

One Fort - Three Centuries

“old Fort Frederick” continues to serve



Pontiacs War - A Settler Refuge

With the Fall of Fort Duquesne in late 1758, the need for Fort Frederick had lessened and was closed in April 1759.

The fort would sit idle until 1763 when an American Indian Confederacy was formed under Ottawa chief Pontiac. His warriors began attacking British forts all along the frontier. Governor Sharpe wrote after the attacks reached neighboring Pennsylvania, *"I apprehend Fort Frederick would be the Retreat or Place of Rendezvous for all the People in that part of the Country should the Indians come down on them I have sent Doctor Heinzman (who having been Surgeon to the Maryland Troops has for some time lived at & taken Care of the Fort) Orders to receive them & their Families into it"*. Local tradition states that over 700 settlers and Militia men were at the fort during this time. The fort was never attacked. Settlers would come to the fort off and on from July 1763 until spring 1764.

American Revolution - Prisoner Camp

Following the French and Indian War the American Colonists began to chafe under the yoke of rule from far off England. Finally in 1775 it came to head as the colonies began fighting against the British military.

By late 1777 the new United States realized they had a need for places to put captured British soldiers, and Fort Frederick was put forward as one of those locations. After a review of the facilities, repairs were made and by the spring of 1778 the first prisoners arrived. During its time as a prison camp from 1778-1783 thousands of British prisoners were held here. Many of the prisoners came from American victories at Saratoga, NY and Yorktown, VA. The prisoners were not just soldiers, but women, children and sailors. In the 18th Century wives and families of soldiers were allowed to follow the army and would be placed in captivity as well.



19th Century - Private ownership and Civil War

In 1791 the state of Maryland sold the old fort as surplus. The fort changed ownership several times before being bought by Nathan Williams, a former enslaved person, in 1850. The Williams' family would own the prosperous farm until 1911.

In the Winter of 1861-1862 "old Fort Frederick" would be a hive of military activity again as the fort ruins were occupied by Union Soldiers. During this time four skirmishes would be fought between Union and Confederate troops. One incident was witnessed by Samuel Bookman he wrote *"A short time after their [First Maryland, US] arrival they encountered a body of Rebel cavalry on the opposite side of the river—a brisk fire was kept up for some time which resulted in killing and wounding some five or six of the enemy, leaving our men unhurt."*

20th Century - Public Good

Fort Frederick had been on peoples minds as a place the state should acquire to preserve in one way or another for years. As early as September 1862, in the middle of The Antietam Campaign, the Maryland Assembly considered this question. It was not until in 1922 the idea would be come reality, when the State Board of Forestry bought the fort to create a park. Initially the only improvements were experimental tree plantings.

The old fort would get another lease on life as in 1934 the Civilian Conservation Corps established a camp at the fort which restored the fort walls, built the log buildings in the park, and created recreational areas and infrastructure. They would complete their work in the Spring of 1937 creating the park you see today.

During the United States Bicentennial the State of Maryland reconstructed the two enlisted men's barracks.

