

Abstract

This project proposes to create a multi-platform, mobile-accessible digital exhibit exploring the capture and burning of Washington, DC, by the British in August 1814. The exhibit will be viewable both from personal computers and mobile devices. All the events, documents, and objects featured in the exhibit will be geotagged. Exhibit sections will be geolocated with an exhibit extension tool built by this project and made available publicly. This will allow visitors/users to access the information while in situ, experiencing the historical landscape of the national capitol in a new way and bringing new light to an underrepresented event in its history.

Walkthrough

All pages of the project's exhibit site, The Burning of Washington, will contain a header title and the same navigation across the top and bottom of the page: home, exhibit, collections, items, and about.

The home page will feature a single graphic image and introductory text summarizing what happened in August 1814 and the organization of the exhibit. Below this text will be a set of links to the sections of the exhibit, which is organized by location. However, there will be an introductory section detailing the lead-up to the capture of Washington, and a section for the aftermath as well.

Navigating to the introduction provides the visitor with a predominantly text overview of the War of 1812, its causes and major events up to August 1814. A second page in this section explains some of the reasons why the British chose the summer of 1814 to make their campaign into the Chesapeake.

On the right side of the screen the user has a list of the main sections of the exhibit. As stated above, these are significant places in the events of August 1814, either because they were burned, they were saved from burning, or they served as the setting of an encounter between the American public and British soldiers.

If the user were to navigate to the section for the President's House (White House), they would be presented with pages which the before, during, and after of the burning of that building. For example, the before section would discuss the presence of First Lady Dolley Madison and the household staff in the house on August 24. They had not evacuated, having been assured by the Secretary of War that they would be safe, and were instead engaged in preparing for a dinner that evening.¹ A rider from Baldensburg came in the afternoon and told them that the British troops were approaching, and the household fled carrying only a few objects with them.² One of these objects was the portrait of George Washington, which would be featured as an item for this section.³ The next section would offer accounts of the burning of the President's House, including the raiding of the wine cellar and taking of trophies by British troops.⁴ A page on the aftermath would discuss damage to the building, looting by locals, and the initial reactions of the destruction by the President, First Lady, and Washington area residents.

From this section a user could continue to another section, for instance the Navy Yard, or continue to the collections to see all of the paintings or published works used in the exhibit. The user could also go to the items portion of the site to browse all the items included in the exhibit.

An inquisitive or motivated user might browse a few sections on various places and then navigate to the exhibit section which features more information, such as a suggested reading list, bibliography of works cited in the exhibit, and links to sites commemorating the War of 1812 or offering resources about the conflict.

Statement of Innovation

This project brings together documentary material relating to the War of 1812 from disparate archives and connects them to specific locations in the District of Columbia and Maryland, offering documentary, chronological, and geographical experiences of the events of August 24 - 26, 1814 in situ to mobile internet users.

Statement of Humanities Significance

The British capture of Washington is an under-examined event in the history of the national capital. This project will connect historical documents and objects to create a narrative accessible to the general public and useful to scholars which helps to contextualize the historic landscape of the Washington D.C. metro area.

Narrative

The War of 1812 was fought between British and United States forces from June 1812 to February 1815, predominantly on the border between the United States and Canada. During much of the conflict, British forces were also engaged in action in Europe against Napoleon Bonaparte. However, following their successful defeat of the French armies in 1814, they were able to devote more attention to the war with the United States. To that end, they launched a campaign of attack on the Chesapeake region in the summer of 1814, targeting Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. This campaign is predominantly remembered for the battle in Baltimore which inspired Francis Scott Key to write the Star Spangled Banner, but this campaign also had a significant impact on the national capitol at Washington.

On August 24, 1814, British and United States military forces met on the field at Bladensburg, Maryland. The British forces won the battle and advanced to Washington, left largely undefended, where they set fire to public buildings. Although the British did not remain in Washington as an occupying force, the capture of the capitol city was a traumatic event both for its residents and for the nation.

The project will create an online archive and exhibit of material related to the attack on and invasion of Washington, DC, by the British on August 24 - 26, 1814, as part of the War of 1812. The project will include: the collection of materials; classification and cataloging using Dublin Core basic standards; geotagging each object or event to the precise location in the District of Columbia or Maryland; the composition of the online exhibit; writing a narrative overview of the events for the public; and the composition of an annotated bibliography of material for those wishing to learn more.

The narrative will be written using a social and cultural history approach. There will necessarily be some military history included in the site, and resources with a military history perspective will be used in the research; indeed, a large portion of the work about the War of 1812 and the Chesapeake campaign in particular have been written by naval and military historians. However, the primary audience for this project is the general public, and so the frame of the narrative will be the residents of Washington, DC, in August 1814, to whom the visitors/users can hopefully relate. As much as possible, the narrative will strive for a balance of voices, pulling primarily from American sources but within those accounts by famous men, ordinary men, women, and slaves. As much as possible, sources will be used which were written at the time of the capture of Washington; in some cases it may be necessary to use memoirs or retrospective writing, but the objective is to capture the feeling of the moment.

Perhaps most importantly, the project will implement a mobile-friendly version of the website to allow residents and visitors of the District of Columbia to actively engage with the exhibit while on the street.

The project will use Omeka (www.omeka.org) because it supports Dublin Core fields, allows for easy export of data, has existing geolocation plugins, and is known to be a viable content management system basis for mobile websites.

The project will also include building an plug-in for the content management system Omeka to provide geolocation for each exhibit section. At present, the only geolocation plug-in is specific to exhibit items and cannot be applied to exhibit sections. Once developed and ready for launch, this plug-in will be made available for general use on the Omeka website as a plug-in.

The intellectual goal of the project is to make accessible to a wider audience the events surrounding the British capture of Washington, DC, during the War of 1812, and to engage the audience by helping them to relate the documents, artifacts, and objects generated during or in response to that event by placing them within a modern geographic context.

The development of a mobile version of the website is key to being able to reach this wider audience. A report from the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicates that African-Americans and non-White Hispanics are significantly more likely to access the internet using a mobile phone than their white counterparts.⁵ A mobile page might increase the access of content by minority residents of the District of Columbia. Moreover, Washington, DC, receives a large number of visitors every year from all over the nation and the world. If they are able to access a data network while visiting, they will have access to this project and the wealth of historical information contained therein.

Environmental Scan

There are very few websites addressing the War of 1812, almost all of which are a traditional combination of text and images similar to what one could find in a printed work. The National Humanities Center's Toolbox Library has a section on "Living the

Revolution” which covers the period from 1779-1823 (<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/livingrev/index.htm>) and thus includes the War of 1812. The National Museum of American History has website to accompany its exhibit on the Star Spangled Banner (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/default.aspx>) which summarizes the war and briefly mentions the events of August 24. Neither explore the capture of Washington in any detail.

The Center for Public History + Digital Humanities at Cleveland State University has developed a mobile and desktop web interface which combines historical documents - primarily photographs - and a map of Cleveland. This project uses Omeka as the base content management system. Although the focus of the Cleveland project is different, the user interface is a model for mobile historical mapping implementation. Art in the City (<http://dev.omeka.org/artinthecity/>) provides a more basic mobile Omeka model.

History and duration of the project

As this project is still in the planning stages, there is little to report regarding previous funding or activity. Some effort has been made by the principal investigators to determine the extent of material available in the public domain or amenable institutions which could be included in an exhibit, and the results have been satisfactory.

Should there be additional work required on the project following the period of the grant, funding will be sought from institutions focused on the Early American Republic, such as the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, or from public history funding institutions. As the site will be hosted on an institutional server, there are no concerns for continued hosting costs.

Work Plan

Phase 1:

- Collect documentary sources and objects.
- Determine which events and places will be created as sections for the exhibit and mapping. Text for these events will be written by the historian.
- Determine a metadata schema for tagging exhibit items.
- Begin drafting a narrative introduction to the War of 1812 and the events which precipitated the capture and burning of Washington.
- Begin development of the Omeka Exhibit Section Geolocation plug-in.
- Begin development of the mobile website interface.

Phase 2:

- Start to enter the items into Omeka. Primary sources written during the event or shortly thereafter will be geotagged with the location at which the text was written.
- Build the exhibit using native tools in Omeka. The exhibit will be grouped by theme but will also feature a chronology.

- Submit the draft narrative to the advisory board for review.
- Finalize Omeka Exhibit Section Geolocation plug-in.

Phase 3:

- Initial implementation and testing, both in house and on the street.
- Review session of website with advisory board.
- Test the mobile website interface.

Phase 4:

- Distribution as detailed below.
- Evaluation: to evaluate the project, we will solicit feedback website users via a set of response questions. We will also track site statistics and attempt to measure the ratio of desktop vs. mobile hits.

Staff

The project director will be responsible for coordinating the efforts of various team members, communicating with advisory board, ensuring coherence of project, and work on aspects of implementation.

A web developer will customize Omeka install and plugins. They must have some experience with Omeka, and be willing to work with Omeka developers to create the Exhibit Geolocation Plugin. This person will also develop the mobile web interface.

A content manager will work with the developer and project director to create a general schema for metadata. They will then enter items into the archive and assist with the construction of the exhibit.

An exhibit developer and historian will write a narrative to accompany the exhibit and work with the web developer and project director on the layout of the exhibit to determine the best structure for users at all points in the exhibit.

The project will have an advisory board consisting of: a geographer with a specialty in historic mapping projects; two historians specializing in the Early American Republic; a military historian with expertise on the War of 1812; an archivist from the Library of Congress or the National Archives.

Final Product and dissemination:

The desktop and mobile versions of the final website will be fully accessible to the public. Initial notifications will be sent to listservs of relevant groups, including the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, H-SHEAR (Early American Republic), H-Pub (Public History), H-DC (District of Columbia History). The website will also be promoted in an ad which will run for one week in the Express, a free weekly paper published for commuters in the Washington, DC, area.

The project director will contact the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission, and the Washington D.C. War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission to educate them about the project and offer a demonstration.

The project will create a QR code which directs readers to the mobile website. This will hopefully be deployed at historic locations which are featured in the site, with cooperation from the site owners or maintainers.

The whitepaper will help to illuminate challenges of a web-based geolocated exhibit, particularly the intersection of mobile geolocation and historical interpretation.

Data Management Plan

Comprehensive backups of all material will be kept. There will be a daily backup of the files and data for the exhibit, and a weekly backup will be downloaded and stored on a portable harddrive stored in a fireproof file cabinet.

All item data generated in the creation of this Omeka-based exhibit will conform to basic Dublin Core metadata standards. Moreover, our metadata will be made openly available using the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) repository plugin for Omeka. We will include the availability of the data on our About page, as well as in our emails to listservs and commissions.

APPENDIX I: ENDNOTES

¹ Paul Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison* (Brooklyn: George C. Beadle, 1865), 8.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid* and Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23 August 1814

⁴ Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906), 110

⁵ Adam Smith, "Mobile Access 2010" <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Mobile-Access-2010.aspx>

APPENDIX II: SELECTED SOURCES

The following are a selection of sources to be used when writing the narrative. Some will also be featured as documentary items in the site itself. Please note that this list is far from complete.

Manuscript Collections

Dumbarton House Collection, Headquarters of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America, Washington, DC

Causten Family Papers, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Dolley Madison Papers

James Madison Papers

Anna Maria Thornton Diaries

William Thornton Papers

Newspapers

Baltimore Patriot & Evening Advertiser

Maryland Gazette (Annapolis, MD)

National Intelligencer (Washington, DC)

Niles' Weekly Register (Baltimore, MD)

The Times (London)

Published Sources

A Subaltern in America: Comprising his Narrative of the Campaigns of the British Army at Baltimore, Washington, etc. during the Late War. Baltimore: Carey, Hart, 1833

Gerry, Elbridge, Jr. *The Diary of Elbridge Gerry, Jr.* New York: Brentano's, 1927.

Gleig, George Robert. *A narrative of the campaigns of the British army, at Washington, Baltimore, and New Orleans...by an officer of the expedition.* Philadelphia: M. Carey & sons, 1821.

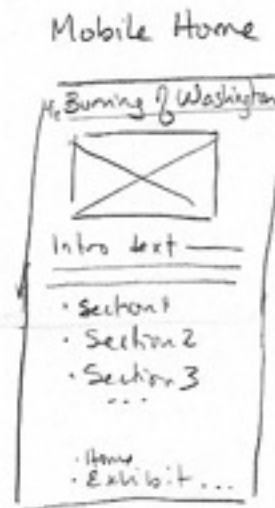
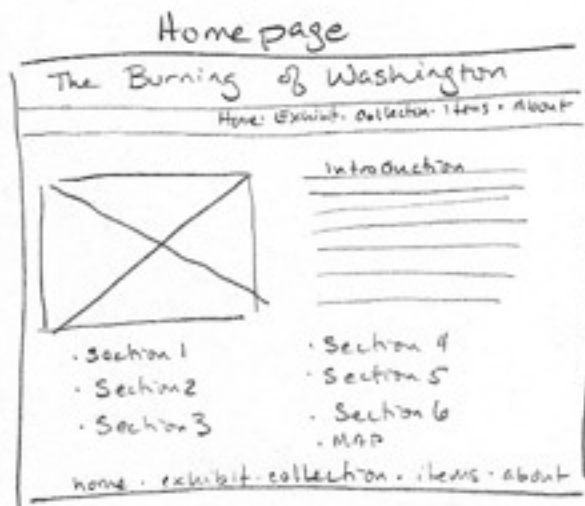
Ingersoll, Charles J. *Historical Sketch of the Second War between the United States of America and Great Britain.* Vol. 2. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1849.

Jennings, Paul. *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison.* Brooklyn: George C. Beadle, 1865.

Smith, Margaret Bayard, *First Forty Years of Washington Society.* New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906.

Williams, John S. *History of the Invasion and Capture of Washington, and of the events which preceded and followed.* New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1857.

APPENDIX III: WIREFRAME



APPENDIX IV: EXAMPLES OF ITEM METADATA

Title Portrait of George Washington

Subject George Washington

Description Oil on canvas. A full-length portrait of George Washington painted in 1796. It was in the President's House in August 1814 and was removed by servants at the direction of Dolley Madison.

Creator Gilbert Stuart (1755 - 1828)

Source The White House Historical Association (White House Collection)

Publisher

Date 1797

Rights This image in the public domain.

Relation

Format jpg

Language

Type Still Image

Identifier: WHHA 800.1290.1

Coverage President's House

Location Coordinates: 38°53'51.61"N 77°2'11.58"W



Title: A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison

Subject George Washington

Description Memoir of a man who was James Madison's slave until 1836, and who later bought his freedom. Jennings was

Creator Paul Jennings (1799 - 1874)

Source Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Publisher George C. Beadle

Date 1865

Rights Public Domain

Relation

Format pdf

Language English

Type Text

Identifier: Jennings1865

Coverage President's House

Location Coordinates: 38°53'51.61"N 77°2'11.58"W

