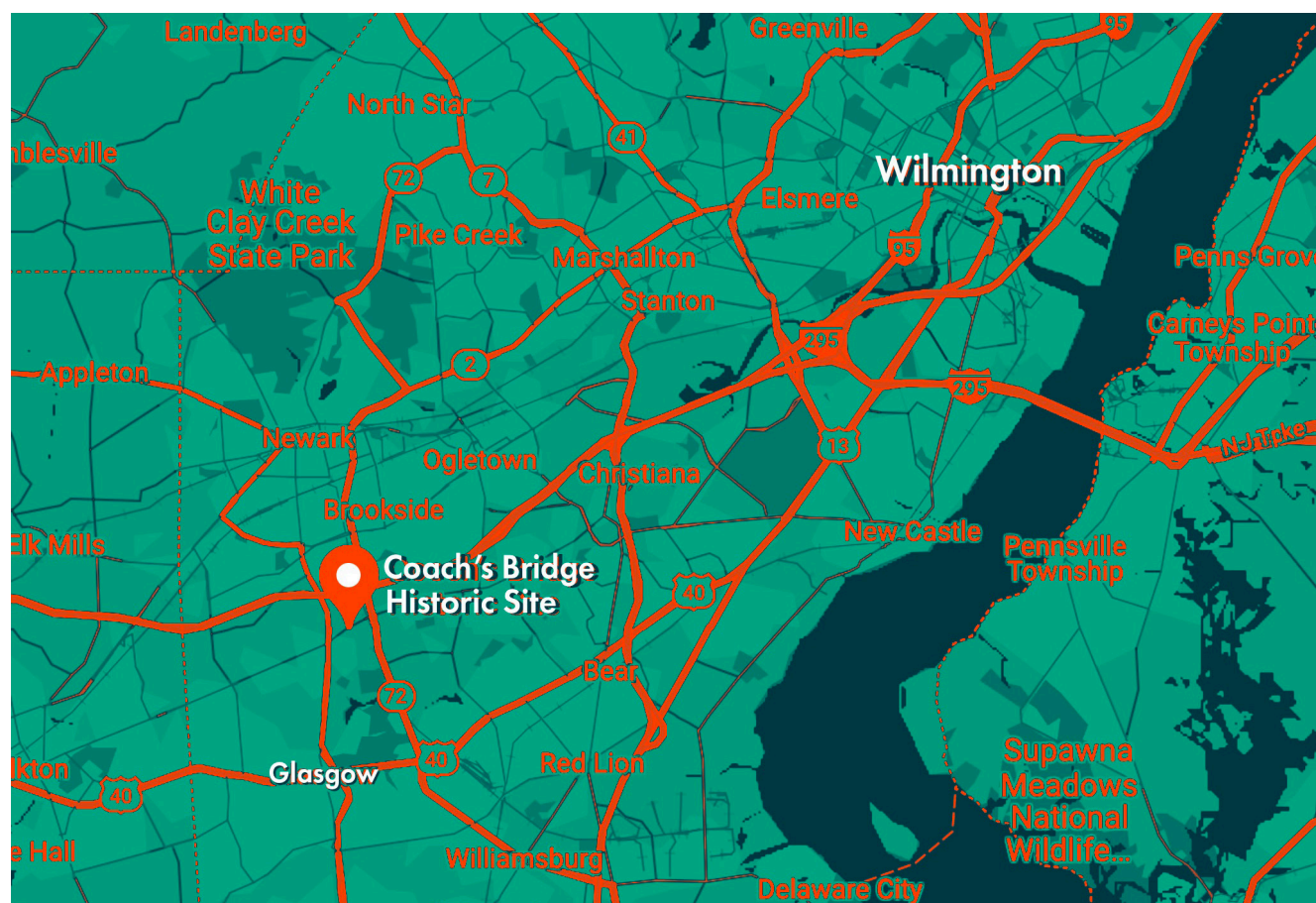
The Wilmington, Delaware metro area and the Washington, D.C. metro area are significantly different in size and median incomes (QuickFacts: Wilmington city, Delaware; Washington city, District of Columbia, n.d.). However, they do share similar racial demographics and the relative distance from city center to the historic site (15 miles and 6.1 miles, respectively).

Zooming in to examine the specific communities that house the battlefields of Cooch's Bridge, Delaware and Bladensburg, Maryland reveals additional commonalities. Using the four communities of Newark, Delaware; Glasgow, Delaware; Bladensburg, Maryland; and Hyattsville, Maryland, which surround the historic sites commemorating the Battle of Cooch's Bridge and the Battle of Bladensburg respectively, population and housing costs are similar metrics as well:

	Bladensburg, Maryland	Glasgow, Delaware	Newark, Delaware	Hyattsville, Maryland
Population (2020 census)	9,657	15,288	30,601	21,187
Median value of housing units	$330,400	$346,200	$357,600	$463,500
Median monthly homeowner costs with a mortgage	$2,002	$1,817	$1,910	$2,722
Median gross rent	$1,652	$1,821	$1,611	$1,831

Source: U.S. Census Quick Facts, accessed on 12/20/2024

The four communities are indeed different but share important similarities to render this comparison a useful case study for future historical interpretation work for the Battle of Bladensburg site located in Maryland.

Timeline of Historic Interpretation

The Cooch family emigrated from England in the 1740s to establish a new life in the New World and begin a grist mill to support the family (Cooch & Cooch Doran, 2018). The Cooch home, built in 1760, was purchased by the Delaware Division of Historic and Cultural Affairs for historic interpretation in 2018. The Cooch's Bridge Historic District — comprising of the Cooch home and 10 acres of surrounding property was designated by the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, but interpretive elements did not emerge in earnest until the purchase from the Cooch family (Eichmann, 2018; National Register of Historic Places, n.d.). Shortly after the designation, the first interpretive effort was dedicated to preservation efforts along with archeological studies to locate the gravesites of the American soldiers who lost their lives during the battle (Denison, 2022). A team of archeologists from Indiana University of Pennsylvania quickly located several possible sites for the burial grounds, which laid the groundwork for additional proposals for archeological work (Denison, 2022). Momentum slowed for additional historic interpretation until the establishment of the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site organization in 2020.

The formation of the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site, a nonprofit focused on preserving the site and promoting public access to it, came organically from the community, with the purpose of recognizing the importance of the property but wanting to tell a more holistic story than what was presented in the 1970s about the property from before, during, and after the famous battle, including stories of the indigenous Lenape people and those enslaved by the Cooch family (Eichmann, 2021). Given the history of slavery in Delaware, and the more than 35-year delay in ratifying the 13th Amendment that outlawed slavery, the Friends organization argued that telling the history of Cooch's Bridge needed to include perspectives other than just the battle itself to have visitors place themselves and the location within the larger narrative of Delaware history (Eichmann, 2018; Eichmann, 2021).

Another aspect of Delaware history that the Friends organization identified as important for future interpretation was the impact that Cooch's grain mill had on industrial history. Using cutting-edge technology for the time, Cooch's grain mill was so exciting to the milling industry that millers from Brandywine Village, Pennsylvania — one of the most prominent milling communities in the region at the time — had to visit and see the technological breakthroughs for themselves (Eichmann, 2021). Cooch's grain mill was identified as a key building for preservation and an important stop along the guided tours that the site now offers.

Since 2020, the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site have worked in conjunction with the state's Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs to fundraise for additional preservation efforts and offer further suggestions on the interpretive elements on the site. The Friends organization works with local historians to conduct limited tours to the public while the preservation work is being finished. The Friends organization also utilizes the buildings and land at the Cooch's Bridge cultural site for social events for the public with direct or indirect ties to the historic significance of the site.

In 2024, the Cooch's Bridge historic site continues to be closed to the public for preservation work but offers scheduled guided tours free of charge, hosts various events, and will be a key portion of a proposed local history tour trail that would stretch into an Iron Hill Park to Glasgow Park Pathway (Iron Hill to Glasgow Park Pathway, n.d.).

Current Historical Interpretation Elements

The current historical interpretation elements at Cooch's Bridge can be put into three distinct categories: (1) guided tours; (2) physical preservation of historic buildings; and (3) public events. While these interpretive strategies are not necessarily novel, the themes explored in these strategies are what set Cooch's Bridge apart for comparison and use by other historic sites.

The guided tours, free to the public by reservation, take visitors throughout the grounds of the historic site. The tours not only discuss the Battle of Cooch's Bridge, but visitors explore racial, indigenous, transportation, and industrial histories. Since the current phases preservation work is still underway, the tours are not yet representative of the final vision that the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site have for the tours. That said, the current tours take visitors on an outdoor excursion that includes interpretive signs, multiple views of the preserved buildings, and the natural landscape that played a role within the historical themes that are explored — all with a local historian. The interpretive signs, similar to those found at the BWP, connect with themes regarding the history of the area rather than focusing on the battle alone. The tour's view of historic buildings, including the Cooch Homestead and the Cooch-Dayett Mill complex, are accompanied by: the Battle of Cooch's Bridge; histories of the indigenous communities who lived in the area; the history of enslavement in Delaware and specific perspectives from the narratives of the enslaved at Cooch's Homestead; a social history of farming in Delaware; history of industrialization in Delaware, exemplified by the Cooch-Dayett mill; and how the natural environment impacted each of these historical themes (Cooch's Bridge Historic Site, n.d.). The tours are planned to expand once the renovations and other preservation efforts are completed. Also, with the possible expansion of a hiking trail from Iron Hill Park, the tour would expand to include more battlefield interpretations (McVety, 2024).

The physical preservation of historic buildings is currently the interpretive element taking the most resources and time by the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site and the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. The Homestead structure, mill complex, the icehouse and smokehouse, and the other farm structures are in good condition given that the first portion of the structures were built in 1760 (Cooch House, n.d.). The Cooch family, who had ownership over the lands since 1746, maintained the buildings well into the 2010's until it was sold to the state in 2018 (Denison,2022). That upkeep, however, did not equate to the level of preservation and care that would ideally accompany a structure of that age. The interpretive potential of these buildings is great, thus, worth the time and resources being spent to improve the structures. For instance, the Homestead levels that were constructed back in 1760 constitute one of the oldest buildings in post-colonization Delaware (Cooch House, n.d.). Also, due to the multidimensional layers of historic interpretation that the buildings hold – from military history to industrial history – the preservation of these buildings is key to the ways in which the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs and the Friends organization envision the holistic history of Cooch's Bridge. The buildings are of such importance to the interpretation of the site that a proposed change to Old Baltimore Pike for safety upgrades was met with such overwhelming concern for the potential negative impact of the protected battlefield by the local community and historians that the plans for road work were scaled back by the Delaware Department of Transportation (Shannon, 2024). One of the proposed improvements was to expand the road enough to produce a roundabout at the intersection near the entrance to the historic site, similar to the roundabout near BWP. The scaled-back improvements do not include the roundabout, which was a victory for the concerned historians and community members (Shannon, 2024). The completion of these preservation efforts will unlock additional potential of the tours and events for years to come.

Even during the massive overhaul of the physical structures from the 2018–2024 period, the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site has utilized community events to realize some of the holistic historic interpretation goals in the short term. During the COVID-19 shutdowns, the Friends organization took to Zoom for their historic interpretation programming. For example, Zoom events such as "The Revolutionary War from other Perspectives" examined how the war that made Cooch's Bridge historically relevant was part of larger historical themes such as British history, Black history, Indigenous history, and other overlooked/marginalized groups. These online events were popular enough to continue after the shutdowns, well into 2023–2024. Once in-person events became more commonplace in 2021 and beyond, the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site utilize on-site and off-site events for fundraising and historic interpretation in unique and creative ways. One example took place in April 2024, where a jazz quintet called The Whitney Project premiered "Cooch's Bridge: The African American Experience." This musical composition came from conversations that composer Jonathan Whitney had with historians and local community members to "convey the intersection of African Americans with the Cooch family, Cooch-owned lands, and local business" (Premiere Performance of "Cooch's Bridge: The African American Experience" set for April 14, March 26, 2024). The concert was one way that the Friends organization use events to communicate the richness of the historic value to the broader public. In that same year, the Friends organization organized a Juneteenth celebration at Cooch's Bridge Historic Site filled with music and a speaker series to highlight how the history of slavery connects to Delaware history and Cooch's Bridge Historic Site. Finally, for the Friends' Fourth Anniversary celebration in June 2024, the Friends put on two events: one as a fundraiser and one as a free event for public awareness. The fundraiser included dinner and a speaker series while the free event was a concert with songs from the American Revolution along with the premiere of an original song about the Battle of Cooch's Bridge (Fourth Anniversary Weekend, n.d.). These events achieve fundraising goals, raise awareness about the historic site, and engage the public through art and cultural events.

Opportunities for Battle of Bladensburg Site

The Cooch's Bridge Historic Site provides some useful potential examples for the interpretation around the Battle of Bladensburg. While the historic site has endeavored to increase its public interpretive elements more recently than the areas around Bladensburg, there are strategies that a well-established site can glean from Cooch's Bridge.

In particular, the use of events both on-site and off-site (including virtual) to engage the broader public are innovative, inclusive, and creative. By starting with the premise that the historic site would be dedicated to a broader interpretive project — with underrepresented voices at the forefront — the events that the Friends of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site can use to fundraise, vraise awareness, and foster historic interpretation can be a wide swath of options. Importantly, events such as the jazz concert used music to not only engage the public but educate them about African-American music along with information about the historic site at Cooch's Bridge. For some people, a historic site may not be their preference for entertainment or educational enrichment. Using music — a much broader genre of

entertainment — to introduce the historic site may draw an audience previously unavailable. Additionally, given the recent acquisition of the lands by the state for use of Cooch's Bridge as a historic site, there is likely a wide swath of people in the area that have no recognition or concept of the Battle of Cooch's Bridge.

These aspects of the Battle of Cooch's Bridge Historic Site can be instructive for the Battle of Bladensburg site. First, when asked questions regarding the general understanding of the Battle of Bladensburg, the survey conducted for this project revealed inconsistent at best knowledge of the battle. Furthermore, during information gathering at a community forum, one of the emerging themes was the fact that much of the contemporary community of Bladensburg and the surrounding areas are New Americans** who may have less knowledge of American history — especially history regarding the War of 1812. Finally, with more Black/African-American perspectives being identified as viewpoints that the community desired to see, using examples such as the jazz concert and/or the Juneteenth celebration could be useful in reaching new audiences. The BWP has hosted many concerts and similar cultural events. During the 2024 Bladensburg Community Survey conducted by PSG, when asked what they remember engaging with at the BWP, respondents only selected "Special events (including concerts, festivals, etc.)" at a rate of 17.4%. Making the concerts and cultural events more consistent could help in raising the profile of these events to the general public.

Also, utilizing events — and often pairing free events with fundraising events — is an excellent method for a new historic site to build its programming and cash reserves. This method can also be used for sites looking to reinvent or reinvigorate themselves. For the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site looking to add to its interpretation, using this dual event method that is not explicitly a transfer of historic knowledge could prove effective in engaging a broader community.

Finally, the proposed connection by hiking trail at Iron Hill Park to the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site provides another potential lesson for the Battle of Bladensburg historic interpretation. The Anacostia Tributary Trail System along the Anacostia River that passes the Bladensburg Waterfront Park is already bringing new audiences near the historic site. The Anacostia Tributary Trail, maintained by the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, travels approximately 24 miles through the DC metro area and takes visitors through a wide range of entertainment options, including historic interpretation sites and museums (Bike and Water Trails, n.d.). Much like the proposed plan for the hiking trail between Iron Hill Park and the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site, the bike path can offer additional interpretive possibilities including but not limited to: further use of physical locations to interpret the battle; additional signage and other physical media to engage bike riders along the trail; and/or further connect the trail to other historic interpretation elements.

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*According to the Administration for Children and Families—part of the Department of Health and Human Services—defines New Americans as: "foreign-born individuals (and their children and families) who seek to be fully integrated into their new community in the United States. These persons include:

· Immigrants. Foreign-born individuals who obtain lawful permanent resident status.
· Refugees. Individuals outside their home country unable/unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution or lack of protection on account or race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group." (New Americans 101, 2015).

CASE STUDY: FORT MEIGS—OHIO'S WAR OF 1812 BATTLEFIELD

History and Context
War: War of 1812
State(s): Ohio
Duration of Battle: May 1813–July 1813 (two separate battles)
Historical Significance: A major victory for the American forces against the British and Tecumseh's Confederacy, which led to the retreat of British forces into Canada
Main body responsible for historic site maintenance: Ohio History Connection (local partners: The Fort Meigs Association – nonprofit entity) – state governmental entity
Organizational Budget in 2023: $31,073,000
Historic Designation: National Historic Landmark

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Along the Maumee River in the suburbs of Toledo, Ohio, is the location of Fort Meigs – an American fortification built during the War of 1812. Under the command of General (and future President) William Henry Harrison, Ft. Meigs was constructed to function as a supply depot and defensive position in the western frontier during the war. The fort was named after then-governor Return Meigs, Jr. for providing General Harrison with the land, supplies, and militia members for the fort (A History of Fort Meigs, n.d.). Construction began in February of 1813 and was completed in the following months.

May 1, 1813 was the first siege of Ft. Meigs by British and Indigenous forces. Led by British General Henry Proctor and Chief Tecumseh, the forces attacking Ft. Meigs eventually numbered an estimated 2,800 men by the time reinforcements arrived on May 4 (Averill, 1886). The fighting went on for days, with May 5 being the bloodiest day of the battle with nearly 600 casualties on the American side (A History of Fort Meigs, n.d.). This was partially due to a blunder by American Colonel William Dudley, who pursued Indigenous forces into the woods after taking the banks of the Maumee River by boat. This endeavor into the woods against Tecumseh's men led to only an estimated 150 men of the original force of over 850 – roughly 20% – returning to the fort (Averill, 1886). This part of the battle eventually would be known as "Dudley's Massacre" or "Dudley's Defeat." Despite the work of Colonel Dudley, the Americans outlasted the British and Indigenous siege, and after nearly a week of fighting the invading forces retreated (A History of Fort Meigs, n.d.)

In July of 1813, the British and Indigenous forces returned for a second siege attempt. General Harrison had left to pursue a further campaign against British forces in Detroit and Canada, leaving General Green Clay in charge. Only this time, instead of leading with an artillery barrage, the invading forces used more stealthy methods of war. Under the command of Tecumseh, the Indigenous forces staged a mock battle aimed at luring the Americans out of Ft. Meigs. The Americans did not fall for this trick, and instead fortified themselves further with additional barricades and other anti-siege preparations. Severe weather eventually forced the British and Indigenous forces away to take cover, giving the Americans another victory without much of a physical altercation with opposing forces (A History of Fort Meigs, n.d.; Averill, 1886).

The majority of the remaining American forces, under the control of General Clay, tore down Ft. Meigs and rebuilt at a smaller scale and then moved along to join back up with General Harrison's forces in Canada. Around 100 militiamen were left to maintain what would then become a supply depot until the end of the war (A History of Fort Meigs, n.d.).

Breakdown of Surrounding Communities

Similar to Bladensburg's and Cooch's Bridge's location to their respective metropolitan areas, the location of Ft. Meigs led to the establishment of Perrysburg – a city within the Greater Toledo area. Perrysburg is around 12 miles away from Toledo's city center, making it very similar to the distance between Bladensburg and Cooch's Bridge to their metropolitan centers.
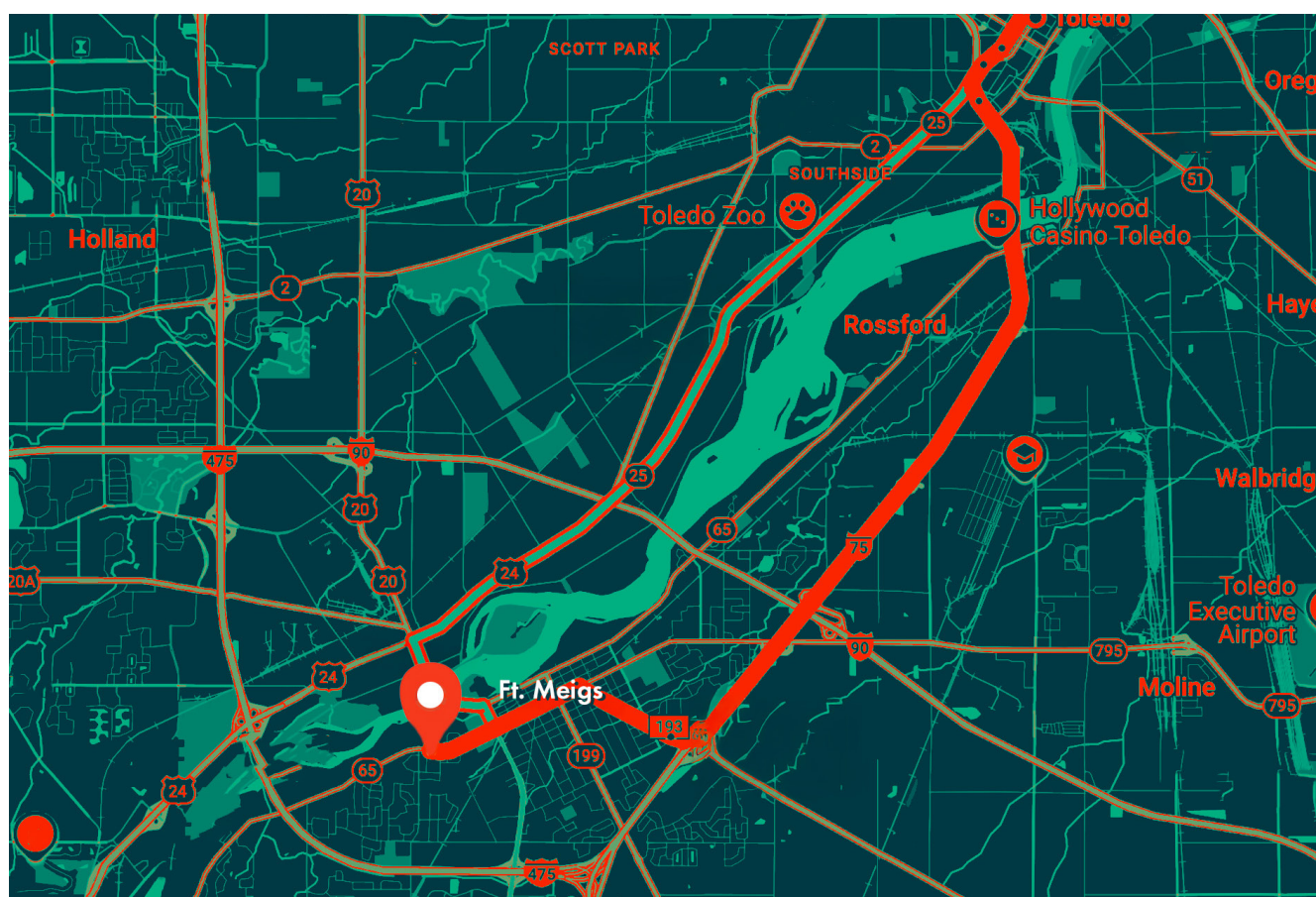
Importantly, Ft. Meigs and Bladensburg Historic Site are similar in their proximity to a major river. This not only served as important to the historical events that took place at each site, but gives each historic site additional interpretive elements within and outside of their respective battles.

For a community demographic comparison, comparing Bladensburg and Perrysburg provides some limited similarities. Looking at racial demographics offers very few commonalities. Once again using population and housing costs, in addition to the age breakdowns of each community, we can view some commonalities between the two communities:

	Bladensburg, Maryland	Perrysburg, Ohio
Population (2020 census)	9,657	25,041
Median value of housing units	$330,400	$306,500
Median monthly homeowner costs with a mortgage	$2,002	$1,985
Median gross rent	$1,652	$1,213
Percentage of people under 5 years of age	9.6%	5.4%
Percentage of people under 18 years of age	35.5%	26.8%
Percentage of people over 65 years of age	11.7%	15.1%

Source: U.S. Census Quick Facts, accessed on 12/20/2024

The two communities are indeed different but share important similarities to render this comparison a useful case study for future historical interpretation work for the Battle of Bladensburg site located in Maryland.

Timeline of Historic Interpretation

The first element of historic interpretation was built in 1908, when a monument was constructed to memorialize the Battle of Ft. Meigs (History Comes to Life at Fort Meigs – Ohio's War of 1812 Battlefield, n.d.). The next iteration of interpretive elements would not arrive until decades later. Beginning in the late 1960's, the Ohio History Connection (OHC) began to reconstruct Ft. Meigs on its original location with the eventual goal of opening a museum of living history at the site (Reconstructing the Past, n.d.). This process also included the use of an archeological team to excavate the site, providing additional interpretive knowledge for the military history of the fort (Reconstructing the Past, n.d.). Using historic maps and diaries of the men who served at Ft. Meigs, the original fort was reconstructed using similar materials that made up the original fort (History Comes to Life at Fort Meigs – Ohio's War of 1812 Battlefield, n.d.). Capitalizing on the surge in popularity of living history in the 1960's and 1970's, the Ft. Meigs interpretive staff took visitors on an interpretive journey in period-specific attire and conducting demonstrations of 19th century technology such as cannon fire and musket fire (History Comes to Life at Fort Meigs – Ohio's War of 1812 Battlefield, n.d.). While the Bicentennial celebrations were met with historic interpretation of the Battle of Ft. Meigs, the work continued for decades to achieve the final goals of the OHC.

The OHC announced the completion of the most recent phase of the restoration of the reconstructed Ft. Meigs in May of 2003. The $6.2 million dollar reconstruction of Ft. Meigs was one of the largest reconstruction and interpretive projects taken on by the OHC. The 14,000 square-foot museum center itself carried a $2.9 million dollar price tag (Reconstructing the Past, n.d.). The 3,000 square-foot visitor center and new interactive exhibits comprise the most recent interpretive elements, which house many of the exhibits in use today (Reconstructing the Past, n.d.). Looking into the future, the OHC is currently raising an additional $1.5 million to improve the museum, landscape, outdoor recreation locations, additional educational programming, and continued collections care for the artifacts currently on display (Reconstructing the Past, n.d.). In Ohio's FY25–26 state capital budget, the Ohio History Connection received $63.7 million to fund projects and initiatives associated with the OHC's 10-year strategic plan (State Capital Funds Will Support Ohio History Connection's Strategic Plan, 2024). This level of state investment is larger than most nonprofit organizations would ever receive, granting the Ft. Meig's Historic Site a leg up in comparison to other organizations, which must fundraise and fund projects through competitive grants

Current Historical Interpretation Elements

The historic interpretation elements still reside mostly within the living history paradigm, but the staff at Ft. Meigs pushes creative and innovative events to reach additional audiences in the Greater Toledo community. The museum itself is crafted around the main exhibit entitled "Legacy of Freedom: Fort Meigs in the War of 1812." The exhibit is split into four main themes: era, conflict, understanding, and remembrance (Legacy of Freedom: The Fort Meigs Museum, n.d.). These four thematic areas offer an interdisciplinary and multidimensional look at the role that Ft. Meigs had on the history of Ohio and the War of 1812. In the era section, visitors are exposed to maps, descriptions, and first-person accounts of the early Indigenous inhabitants of the area and how contact with European colonists shaped the 18th and 19th centuries (Legacy of Freedom: The Fort Meigs Museum, n.d.). The conflict section of the museum focuses almost exclusively on the role that Ft. Meigs played in the War of 1812, full of maps of troop movements, accounts from soldiers, and other elements of military interpretive history (Legacy of Freedom: The Fort Meigs Museum, n.d.). The understanding section of the exhibit introduces another dimension of historic interpretation, where visitors are taken through video presentations and physical exhibits of the archeological discoveries at the battlefield (Legacy of Freedom: The Fort Meigs Museum, n.d.). Finally, the remembrance section of the museum offers a wide breadth of first-person accounts from the Battle of Ft. Meigs, including diary entries and accounts from the historians who helped preserve the memories of these soldiers (Legacy of Freedom: The Fort Meigs Museum, n.d.). The museum offers a gift shop as well.

The use of special events and educational opportunities also helps set Ft. Meigs apart from other War of 1812 historic sites. For the educational professionals, Ft. Meigs offers a wide variety of options for student visitors and field trips. Guided tours and the student Call to Arms program takes students along with period-appropriate costumes through a detailed narrative of the fort's role in the War of 1812 and the larger narrative of Ohio history (Educate, n.d.). The Call to Arms program is when the field trip gets interactive for students. Students are taken through a narrative about the role that soldiers played during the War of 1812 and the construction of Ft. Meigs, accompanied by a facilitated debate where students discuss the merits of defense versus retreat (Educate, n.d.). Then, students physically build mock blockhouses and participate in mock court martials to learn about how life in the 19th century compares to today (Educate, n.d.).

Educational professionals can also utilize the interpretive elements directly from their classrooms. "The Foot of the Rapids" podcast, hosted by staff at Ft. Meigs, takes students through diary entries, memoirs, letters, poems, and music from the era to help tell the story of the fort along with narratives about the War of 1812 (Educate, n.d.). For small fees, teachers can also request virtual outreach programming to supplement their classroom learning. The first level of outreach is a "virtual call with a soldier," where historically uniformed staff members from Ft. Meigs Historic site give online presentations to classrooms and share maps, timelines, and first-person accounts from the comfort of Zoom (Educate, n.d.). Teachers can also request the "Life at Fort Meigs" case study program, which sends teaching aids in a physical case directly to teachers that tell stories of the entire War of 1812 and Ohio's role in the conflict (Educate, n.d.). Finally, there is a live virtual tour option where a guide takes a class on a live virtual tour of the historic site and answers questions in real time (Educate, n.d.). There is also an archeological dig site for students, where visiting children can learn how experts dug for artifacts from the battle and then get to dig in sand traps for other buried "artifacts" (Educate, n.d.). These options offer a robust set of educational tools for educators of all ages.

The events held on-site are also creative, unique, and engage people on a variety of levels. Some of the mainstay events tap into familiar elements of living history such as reenactments, demonstrations of era-specific wartime drills, as well as the "Crossbow to Cartridge" demonstration that shows off the technological advancement of weaponry during the fort's era (Activities and Special Events, n.d.). Other events held at the historic site, however, tap into peoples' interests outside of the typical historic interpretation methodology. For example, each season of the site being open is accompanied by "Fort Meigs After Dark Lantern Tours," where guests are exposed to nighttime guided tours of the fort and demonstrations of how the battle would have felt during the evening hours (Activities and Special Events, n.d.). The second Sunday of each month is reserved for tabletop games designed to engage people interested in recreating troop movements through miniatures (Activities and Special Events, n.d.). October offers Ghost Walk tours, where visitors interested in the paranormal can interact with the historic site for a spooky time (Activities and Special Events, n.d.). The winter holidays then give way to the "Historic Holidays" festival, where the fort is decorated for the winter holidays and visitors are given information on how early Americans would have celebrated similar times of the year (Activities and Special Events, n.d.). In 2025, the Ft. Meigs Historical Site will debut a new event type: the "Tea and Historic Crafts" event series. There, visitors will enjoy tea and craft using techniques and materials that would have been used in the early 19th century (Activities and Special Events, n.d.). These events engage visitors on- and off-site, in a variety of methods, all with the aim of promoting the historic interpretation of the Battle of Ft. Meigs and the War of 1812.

Opportunities for Battle of Bladensburg Site

The Ft. Meigs Historical Site offers many potential learning opportunities for the Battle of Bladensburg site. While Bladensburg does not have a reconstructed fort from the War of 1812 on site, the museum, the events, and educational tools that are available at Ft. Meigs are areas of further exploration. While the budget of Ft. Meigs — given its governmental status — allows for a larger museum, the popularity and versatility of the structure's historical interpretation elements provides some pathways forward to a revitalization of the visitor center at the BWP.

First, the number of educational opportunities that come from the Ft. Meigs Historic Site that engage students of all ages can provide additional ways that the Battle of Bladensburg site could interact with the school-age population. The use of direct-to-classroom resources, for instance, could help supplement the shortcomings within the historic curriculum that were identified in the community survey and community meeting. On-site educational resources such as costumed guided tours, archeological "dig sites," and student-centered reenactments and debate can give the Battle of Bladensburg Site a new way forward.

While events are already prevalent at the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site and the BWP are robust and active, the events offered at Ft. Meigs could prove to be useful examples. The tabletop troop movements, tea and crafts, ghost tours, and night tours offer a wide range of ways that people visiting Ft. Meigs can interpret the past. When asked in the community survey about what they would like to see at Bladensburg, many of these options garnered heavy support (i.e., costumed tours).

Finally, the centering of Indigenous histories within the museum can offer a way to engage communities that do not often see themselves reflected in American military history. By foregrounding the entire museum experience with Indigenous history first, the museum sets the historic stage broader than the battle itself but does so in a way that engages audiences with perspectives that they might not encounter in a textbook or classroom experience. Overall, there is a lot that any historic site could glean from the work that Ft. Meigs is doing in regard to historic interpretation, but the lessons for fellow War of 1812 sites are ever more important.

CASE STUDY: THE BATTLE OF BRANDYWINE

History and Context
War: Revolutionary War
State(s): Pennsylvania
Duration of Battle: September 11, 1777
Historical Significance: A defeat for American forces that left the then-continental capitol Philadelphia vulnerable for eventual occupation.
Main body responsible for historic site maintenance: Brandywine Battlefield Park Associates
Organizational Budget in 2023: $139,000
Historic Designation: NPS Class A battlefield site

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Shortly after the previously mentioned Battle of Cooch's Bridge, the American forces found themselves near Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania under the command of General Washington being chased by General William Howe's and General Cornwallis's men. The British forces were in the process of traveling by boat from Sandy Hook, New Jersey toward Philadelphia. Due to the previous battle at Cooch's Bridge, the British forces were forced to change their landing procedures from their ships, and therefore General Washington was unable to fully scout the size of the British forces heading Philadelphia's way (Harris, 2014; Higginbotham, 1977).

General Washington decided to deploy his troops in a way to try and entice the British into attacking them directly at Chadds Ford, set up defensive positions within the city, and deployed detachments of soldiers on both the north and south sides of the city to further lure the British into a direct line with the city (Harris, 2014; Higginbotham, 1977). However, General Cornwallis and General Howe were equipped with better knowledge of the area — partially due to the work of British loyalists feeding them information (Harris, 2014; Higginbotham, 1977). Therefore, rather than attacking the Americans at Chadds Ford as Washington hoped, the British forces used a flanking maneuver. A contingent of the British and allied German forces would indeed engage the Americans directly at Chadds Ford while the rest of Howe's and Cornwallis's men would march north to Trimble's Ford (across from Brandywine Creek) to flank the American forces (Harris, 2014; Higginbotham, 1977).

The British and German troops began marching in the early morning of September 11, 1777 from nearby Kennett Square, Pennsylvania along the "Great Road" (now U.S. Route 1) toward the Americans positioned at Brandywine Creek and the fighting quickly commenced. At the same time, General Cornwallis took his men on the flanking maneuver — which took almost nine hours to complete — and arrived on the American's flank around 2pm that day (Harris, 2014; Higginbotham, 1977). The fighting lasted almost 11 hours, which makes it the second-longest battle of the Revolutionary War.

The maneuver worked, and the Americans were headed toward not only a loss but the potential of complete annihilation of the Continental Army. The saving grace of Washington's tactical blunder was the work of Colonels Sullivan, Stirling, and Stephen of the Continental Army who were able to hold off the British flanking maneuver's advance for more than an hour while the rest of the army prepared for their retreat. Without this effort, it is more than likely that General Washington's forces would have experienced a complete defeat (Harris, 2014; Higginbotham, 1977).

The retreat led to many skirmishes in the outlaying Philadelphia areas, including the Battle of the Clouds and the Battle of Paoli. Knowing that Philadelphia was on the British target list and the army in disarray, the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council ordered that 11 church bells in the city — including what is now known as the Liberty Bell — be taken down and removed so the British army could not take possession of them and win a symbolic victory over the Americans (Whelan, 2003). The Continental Congress abandoned Philadelphia in lieu of being captured, and the British forces marched into Philadelphia unopposed (Harris, 2014; Higginbotham, 1977).

Breakdown of Surrounding Communities

Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, the main location of the Battle of Brandywine, is a small town in the counties surrounding Philadelphia. The Battle of Brandywine, compared to the other battles examined in these case studies, is the community that is the farthest distance from a nearby metropolitan area. At almost 26 miles from Philadelphia's city center, this historic site near Chadds Ford is farthest away from a major city's potential historic tourism market.

For a community demographic comparison, comparing Bladensburg and Chadds Ford provides some limited similarities. Looking at racial demographics offers very few commonalities. Once again using population, median household income, educational attainment, and housing costs, in addition to the age breakdowns of each community, we can view some commonalities between the two communities:

	Bladensburg, Maryland	Chadds Ford CDP, Pennsylvania
Population (2020 census)	9,657	9,657
Median household income	$62,400	$62,400
Median gross rent	$1,652	$1,197
Percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees or higher	14.1%	14.1%

Source: U.S. Census Quick Facts, accessed on 12/20/2024

The two communities are indeed different, but share important similarities to render this comparison a useful case study for future historical interpretation work for the Battle of Bladensburg site located in Maryland.

Timeline of Historic Interpretation

Efforts toward historic interpretation for the Battle of Brandywine began in 1949, when the Brandywine Battlefield Park became a Pennsylvania State Park. The land was then designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1961, just as the living history movement began to experience a resurgence. The National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program Report, published in 2000, designated the Brandywine Battlefield as a Class A battlefield site (Preserving the Brandywine Battlefield, n.d.).

During this time between 1949 and the late 1960s, the interpretive elements of the Brandywine Battlefield included mostly reenactments, guided tours, sponsored seminars, and open houses of the historic properties that were on-site. In the subsequent decades, the Brandywine Battlefield site began adding additional interpretive elements, including digital tours, a physical gift shop in downtown Chadds Ford, a visitor's center, school tours and summer camps, podcasts, and events. However, much of the programming remained within the physical boundaries of the battlefield around Chadds Ford.

As the 2020s approached, the Brandywine Battlefield Historic Site desired to build upon its 2013 interpretive plan and take what was already being done into a new dimension with the 2022 Brandywine Battlefield Heritage Interpretation and Connectivity Plan. One of the main aspects for improvement for the historical interpretive elements is connecting the interpretive elements that existed in Chadds Ford with the surrounding communities that hold historical significance to the Battle of Brandywine. In particular, the question around future historic interpretation rested on how to incorporate the communities of Birmingham, Thornbury, and West Chester with the interpretive elements in Chadds Ford.

Current Historical Interpretation Elements

While soliciting bids for interpretive plans for the 2022 Brandywine Battlefield Heritage Interpretation and Connectivity Plan, the existing interpretation near Chadds Ford continued to evolve. Much like the site at Fort Meigs, the historic site used the physical location to build educational programming, guided tours, and the summer camp and leadership programs. When it comes to tours, the large physical footprint of the battlefield proves to be a difficult barrier. Since the battlefield encompasses many miles given the flanking maneuver that swung the battle, many of the guided tours are audio and it is encouraged to travel via car (Maps and Tours, n.d.). Groups — both private and from school districts — are offered interpretive guides but are still required to have vehicular transportation for the full tour. From the educator perspective, the Brandywine Battlefield Historic Site offers school group tours, again with the assumption that school districts would provide their own transportation around the vast battlefield grounds. In addition to available tours, the Brandywine Battlefield Historic Site offers summer camps and leadership camps for youth. The Brandywine Battlefield Summer Camp — for ages 8–12—is a one- or two-week camp (depending on the camper) to learn about life in the 18th century and Washington's Continental Army through "hands-on activities, visits from historical characters, and exciting games" (Brandywine Battlefield Summer Camp 2025, n.d.). The leadership program, aimed at adults, is a seminar style program aimed at offering lessons and practices from the 18th century military leaders who were featured at the Battle of Brandywine and translate them into modern contexts (Leadership Programs at the Brandywine Battlefield, n.d.).

For a major Revolutionary battlefield, the current interpretive elements offer limited return to visitors. However, the highlighting of this case study lies in the proposed improvements in the 2022 Brandywine Battlefield Heritage Interpretation and Connectivity Plan. This plan involves seven partner municipalities to produce a first-of-its-kind heritage plan that will span two counties (Brandywine Battlefield Heritage Interpretation and Connectivity Plan, 2022). The plan includes building three new heritage centers; vetting additional interpretive sites; building upon new historic themes for interpretation; and linking all heritage sites together with sidewalks, trails, bikeways, and water trails to create a truly immersive experience that one can experience in different modalities and start from a variety of locations (Brandywine Battlefield Heritage Interpretation and Connectivity Plan, 2022).

While these plans are still in the implementation phase, the solutions offered in this plan can offer the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site additional insights when considering possible expansion and changes.

Opportunities for Battle of Bladensburg Site

Lack of connectivity between interpretive elements and other attractions at the BWP, the changes to the physical landscape, and the size of the current footprint of the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site provides some different possibilities compared to the Battle of Brandywine Site. However, some of the improvements gleaned from the planned interpretive elements at the Brandywine site remain relevant. For example, the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site already utilizes multiple modalities of connectivity through boat tours, a bike trail, and historically preserved houses. However, the entrance to these interpretive elements remains separated and contains different themes and branding from element to element. For instance, the signage at the BWP is quite different from the signage on the nearby Anacostia Tributary Trail System bike path along the Anacostia River. Also, while the boat tours and bike paths are important and popular experiences available at the BWP, these remain disparate interpretive experiences rather than part of one singular branded experience.

Depending on the thematic choices of the future interpretive elements surrounding the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site, the partnership with different municipalities could mirror the proposed changes in the 2022 Brandywine Battlefield Heritage Interpretation and Connectivity Plan. The Brandywine Plan is focusing on the military history that impacted the area but is using entrances in multiple municipalities to foster further exploration of these interpretive elements. While the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site also incorporates multiple municipalities through the Anacostia Trails Heritage Areas, using a singular or set of guiding themes among the different municipalities as well as transportation options (water, bike, walking) could be useful in establishing a more cohesive interpretive experience.

Finally, the leadership program and summer camp options could prove useful in attracting different audiences to the physical locations of the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site, thereby increasing the general interest in the history of the battle and surrounding areas. Engaging with children is nothing new for the Battle of Bladensburg Historic Site, but providing consistent summer programming could bring consistent interest to the site. Also, building upon the idea of a leadership program, designing additional adult-focused programming that can be used in commercial and industrial contexts by using lessons from history can further the historic site's reach into communities not yet interested.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Alderson and Low's (1996) seminal work on historic interpretation identified the dual nature of historic interpretation: "Interpretation is both a program and an activity. The program establishes a set of objectives for the things we want our visitors to understand; the activity has to do with the skills and techniques by which that understanding is created" (p. 3). The challenges facing historic interpretation in the mid-1990s will sound very familiar to readers in the 2020s. "Times have changed. History, particularly state and local history, has been relegated to a less important position in the curriculum. People move more often so that homes in which three or four generations of family once perpetuated the oral tradition are virtually things of the past. The visitor to the historic site of today is both more sophisticated and less well informed" (Alderson & Low, 1996, p. 6). For a variety of different cultural, technological, and political reasons, we find ourselves in a similar position with the same set of challenges. How do historic sites engage the community around them? How does the proliferation of the newest technology change the methods of interpretation, and the types of programs offered? In areas that are rapidly urbanizing, how do historic sites gain and/or maintain their significance while cities and communities expand around them? How do larger political forces impact historic sites, including funding and other public support? Which perspectives are shared at the historic site?

These questions will likely remain unanswered to some degree as the context around historic sites changes. In the 2020s, historic interpretation and organizations tasked with these important aspects of national identity-building and maintenance face some critical crossroads. Social movements on both sides of the political aisle have called into question who, what, and why certain aspects of American history are interpreted at historic sites. Technology such as cell phone applications and virtual/augmented reality have pushed historic interpretation toward new possibilities. As residential areas expand, buildings age, and major weather events become more commonplace due to climate change, organizations and governments tasked with historic interpretation and preservation are facing unprecedented challenges to maintain historic sites. These challenges arise alongside a paradigm shift in historic interpretation. Historic sites and museums — due to some of these pressures — are shifting toward the visitor experience rather than a "collection-centric exhibition" (Bergman, 2013, p. 174). This examination of the current literature on historic interpretation will provide the framework for future potential changes to the Battle of Bladensburg historic interpretation.

Balancing Historic Interpretation: Entertainment vs. Intellectual Depth

Museums and historic sites have always been made to balance entertainment and education, and finding the right balance for a community directly impacts the longevity and popularity of that site of historic interpretation (Alderson & Payne Low, 1996; Allison, 2016; Jackson, 2012). Historic sites and museums rely – to some extent – on attracting paying customers to the museum or site to maintain the facility. Even at locations that provide free admission, increasing foot traffic to the sites is often crucial to maintaining funding from philanthropists or local governments. Typically, this results in efforts focused on attracting new visitors through cultural tourism to historic sites and museums.

Jackson (2012) describes cultural tourism as a "double-edged sword" for organizations operating historic sites: "on the one hand, increased demand by tourists provided a powerful political and economic justification to expand conservation activities. On the other hand, increased visitation, overuse, inappropriate use, and the commodification of the same assets without regard for their cultural values posed a real threat to the integrity...of these assets" (p. 33). That said, the economics of and social need for historic sites ensures a dance with this double-edged sword. The question for historic sites, then, becomes: how do historic sites and museums increase the number of visitors without compromising the historic interpretive work of the site itself?

Children or students have often been a perpetually new audience for historic sites and museums, with many sites or museums offering programming or exhibits aimed at a younger audience. There are even companies that aim to represent history in toys, such as the Playmobil's 2018 "history class" toy set as an addition to its "furnished school building" collection. When researchers endeavored to study the effects of such toys, they found that the toy contained examples of hands-on learning, mixed-methods research tools, and historic artifacts. These representations of "history class" fostered in the children (study participants) a sense of excitement in history as a place of "discovery-based learning, self-directed activity-based learning, original material encounters, and a teacher who not only teachers and fosters this, but who as an expert explains historical contexts in a way that is appropriate for children" (Barsch & Mathis, 2020, p. 161). Some historic sites are already exemplifying this mixed-method, hands-on learning approach to entertain children and get them excited about history. The Fort Meigs historic site in Ohio, a War of 1812 frontier fort location, provides students with guided tours, reenactment opportunities, virtual reality experiences, archeological dig sites, and more (For Teachers, n.d.). What these children desired to see in their schooling following their time with the toy is reflective of many of the strengths that historic sites and museums – such as Fort Meigs – possess.

The research uncovered from the Playmobil toy of a "history class" is indicative of a macro-level trend: people desire to engage meaningfully with history. When historic sites or museums fail to attract a robust audience, the reason usually lies with the resources available to the site or museum – not the lack of interest in history itself. Ress and Cafaro (2021) found this to be the case at the open-air museum in New Harmony, IN. Utilizing a visitor survey, Ress and Cafaro (2021) found that visitors tended to skew older in age (nearly a quarter of respondents were over 70 years of age), wanted to learn from a tour guide, and wanted to "experience the past" (p. 1). The desire for a tour guide surprised the researchers, who note that finding flew in the face of recent writings regarding historic interpretation (Ress & Cafaro, 2021). When exploring hypotheses for this surprise in their findings, Ress and Cafaro (2021) argued that the expectations placed upon the guests were a factor. The explosion in self-guided audio tours and/or tours that provide prerecorded information through video and other digital platforms was an example of museums and historic sites expecting their guests to receive "content – curated by museum interpreters or designers – that does not do much to provide an 'immersive' experience for museum visitors" (Ress & Cafaro, 2021, p. 4). Visitors want to feel immersed in the past and experience it on their own terms rather than "be expected to read text, watch videos, and absorb knowledge from an 'electronic' tour guide" (Ress & Cafaro, 2021, p. 4).

This reversal could also be partially explained by the role of trust in teaching history. Haynes (2018) argues that trust might be a better concept than 'truth' when asking others to engage in history. Nationwide, trust in institutions is at some of the lowest levels ever recorded (Saad, 2023). A return to tour guides as a key part of historic interpretation can be viewed through a trust lens: who has the "social license to teach" history (Haynes, 2018, p. 175)? For many, teachers are granted such license and the same can be extrapolated to tour guides. People might distrust institutions, but the more familiar or local it is, the more trust it garners. Saad (2023) found that the institution with the greatest reported trust was small businesses. If tour guides are knowledgeable, approachable, and local to a historic site, they may develop a higher sense of trust with the visitors (Haynes, 2018).

One of the researchers' additional recommendations was to introduce immersive technological tools to enhance the experience and attract new audiences, while still having tour guides to supplement the learning experience. Financial implications aside, Ress and Cafaro (2021) recommend having immersive technologies that are usable by an older audience and, for the younger audiences, provide visitors' ability to "feel immersed in multiple timelines at the same site" (p. 1). Younger audiences – both from this survey research and the Playmobil example – want a more interactive, hands-on approach to history. In other words, younger audiences want to engage with history rather than be told about history.

This desire to engage with history by younger audiences is not new, and museums and historic sites are often much more engaging than how history is taught in a classroom. In a way, museums and historic sites often utilize what Thorp and Persson (2020) call historical thinking, which views history and history education (including historical interpretation) as something that should not "primarily deal with disseminating certain historical narratives, but rather with the processes and methods through which these historical narratives are constructed" (p. 892). Visitors want to deepen their understanding of history as a discipline; and achieving this might change what the broader public – children included – view as historically significant. Bergman (2020) found that students – even prior to any formalized instruction – often identified events that were "exciting and thrilling" in some way or directly changed the present and therefore the course of history (p. 164). When asked to expand on what makes history exciting or thrilling, students would "emphasize the number of people who died as a key element in measuring the significance of an event in the past" (Bergman, 2020, p. 169). Bergman (2020) also found that for these students, history was heavily political (i.e., focus on political leaders) and male-centric. What students viewed as historically significant reflects how history is traditionally taught in schools throughout the United States where students focus on conflict, male political leaders, and events that have a high impact (real or perceived) on the present. For organizations looking for a new pathway for their historic interpretation, making historical narratives interactive and utilizing unexamined perspectives are additions that can engage new audiences.

Striking the balance between entertainment and intellectual rigor is an ongoing challenge for all historic sites and museums. The interpretive elements around the Battle of Bladensburg are working to strike this balance by integrating children/student activities, outdoor exploration, and a modern bike trail alongside signage on various historical occurrences related to the battle, the War of 1812, and beyond. Going forward, the maintenance of this balance must also consider expanding the narrative for new perspectives and incorporating new technologies into the interpretive methods

Changing Perspectives on the Nation's Past and Future

Historic interpretation serves to construct images and narratives about a nation's past and future (Jackson, 2012; Topcu & Hirst, 2020; Zaino, 2019). For that reason, historic interpretation is full of meaning-making for a nation and its communities. Meaning-making, in this instance, refers to the use in educational psychology that describes meaning-making as the process where people create epistemologies that help them make sense of and interpret knowledge, personal influences, and relationships between concepts in their broader reality (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Ignelzi, 2000; Fantozzi, 2012; Kunnen & Bosma, 2000; Mortimer & Aguiar, 2006; Mortimer & Scott, 2003). The construction of narratives regarding a nation's identity is not completed with one effort or methodology. On the contrary, it is an ongoing process that happens in a variety of modalities and methodologies in the discipline of history. As we engage in different methodologies within the discipline of history, such as a bottom-up perspective rather than a top-down, 'great man' perspective, the political nature of such changes comes into sharp relief at historic sites. What is remembered and for what purpose is the subject of constant public negotiation and shapes individuals' understanding of the world around them. One of the most recent examples of this negotiation comes from the publication of The New York Times Magazine's 1619 project, when the mere question of "when does American history begin" caused debate and uproar in educational and political contexts throughout the country (Erford, 2021). The intensity of these discussion — especially at physical sites of historical remembrance — is partly due to what representation at historic sites and/or museums ultimately means: "translating figures into bronze, stone, and mortar is not pure historical evaluation. It bestows honor to the icon now. As a result, it calls for an evaluation of current or potential building icons within both historical and contemporary contexts" (Dennis & Reis-Dennis, 2019, p. 192). The dominant culture will often argue for keeping historical narratives that reaffirm their positions of power. People who desire a full accounting of the past — warts and all — do so in part to "foster mutual understanding and responsible civic engagement across multiple and diverse cultures" (Baumann et al., 2011, p. 38).

Part of the constant negotiation of what and how we remember our nation's history is the ongoing fight for increased representation by marginalized groups. Calls for increased representation often calls into question traditional and "established" historical narratives. While visitors to historic sites and museums often report feeling less control or responsibility over the past, these locations often make them feel more positive and in control of the future (Topcu & Hirst, 2020). Hence, when people are asked to grapple with uncomfortable parts of the past or asked to share the heritage spotlight with someone that looks different than them, there is often resistance on the part of the dominant group that leads to misunderstandings of the past. Plantations in the South are often the most extreme examples of this phenomenon. The majority of plantations that are used for historic interpretations offer an underinformed or incorrect narrative of slavery. When asked to change the interpretation to be more accurate, the "enduring effects of the dominance of white-controlled history, heritage, and identity have affected the interpretation" of those spaces (Worthington, Donaldson, & White, 2021, p. 4). To some, reinterpreting sites such as plantations without a direct acknowledgement of their role in white supremacy in the United States will always be incomplete (Eldar & Jansson, 2021). Many historic plantations, for political and/or personal reasons, refuse to engage at that core of the site's culpability in the horrors of slavery because visitors do not wish to share in the culpability or be confronted with the discomfort of that portion of America's past.

When it comes to places to remember the past – such as museums and historic sites – visitors tend to engage in two simultaneous tasks: "to revisit the past 'as it was'" and "recreate history in ways that suit their own purposes" (Allison, 2016, p. 7). These tasks are not done in a vacuum, however. Famous historic sites such as Greenfield Village near Detroit, MI and the living history of Williamsburg, VA – and even at amusement parks such as Disney's "City of Tomorrow" – were often financed by wealthy industry leaders who wished to portray a particular vision when remembering important aspects of American history (Allison, 2016). The financial realities of historic sites add another difficult aspect of adding new perspectives; if the financial supporters of a historic site or museum are committed to a particular viewpoint or historical interpretation, it may be difficult to add perspectives to that narrow vision of the past without significant backlash.

A related challenge to new perspectives being added to historic sites partly lies in the balancing of entertainment and intellectual depth and the hesitancy that these sites show in making guests uncomfortable. "Controversial and painful aspects of the past (domestic violence, racism, slavery, sexism, child labor, and unsanitary conditions) are often neglected or scarcely mentioned" at historic sites – particularly ones that engage in living history exhibits (Allison, 2016, p. 29). This discomfort was felt acutely at the Scott Joplin House State Historic Site in St. Louis, MO. The site opened with the primary focus on the impact that Scott Joplin had on arts and culture through music. Residents, especially residents of color, were largely indifferent or antagonistic toward the historic site due to the lack of authentic representation of the structural barriers faced by the Black community in St. Louis. The staff of the historic site and the scholars navigating the historic interpretation were majority-white, and many residents saw this racial difference leading to a whitewashed version of history. It took 15 years of public pressure – including community meetings and engagement with the local press – but the site eventually created committees to expand the historic interpretation at the site. This effort resulted in the site added aspects of the Scott Joplin story such as "racial segregation, socioeconomics, sanitation, crime, prostitution, and sexually transmitted diseases," but it was not without periodic moments of backlash from the historic society and related community leaders (Baumann et al., 2011, p. 65). Since this reexamination, the historic site and the public have worked hard to navigate these uncomfortable but necessary parts of the historic interpretation. This work kept the uncomfortable portions in place, but at great fiscal and social costs to the public advocates that desired a more holistic historic examination.

The California State Railroad Museum (CSRM) also added more diverse perspectives to their historic interpretation in the 21st century. The CSRM was already ahead of many fellow historic sites in their representation of the social effects of the railroad as a technology but lacked meaningful representation of Chinese labor that built the railroad itself (Bergman, 2013). Changes to the museum in the 1990s and early 2000s added Chinese representation to the museums exhibits and the introductory video for guests (not without bumps along the way), and now visitors "learn that the Chinese and many ethnic minorities participated in the building and development of the railroad in California" (Bergman, 2013, p. 87). Despite taking decades to remedy and deep public advocacy efforts to make it happen, the CSRM is an example of incorporating new perspectives.

Even with potential costs and communication difficulties with the public, the cost of inaction correcting the historical record is also great. How groups of people are portrayed in the collective public memory has direct consequences to the present. For example, Karen Zaino (2019) found that newspaper accounts regarding violence at the Covington (Kentucky) public schools in the 1970s presented Black and Brown students during integration efforts as "threatening and violent" while "White violence, in turn, was explained and excused as precautionary, disciplinary – a safety measure" (p. 8). This portrayal helped to shape the memory of the event, and the subsequent interpretation shaped understandings of the present. Zaino (2019) found the same framing regarding white residents and people of color in a 2014 lawsuit brought against a Covington school resource officer, where the officer was found to use excessive force against students of color. Changes to perspectives does important work representing historically marginalized groups, but also has the potential to impact social and racial relations in the present.

This effect of historic narratives impacting the present happens in so-called "progressive" communities as well. In a study on the ways that the racial achievement gap is discussed in public in Ann Arbor, MI, Evanston IL, and Chapel Hill, NC, Cieslik-Miskimen and Robinson (2022) found that K–12 racial achievement gaps "are covered with a present-mindedness that obscures the historic social, cultural, and economic forces that created opportunity disparities between student groups" (p. 155). This happens because journalists, in this case, rely on historic narratives that obfuscate the structural barriers that students of color faced in the history of American K–12 education and continue to face within that system. This leads to blaming students of color for so-called deficiencies rather than tackling the structural issues that led to the difference in achievement originally. This does not mean that historical narratives remain unchanged in perpetuity. However, when historical narratives do change, it is typically related to greater social introspection and political inflection points.

At times of social upheaval that wrestle with key themes of a nation's history, much like the decades of the 2010s and 2020s in the United States, results in a reconsideration of historic sites. For example, the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota prompted a global racial reckoning that resulted in many historic sites in the United States to be reexamined and altered. Statues of Confederate soldiers and leaders in the South — including statues in Baltimore and throughout the state of Maryland — came down. Monuments to Christopher Columbus were fought over and resulted in some being taken down, some covered, and some left standing despite the protests. Buildings and areas named after historic figures with past actions that exacerbated or directly benefited from inequalities were questioned and, in some cases, changed.

Prior to this racial reckoning, higher education institutions were already wrestling with whom campus buildings were named after. The University of Oregon was one such institution to face a reconsideration of two building names due to the racial discrimination demonstrated by the buildings' namesakes. The student-led effort to de-name the two campus buildings ultimately led to a 50/50 split: one hall renamed, and one hall kept the name in question. The building that was subject to the name change was deemed no longer worthy of reverence or remembrance in this way because of the man's deep involvement with the Ku Klux Klan. The building that kept its name, in contrast, was let off the hook because of that historic character's legal defense of slavery and discrimination. The more formalized racism was excused while the extralegal racism condemned, reaffirming the dominant culture's boundaries around historic interpretation (Dennis & Reis-Dennis, 2019).

The addition of more diverse perspectives in historic interpretation is a critical exercise not only so more people can see themselves reflected in our remembrance and commemoration of the past, but it also serves to deepen our understanding of past events. Historic sites, such as those commemorating the Battle of Bladensburg, must continue to adapt to new historical sources, new technologies, and new perspectives that reflect the community's desire to engage with history.

New Technology And Historic Interpretation

Much like our everyday life, advances in technology are constantly changing the way we experience history and historical narratives. Digital histories and the use of social media has accelerated the mobilization of historical knowledge (Malin & Hornbeck, 2022). The million-dollar question, however, is what knowledge is being proliferated and from what perspective. What Malin and Hornbeck (2022) found is historians and non-historians both engage in activities that "mobilize the usable past in service of the present" and not just passing along historical 'facts' (p. 514). We see this proliferation at all levels of American life, including a centers of immense social power such as politicians and the press. When deployed, these power centers utilize the usable past as a waypoint to guide everyday Americans toward a vision of future that suits their needs and interests. Especially in times of social upheaval and change, how a nation views its past and the subsequent future holds immense power to shape the current reality and policy decisions that are made throughout the country. Typically, times of great upheaval and contention lead to changes in historical interpretation.

Notably, Allison (2016) found that great societal pressures of the 1960s and 1970s coincided with a rising popularity of living history museums as a way for American citizens to grapple with the social upheaval they were experiencing (p. 17). The 1976 Bicentennial celebrations served as implicit culminating moment for the surge in living history, where "program planners and historical interpreters (costumed staff portraying characters from the past) moved away from using the created past of living history as inspirational entertainment and focused instead on specific historically based content goals" (Allison, 2016, p. 3). Living history is typically experienced as a "program [which] attempted to immerse visitors in a time period and give them a role" as a way to give people an escape from the present and a deeper understanding of the past (Allison, 2016, p. 6). As we enter another period of social upheaval following a once-in-a-generation pandemic and a dramatic increase in political violence, is historical interpretation entering another period of increased interest? Time will tell, but even without a dramatic increase in visitors, historic sites and museums will undoubtedly utilize new technologies within their interpretive elements.

In addition to digital histories evolving to become a respected methodology in the field (Robertson & Mullen, 2021), augmented reality is increasingly becoming a tool for historic education and interpretation (Amakawa & Westin, 2018; Harley, et. al, 2016; Hughes & Brown, 2021). Augmented reality (AR), for historic interpretation, can range from self-guided audio tours to full virtual reality immersion and can enhance multiple mediums of historic consumption. There are many sites now using AR to increase the opportunities for interpretation and engagement with new audiences. The New Acropolis Museum in Athens maps additional interpretation and artwork onto whitewashed statues, literally bringing augmented reality to the artifacts themselves (Keil et al., 2013). The National History Museum in London utilizes AR in their presentation of evolutionary history (Debenham, Thomas, and Trout, 2011; Barry et al., 2012). Finally, the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam uses AR to change the ways visitors experience the museum's art (Kolstee & van Eck, 2011). Prince George's County, MD has already begun experimenting with AR to deliver historic interpretation. Beginning in 2019, the Sankofa mobile museum initiative brings augmented reality and discussion directly to the community (Sankofa Mobile Museum, n.d.).

That does not mean AR should be utilized without considering the direct interpretive impact that the technology is making. In fact, Amakawa and Westin (2018) state that "the key feature of AR is that it allows information to be accessed and presented in a specific context and relevant location in the real world" (p. 318). This access to new or additional information and context has been found to deepen the understanding of a historic event and increase visitor enjoyment. Researchers found that graduate students exposed to AR for historic interpretation "were able to effectively and enjoyably learn about historical differences between past and present historical locations by contextualizing their visual interpretations, and that the two mobile AR apps were effective" whether the students were in or outside the lab (Harley et al., 2016, p. 359). Ultimately, the study's results demonstrate that intentional contextualization within augmented reality being integrated into an AR mobile app may "lead to positive learning outcomes and emotions as well as adaptive learning behaviors" (Harley et al., 2016, p. 384).

Given the previous discussion in this review on the emerging new perspectives in historic interpretation, AR can open new methods to interrogate the heritage of underrepresented groups (Amakawa & Westin, 2018). The key, however, when AR is introduced to a historic site is for the AR to not remain static. A critical error by many historic sites is once AR is introduced in the form of a mobile phone application, for example, that application becomes outdated. Without constant maintenance and updates to the AR, that technology quickly becomes akin to an artifact: something from the past that fails to reach new audiences. While the cost of continual updates and maintenance to digital technologies can prove expensive, the learning opportunities that AR offers and the attractiveness to new visitors is an undeniable carrot for historic sites and museums.

The Battle of Bladensburg's Interpretation

Bladensburg is located in an area experiencing rapid urbanization, growing from a small town in the 18th century to part of the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C. in the 21st century (Beyond the Battle: Bladensburg Rediscovered, n.d.). Urbanization around historic sites presents difficult preservation challenges. Globally, after WWII, eastern, southern, and parts of southeastern Europe went through "rapid and massive" urbanization and suburbanization due to damage from the war (Föllmer & Smith, 2015, p. 475). Even in this extreme example, one of the bigger concerns by local governments and city planners was the preservation of historic buildings and sites along with rebuilding their communities (Föllmer & Smith, 2015). European cities would find ways to rebuild historic buildings simultaneous to the modern rebuilding efforts to ensure that the character of the historic foundations of the communities was kept in some fashion for future generations. Without this effort, cities such as Paris, Prague, and Berlin would look dramatically different than they do today, with the centuries of historic interpretation gone (Föllmer & Smith, 2015). Fortunately, Bladensburg is not rebuilding akin to post-WWII Europe. However, similar considerations of creating parallel tracks of development — historic preservation along with modern, new buildings — is key to maintaining current interpretive elements.

For the Bladensburg area, the consideration of restoration next to simultaneous growth has been a part of the interpretive planning process since 2001. In the 2001 Functional Master Plan for Heritage Tourism (The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, John Milner Associates, & Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, Inc., 2001), the Bostwick House, the Market Master's House, the Magruder House, and the George Washington House were all identified as potential restorative opportunities alongside the construction of a new visitor's center. Now, in 2024, phases of restorative efforts that have led to use and occupation of the properties while the visitor's center is in a period of reconsideration. The visitor center, once the home for Bladensburg-related artifacts, is now a rentable community space. Further restorations are not probable, given the lack of suitable, relevant buildings nearby. However, there are additional possibilities for historic interpretation improvements in Bladensburg. For example, the newly constructed public library in Bladensburg was designed to resemble a ship as a nod to the importance of the river to the community's history.

Using the urbanizing environment around the contemporary location of a historic site also offers interpretive possibilities. The placement of certain city infrastructure — interstate highways, waste sites, transportation hubs, just to name a few — can offer insight into the current state of the historic site's location in a city as well as the social pressures that led to those decisions at a municipal level. For example, analyzing the placement of interstate highways and the neighborhoods divided by them can add to the understanding of redlining (housing discrimination), environmental racism and other racially discriminatory practices in urban areas. Krieg (1995) found in his analysis of toxic waste sites in the Greater Boston area that race and class often coincided with the placement of waste sites. Racially diverse neighborhoods tended to be more closely associated with areas that had a long history of industrial activity in that area, further exposing communities of color to pollutants over time. Class was strongly associated with recently industrialized areas, illustrating the next phase of social inequities that were used to place new waste sites. Overall, Kreig's (1995) findings offer insights on how to add urbanization itself into the historical narrative and interpretation of a physical location. Bladensburg's bridges — used now for motor vehicle, bike, and pedestrian travel — is one example of using the urbanizing environment to interpret the battle. The advantage that Bladensburg has in this regard is the use of bridges and the control of waterways during the Battle of Bladensburg itself lends to natural connections between urbanizing environs and battle interpretation (Aeon Preservation Services, 2021). While not perfected, these aspects of the urbanizing environment can be used to further push the boundaries of understanding regarding the battle without compromising further development.

Areas facing rapid urbanization can also use markers, sites, or museums that are not present within larger interpretive efforts. For example, O'Brassill-Kaulfan (2023) highlighted how, despite being the site of a contemporary municipal services building, the location of Philadelphia's first vagrancy prison is still an important piece of the overall interpretation of anti-homelessness history in the United States. While it differs from the living history site at Eastern State Penitentiary located across the city, the story of the Arch Street Prison is still included in ride-along tours and other efforts toward historic interpretation around the city of Philadelphia (O'Brassill-Kaulfan, 2023). The Great Dismal Swamp in North Carolina and Virginia is another example; with no markers, sites, museums, or memorials, the Great Dismal Swamp remains a critical part of the story of African American resistance to slavery in the South (Golden, 2021).

The Battle of Bladensburg historic interpretation will have to work with aspects of the narrative that are no longer physically present. Using what is no longer physically present within an interpretive framework will be critical given the changes to the environmental landscape surrounding the battle site. The waterways are no longer in a state to replicate or support the oceanic trade and the archeological digs for battlefield artifacts did not produce much by way of evidence of the battle (Ervin & Fehr, 2012; McMasters, 2013). As the previous research indicates, this is not a lost opportunity but rather a challenge to find strategies to insert aspects of what no longer physically exists into the historic narrative of the battle. The majority of the historical interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg is centered around the BWP. Bladensburg was, up until the 1840s, a bustling port town along the Anacostia River that processed oceanic trade (Port O'Bladensburg, n.d.). As a branch of the Potomac River, the Anacostia River flows around Northeast Washington D.C. and into Maryland. The waterways near Bladensburg and the bridges that cut across them were important to the outcome of the Battle of Bladensburg, but also is part of the larger historical narrative about the Bladensburg community. Waterways, even ones no longer in use, can be an excellent conduit to larger historic interpretation. Salo (2021) found this to be the case in South Carolina, where utilized ferry sites to not only add to the narrative and interpretation of transportation in South Carolina, but what and who was being transported on the ferries as well. As we explore the results of the community outreach for this project later in this report, many community members desired the historic interpretation improvements at Bladensburg to be related to the current state of the Bladensburg community. As Blackburn (2016) so aptly put: "interpretation works best when the opportunities that are crafted for the public relate to their interests and experiences" (p. 87).

Historic interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg faces another interesting challenge: how do you commemorate a military defeat? The United States has mainly engaged with a grand narrative of military excellence and successive victories that contribute to the superpower status the country now enjoys. Historians, community members, and municipal leaders have begun to wrestle with different ways to interpret military history – particularly when it comes to defeats or less-than-savory parts of military victories. "These historical paradigms...can be referred to as exceptionalist or triumphalist versus revisionist or critical interpretations of US history" (Malin & Hornbeck, 2022, p. 504). While the Battle of Bladensburg was a loss for the American military, the War of 1812 provided the lessons learned to push for a professionalization of the U.S. military (Blackburn, 2016). Without knowing the events that led to this change in the military, it would be impossible to understand the origins of surrounding events. Blackburn (2016) points out that "the origins of the Civil War cannot be understood without a grounding in the events that took place in the years between the end of the country's last war with Great Britian and the beginning of the Civil War" (p. 97), placing the importance of the War of 1812 and the following decades upon a high pedestal. However, even Blackburn (2016) acknowledges the challenges of portraying losses or defeat within historic interpretation: "tragedy is the most difficult subject to interpret" (p. 210). Since most community members in Bladensburg know the loss of the battle led to the burning of the White House, remembering the Battle of Bladensburg was always a complicated and challenging part of the American historical narrative.

The current state of the historic interpretation located at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park could be situated within two themes of American military history: "the mythos of the citizen soldier and the civilian control of the military. The second is understanding if there exists an American way of war" (Blackburn, 2016, p. 17). The 2021 interpretive plan (Aeon Preservation Services, 2021) found that, while the BWP contains 14 interpretive signs, the signs lack cohesion and there were gaps in the themes provided by the signs. While many fall into the two themes listed above, many take on a broader view of historical events in the area and highlight historic events that do not surround the Battle of Bladensburg. That approach is used at many historic sites for robust historic conversations, but risk taking too much away from the interpretation of the site as a location of an important military conflict. If, going forward, there were an effort to produce new and improved signage, a recommendation from this literature review would be to first select a dynamic theme to house the interpretative elements of the area rather than using the location as the sole interpretive frame. There are abundant interpretive opportunities with improved signage, and the themes are not something that needs to be set in stone in perpetuity. For future deliberations, the connection to the current community of Bladensburg (whether physical, cultural, or social) along with a cohesive theme would improve the interpretive qualities of the signage.

Historic sites can also utilize discussion and deliberation between visitors (or visitors and exhibits/tour guides) to foster greater understanding of history but also a greater sense of civic engagement (Nokes & De La Paz, 2023). Especially in military defeats, deliberation over a loss might serve a dual-purpose of increasing engagement in the historic site while also deepening the public's understanding of the battle itself. This could provide a future theme to the interpretive signage and/or be the instigating premise of tours for both adults and students. Some of the interpretive elements at the BWP, such as the Dueling Grounds, are already being utilized by community members to showcase how conflict resolution has changed over time. Further explorations using this methodology could offer more pathways to engage with the historical content available at the BWP.

The current state of battlefield interpretation at Bladensburg remains at a pivotal crossroads. The War of 1812 Bicentennial Celebrations and the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail provided additional resources and visibility to the Battle of Bladensburg interpretive elements. Then, choosing a theme that incorporates new technology, new perspectives, and a viewpoint surrounding the battle itself will be paramount.

Literature Review Conclusion

This literature review offers an explanation of how historic interpretation arrived at the junction we find ourselves in as well as a way forward. For the Battle of Bladensburg, important questions around the battle's meaning to the past and present community, the broader history of the War of 1812, and American military history will need to be answered in order to move the interpretative elements forward in a meaningful way.

The Bladensburg area is also home to a continually diversifying population, some of which has no personal connection to American history. Ultimately, "public memory sites need administrative structures that ensure access and responsiveness in order to respond to their multiple publics; second, that this engagement can result in stronger ties between the sites and their publics; and third, that the interpretive materials that are more inclusive are not guaranteed to be permanent" (Bergman, 2013, p. 183). Some elements of this already exist at the BWP, for instance. The interpretive boat tours and the modernized bike trail have opened the park to many new visitors anxious to obtain historical meaning from the site. Moving forward, this review of the literature provides multiple pathways to explore when planning for the next phase of historic interpretation.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE SIZE EXPLANATION

The recommended sample size of 385 comes from a commonly used formula in statistics to estimate a population proportion with a given level of confidence and margin of error. It is often referenced when designing surveys, especially when researchers aim for a high level of confidence that their sample reflects the population.

Formula for Sample Size:
The formula to calculate sample size (n) for a simple random sample when estimating a proportion is:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{E^2}$$

Where:
- n is the sample size.
- Z is the Z-value (the number of standard deviations from the mean) corresponding to the desired confidence level.
- p is the estimated proportion of the population (if unknown, it's commonly set to 0.5 for maximum variability).
- E is the margin of error (how much error you're willing to accept in your results).

For a sample size of 385:
1. **Z-value for a 95% confidence level:** The Z-value for 95% confidence is 1.96.
2. **p = 0.5:** We assume maximum variability (the worst-case scenario) when we don't have prior information about the population proportion.
3. **Margin of Error (E) = 5% (0.05):** This is a common margin of error in surveys.

Now, applying these values:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.16$$

Rounding up, you get **385** as the ideal sample size to estimate a proportion with 95% confidence and a 5% margin of error.

A sample size of 385 is often cited because it strikes a balance between accuracy and practicality, offering a solid level of confidence and a manageable margin of error for most surveys or studies, especially when the population is large, and the proportion is unknown.

APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY PRESENATION AND WORKSHEETS

Battle of Bladensburg Community Meeting, October 22,

Who are we and what is this meeting for?

Parker Strategy Group And The Battle Of Bladensburg Project

Parker Strategy Group (PSG) is a full-service, women-owned consulting firm specializing in market research, economic impact analysis, marketing and communications, and political consulting.
Our team is committed to solving the most complex puzzles. With over 50 years of combined experience, there isn't a challenge that we haven't seen. To this project on the Battle of Bladensburg, our team brings a complementary set of skills in market vresearch and subject matter expertise in history.
In short, we're here to bring the historical interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg into the future. We have analyzed the latest in historic interpretation literature, conducted an online community survey, and coordinated a series of ongoing interviews with key

What you see, what you want to see

With your first blank Maryland historic marker sheet of paper, we want you to write, describe, or draw what you think the most important historical memory from the Battle of Bladensburg right now.

With your second blank sheet, we want you to write, describe, or draw what you would like to see or know about the Battle of Bladensburg.

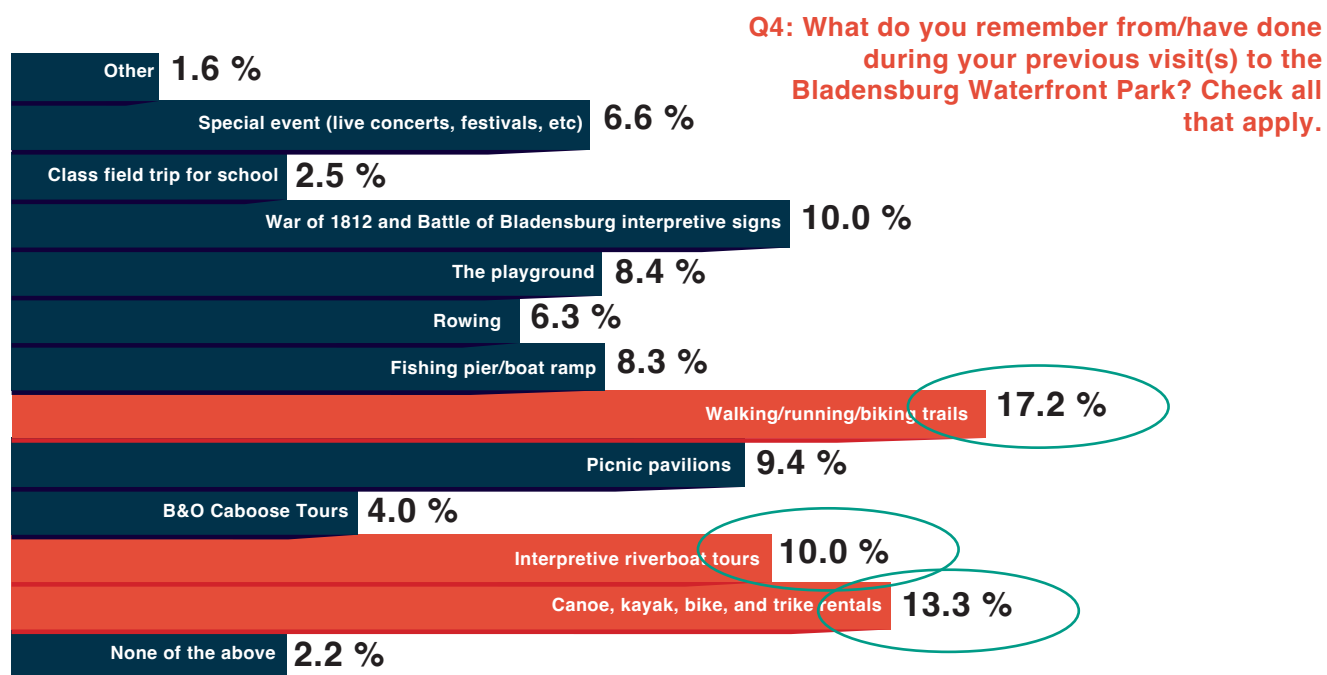You can work individually or in a group!

What does the literature say?

How Do Experts Think About Historic Interpretation And What's Coming Next?

- Historic interpretation serves to construct images and narratives about a nation's past and future (Jackson, 2012; Topcu & Hirst, 2020; Zaino, 2019).

- Digital histories are evolving to become a respected methodology in the field (Robertson & Mullen, 2021) and augmented reality is increasingly becoming a tool for historic education and interpretation (Amakawa & Westin, 2017; Harley, et. al, 2016; Hughes & Brown, 2021).

- Museums and historic sites have always been made to balance entertainment and education, and finding the right balance for a community directly impacts the longevity and popularity of that site of historic interpretation (Alderson & Payne Low, 1996; Allison, 2016).

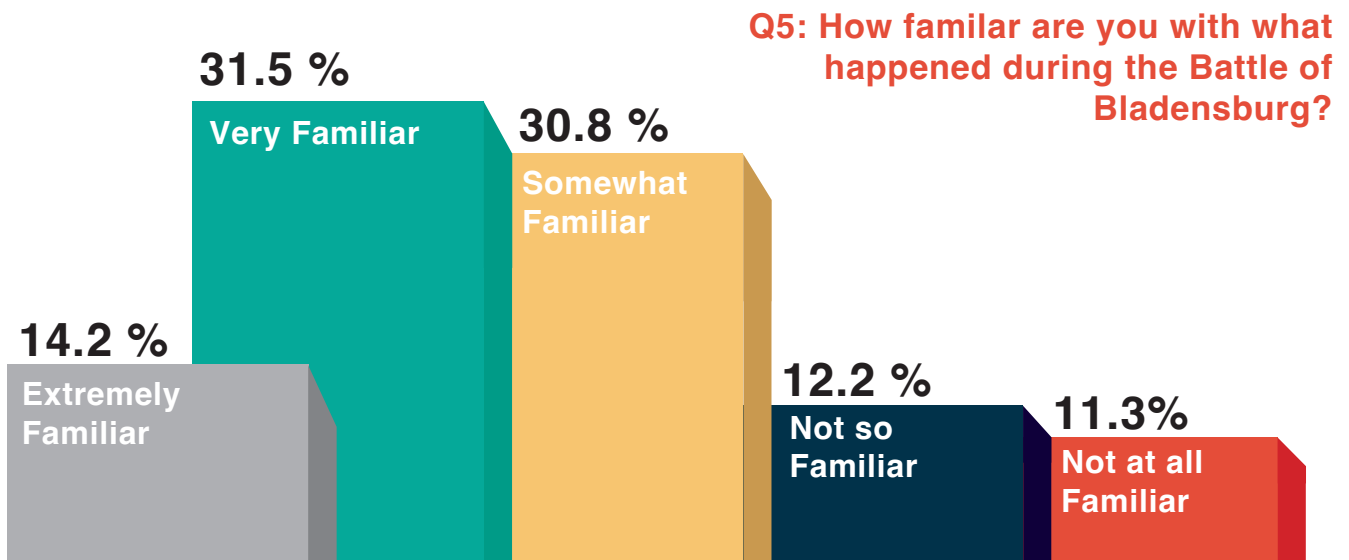**What Do Respondents Remember About The Bladensburgwaterfront Park?**

- The top three answers were the trails throughout the park, canoe/kayak/bike rentals, and riverboat tours.

Q4: What do you remember from/have done during your previous visit(s) to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park? Check all that apply.

Category	Percentage
Other	1.6 %
Special event (live concerts, festivals, etc)	6.6 %
Class field trip for school	2.5 %
War of 1812 and Battle of Bladensburg interpretive signs	10.0 %
The playground	8.4 %
Rowing	6.3 %
Fishing pier/boat ramp	8.3 %
Walking/running/biking trails	17.2 %
Picnic pavilions	9.4 %
B&O Caboose Tours	4.0 %
Interpretive riverboat tours	10.0 %
Canoe, kayak, bike, and trike rentals	13.3 %
None of the above	2.2 %

N=1294

Familiarity With The Battle Of Bladensburg

- The following questions tested respondents' familiarity with the Battle of Bladensburg, beginning with self-reporting on their own knowledge.

Q5: How familar are you with what happened during the Battle of Bladensburg?

14.2 %
Extremely Familiar

31.5 %
Very Familiar

30.8 %
Somewhat Familiar

12.2 %
Not so Familiar

11.3%
Not at all Familiar

N=451

Q8: True or False: The Battle of Bladensburg was fought between the Americans and Indigenous (Native) forces.

32.6 %
True

67.4%
False

N=445

Q9: True or false: One of the main reasons the Americans lost the battle was because enemy troops outnumbered the Americans on the battlefield.
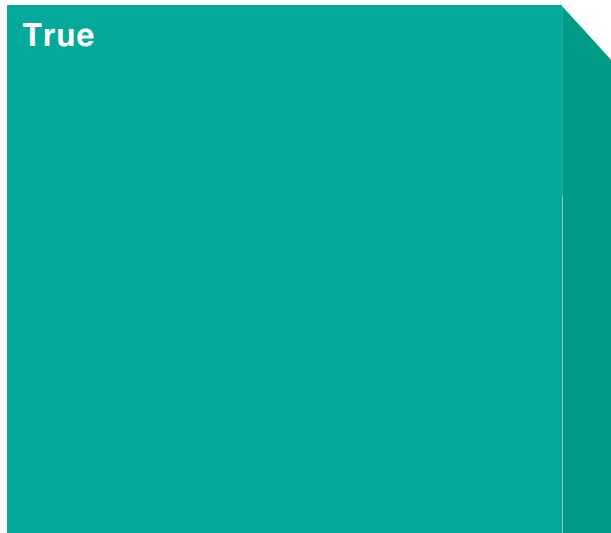
49.2 %
True

50.8%
False

N=445

Q10: True or false:The Americans losing the Battle of Bladensburg led to the burning of the White House in Washington, DC.

84.3 %

True

15.7%

False

N=445

Q12: Are different perspectives reflected in the way the story around the Battle of Bladensburg is currently told? (Example: different cultural, racial, class, or gender viewpoints)

29.5 %

Mostly reflects different perspectives

22.2 %

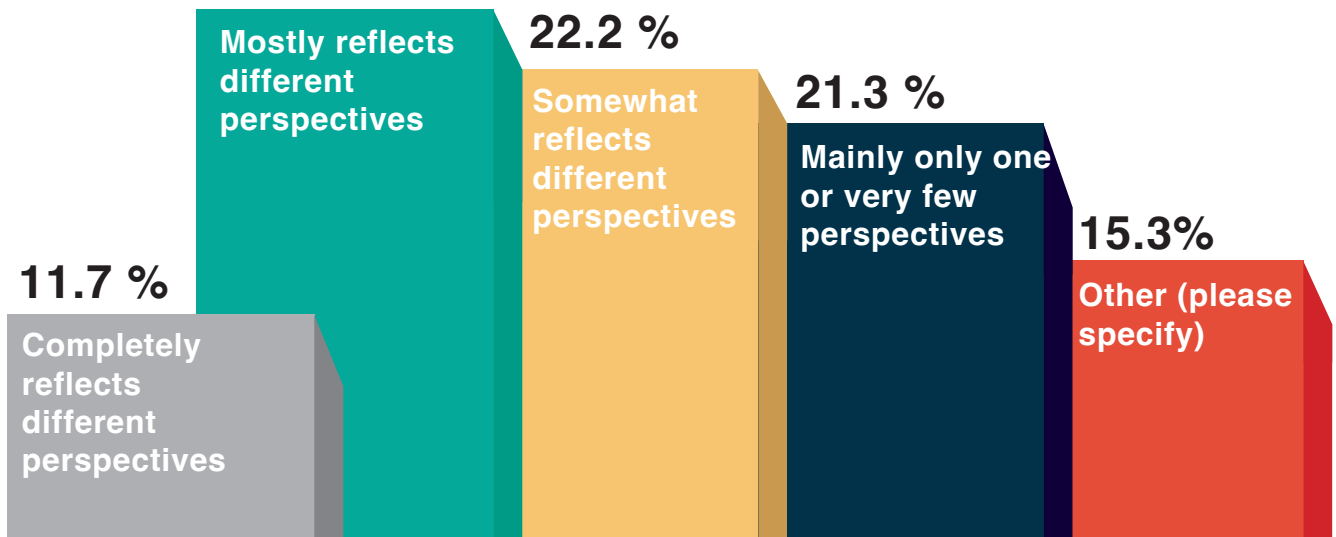Somewhat reflects different perspectives

21.3 %

Mainly only one or very few perspectives
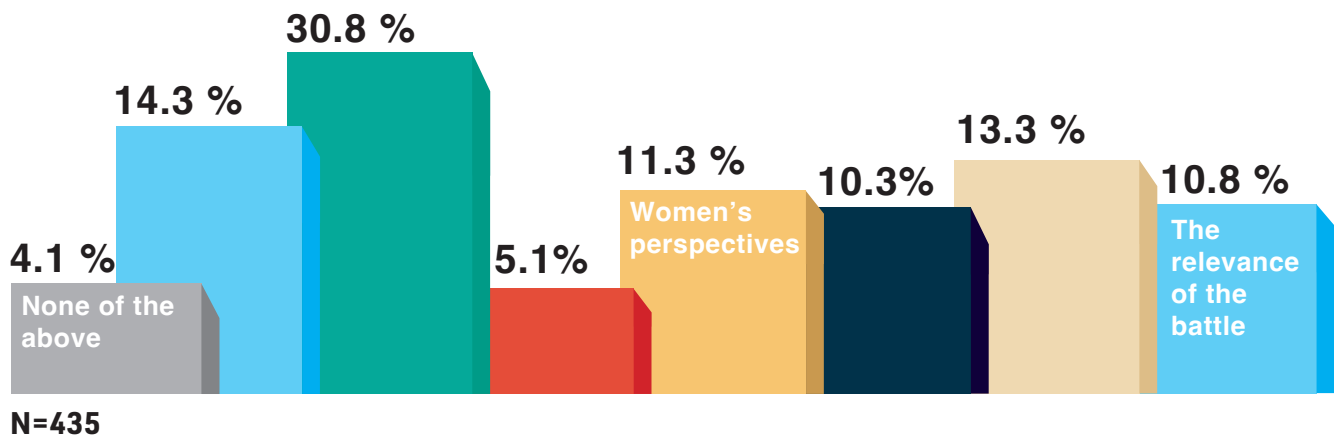
15.3%

Other (please specify)

11.7 %

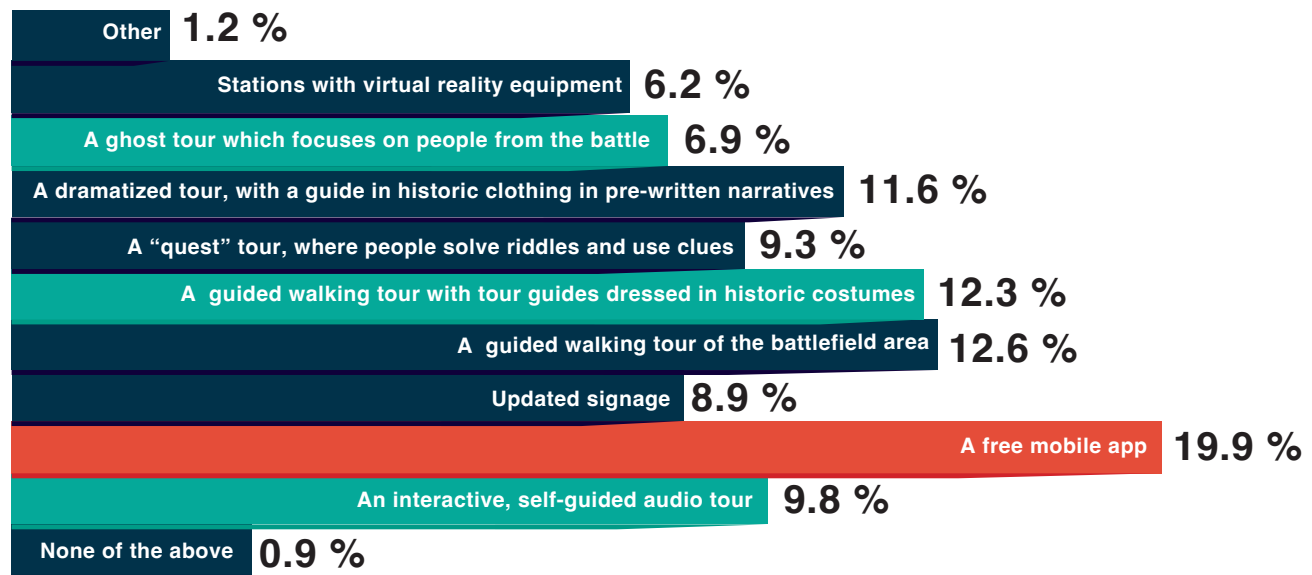Completely reflects different perspectives

N=447

Q13: Which perspectives do you think are most underrepresented in dicussions about the Battle of Bladensburg?

4.1 %
None of the above

14.3 %

30.8 %

5.1%

11.3 %
Women's perspectives

10.3%

13.3 %

10.8 %
The relevance of the battle

N=435

Q17: If given a magic wand, what are the top three things that you would want added to the current Battle of Bladensburg historic site?

Other **1.2 %**

Stations with virtual reality equipment **6.2 %**

A ghost tour which focuses on people from the battle **6.9 %**

A dramatized tour, with a guide in historic clothing in pre-written narratives **11.6 %**

A "quest" tour, where people solve riddles and use clues **9.3 %**

A guided walking tour with tour guides dressed in historic costumes **12.3 %**

A guided walking tour of the battlefield area **12.6 %**

Updated signage **8.9 %**

A free mobile app **19.9 %**

An interactive, self-guided audio tour **9.8 %**

None of the above **0.9 %**

N=1123

- 87.4% of respondents found it "extremely" or "very" important to include multiple perspectives when we remember historic events.
- 75.4% selected either "agree" or "strongly agree" when asked if the ways we remember events should change over time when new evidence and/or perspectives emerge.

Reaction To The Research

Second feedback activity

Reaction to the research feedback activity
• First, use the second handout to share your reaction to the research.

• Second, in small groups, discuss your reactions with your fellow community members.*

• *Questions to consider: Where did you find similarities and differences in your reactions? Which question was your highest-rated response? Lowest-rated response? What stood out in the free-response questions?

Battle of Bladensburg Community Meeting Activity 2

1. Do the top 3 answers regarding what people remember from the Bladensburg Waterfront Park (Walking/running/biking trails; canoe, kayak, bike and trike rentals; interpretive riverboat tours) reflect your own experience? Circle what best reflects your opinion.

2. 83.3% of respondents reported some familiarity (somewhat to extremely familiar) with the Battle of Bladensburg. When presented with the series of true/false questions regarding the battle, two out of three questions had a majority of respondents answer correctly. The other true/false question was closer to 50/50 in the answer distribution. In your opinion, does this reflect the general understanding that people have regarding the Battle of Bladensburg? Circle what best describes your opinion.

3. The top three responses to what respondents want to see in the future (free mobile app, updated signage, and a modern guided walking tour) matches my opinion for what I want to see in the future. Circle what best describes your opinion.

4. Free response: according to our survey respondents, the top-ranked missing perspectives regarding the Battle of Bladensburg are Black/African American perspectives. In your opinion, how can we better highlight those perspectives?

5. Free response: in your opinion, what explains the top tw responses regarding how often the Battle of Bladensburg came up in school and beyond being "fairly frequently, and with multiple perspectives" and "it never came up?"

PARKER
STRATEGY
GROUP

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area: Battle of Bladensburg Survey

We need 8 minutes of your time!

Hello there! We need your input! Parker Strategy Group is working with the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA) to help determine how folks are currently experiencing the Battle of Bladensburg's historic markers, the Bladensburg Waterfront Park, and other heritage sites related to the battle.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Your responses are confidential and will be shared in aggregate. Please do your best to answer each question, choosing the response that best represents your opinion.

In exchange for your time, you will have the chance to win 1 of 2, $50 gift cards.

If at any time during the survey you are uncomfortable with a question, please terminate the survey. You do not have to complete the survey to be eligible for the drawing.

Please contact Kyle McMillen at mcmillen@parkerstrategygroup.com or call 1-888-663-7762, ext. 0 if you have any questions regarding the survey or gift card drawing.

Click below to get started!

* 1. Are you 18 years old or older?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area: Battle of Bladensburg Survey

* 2. Do you currently or have you ever worked in market research-related jobs?

○ Yes

○ No

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area: Battle of Bladensburg Survey
Bladensburg Waterfront Park

When was your most recent visit to Bladensburg Waterfront Park (address: 4601 Annapolis Rd, Bladensburg, MD 20710)?

◯ I've visited in the past month

◯ I've visited in the past 2-6 months

◯ I've visited between 6 months and 1 year ago

◯ My most recent visit was more than a year ago

◯ I've never been to Bladensburg Waterfront Park

◯ Other (please specify)

[   ]

* 4. What do you remember from/have done during your previous visit(s) to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park? Check all that apply.

☐ Canoe, kayak, bike, and trike rentals

☐ Interpretive riverboat tours

☐ B&O Caboose Tours

☐ Picnic pavilions

☐ Walking/running/biking trails

☐ Fishing pier/boat ramp

☐ Rowing

☐ The playground

☐ War of 1812 and Battle of Bladensburg interpretive signs

☐ A class field trip for school

☐ Special event (live concerts, festivals, etc.)

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

☐ None of the above

* 5. How familiar are you with what happened during the Battle of Bladensburg?

○ Extremely familiar

○ Very familiar

○ Somewhat familiar

○ Not so familiar

○ Not at all familiar

6. Narrowing it down to one answer, what is the most familiar detail of the battle to you? Be as specific as possible.

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[                                    ]
```

* 7. Thinking about your experience in school and beyond, how often did the Battle of Bladensburg come up?

○ All the time

○ Fairly frequently, and with multiple perspectives

○ Fairly frequently, but it felt like the same story being told

○ Not very often (example: only when they covered Maryland history in school for a short period of time)

○ It never came up

○ Other (please specify)

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[                              ]
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* 8. True or False: The Battle of Bladensburg was fought between the Americans and Indigenous (Native) forces.

○ True

○ False

* 9. True or false: One of the main reasons the Americans lost the battle was because enemy troops outnumbered the Americans on the battlefield.

○ True

○ False

* 10. True or false: The Americans losing the Battle of Bladensburg led to the burning of the White House in Washington, DC.

○ True

○ False

* 11. Do you believe that the portrayal of the Battle of Bladensburg in history books and/or current signs and tours is accurate?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I'm not quite sure

* 12. Are different perspectives reflected in the way the story around the Battle of Bladensburg is currently told? (Example: different cultural, racial, class, or gender viewpoints)

○ Completely reflects different perspectives

○ Mostly reflects different perspectives

○ Somewhat reflects different perspectives

○ Mainly only one or very few perspectives

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

13. Which perspectives do you think are <u>most underrepresented</u> in discussions about the Battle of Bladensburg?

○ Indigenous perspectives

○ Black or African American perspectives

○ Women's perspectives

○ Economic class perspectives

○ Non-military perspectives

○ The relevance of the battle

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

○ None of the above

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area: Battle of Bladensburg Survey
Your opinion on historical interpretation

* 14. How important do you think, generally speaking, it is to include multiple perspectives when we remember historic events?

○ Extremely important

○ Very important

○ Somewhat important

○ Not so important

○ Not at all important

* 15. Do you agree or disagree that the ways we talk about and remember historic events should change over time as new evidence or perspectives emerge?

○ Strongly agree

○ Agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly disagree

16. Excluding the Battle of Bladensburg, do you have an example of your understanding of a historical event/memory has changed as you've gotten older or been exposed to new information? Be as specific as possible.

* 17. If given a magic wand, what are <u>the top three</u> things that you would want added to the current Battle of Bladensburg historic site?

- [ ] An interactive, self-guided audio tour with individual audio devices
- [ ] A free mobile app that helps you visualize the battle and other historical buildings in the area
- [ ] Updated signage about important battle memories with new narratives
- [ ] A modern, guided walking tour of the battlefield area
- [ ] A modern, guided walking tour of the battlefield area with tour guides dressed in historic costumes
- [ ] A "quest" tour, where people solve riddles and use clues to search and explore historic battlefields and buildings
- [ ] A dramatized tour, where people follow a guide in historic clothing in pre-written narratives and adventures that take you through different parts of the battle and aftermath
- [ ] A ghost/paranormal tour which focuses on people from the battle
- [ ] Stations with virtual reality equipment to help you "see" the recreated battlefield
- [ ] Other (please specify)

  [   ]

- [ ] None of the above

* 18. What is your home address's zip code?

[   ]

* 19. What best describes your racial identity? Check all that apply.

- [ ] Indigenous or Alaska Native
- [ ] Black or African-American
- [ ] Hispanic or Latino/a
- [ ] Asian or Asian-American
- [ ] Middle-Eastern or North African
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- [ ] White
- [ ] From multiple races
- [ ] Prefer not to answer
- [ ] Other race(s) (please specify)

  [   ]

* 20. What best describes your gender identity? Check all that apply.

☐ Female

☐ Gender expansive

☐ Gender fluid

☐ Gender nonconforming

☐ Genderqueer

☐ Male

☐ Nonbinary

☐ Two-spirit

☐ Transgender

☐ Prefer not to answer

☐ Another gender identity (please specify)

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[                                        ]
```

* 21. Which age range are you currently in?

◯ 18-24

◯ 25-34

◯ 35-44

◯ 45-54

◯ 55-64

◯ 65+

* 22. What is the highest level of education you've completed?

○ High school diploma or GED

○ Some college, no degree

○ Associate's degree

○ Bachelor's degree

○ Post-graduate degree (masters, Ph.D., M.D., etc)

○ Prefer not to answer

* 23. What is your current income range per year?

○ Under $15,000

○ Between $15,000 and $29,999

○ Between $30,000 and $49,999

○ Between $50,000 and $74,999

○ Between $75,000 and $99,999

○ Between $100,000 and $150,000

○ Over $150,000

○ Other (please specify)

○ None of the above

* 24. What best describes your current employer?

○ Private company/organization

○ Nonprofit company/organization

○ Government employee (work for a city, county, etc.)

○ Self-employed

○ Student or in-training

○ Stay-at-home parent

○ Unemployed

○ Retired

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

○ None of the above

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area: Battle of Bladensburg Survey
Enter to win and THANK YOU!
Thanks so much for taking time out of your day to help us by completing this survey.

25. We're going to do a random drawing giving away 2 $50 gift cards! Please enter your email and/or phone number so we can contact you if you win! We do not sell data to any third-party.

[   ]

APPENDIX D: REFERENCES

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