

The Buffalo News : City & Region

Monday, May 17, 2010



Charles Lewis/Buffalo News

Chris Brown, of the Erie County planning committee for the War of 1812 Bicentennial, looks over displays at Sunday's dedication

Related photos on the Picture Page, C10.

Black Rock garden takes root as sign of peace

By Jay Tokasz

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Updated: May 17, 2010, 6:48 am

Published: May 17, 2010, 12:30 am

A stone's throw from several battle sites in the War of 1812, Black Rock residents gathered Sunday to commemorate the peace between the United States and Canada that has endured for nearly 200 years.

On a more parochial level, they also came to celebrate the conversion of a once-blighted corner into a working community garden sprouting tomato plants, pumpkins, green beans and a variety of other vegetables.

The garden is the first in Western New York to be dedicated as part of the War of 1812 Bicentennial Art of Peace Garden Trail, the Binational Economic & Tourism Alliance's commemoration of 200 years of peace between the two nations.

At least 30 community gardens are being planned in Ontario and Western New York.

The garden at the northeast corner of Dearborn and Hamilton streets is the latest incarnation for property that was part of the outskirts of the Village of Black Rock in the early 1800s.

During the War of 1812, British redcoats likely stomped across the same earth in their clashes with American military.

The two forces battled on at least four documented occasions within walking distance of the site. In 1812, American forces captured the HMS Detroit. But in trying to get the ship to Black Rock, it ran aground at the southwest tip of Squaw Island.

A force of 400 British troops crossed the Niagara River overnight and landed at what is now Amherst and Niagara streets in July 1813, only to be pushed back by a vigorous American defense led by Gen. Peter B. Porter, who later served as U. S. secretary of war under President John Quincy Adams.

British forces returned in December 1813, and this time succeeded in burning down the villages of Buffalo and Black Rock. Finally, in August 1814, British and American forces battled again at what was known as Scajaquada Creek Bridge, near the site of a current Tops Market on Amherst Street.

On any of those occasions, the redcoats might well “have walked across this parcel on the way to attack,” said Bill Parke, community planner with the city’s Office of Strategic Planning.

More recently, the site was marred for years by a deteriorating building that finally was demolished in 2008.

“[In] 2008, it was a derelict building; [in] 2009, we started building a garden; and 4,000 hours later, we’re here,” said Beverly Eagen, president of the Dearborn Street Community Association.

The garden is relatively simple, with lots of grass and a few large beds set off by timbers.

Other peace gardens will include elaborate elements such as labyrinths and statues, said Arlene White, executive director of the Binational Economic & Tourism Alliance.

But most of them are unlikely to have as much of a transformative impact on their neighborhoods, she said.

“This is the best kind of peace garden from my perspective,” she said. “What this community garden is doing is changing the community.”

Because Buffalo and Black Rock were burned to the ground by the British, the city currently has few physical landmarks for the War of 1812 bicentennial commemoration.

But planners at Sunday’s event said proposals are in the works to establish a better representation of the city’s key role in the war.

“Our greatest opportunity is to do something on Squaw Island,” said Chris Brown, a member of the Erie County planning committee for the War of 1812 Bicentennial. “We want people to have a place to come to when they come to Buffalo.”

Warren Glover, chairman of the historic preservation committee of the Black Rock-Riverside Planning Alliance, said he hopes that the War of 1812 battles in Black Rock can be re-enacted in 2012, perhaps on Squaw Island.

One group also has proposed installing a large map in downtown Buffalo showing Buffalo before the war, Brown said.

e-mail: jtokasz@buffnews.com



Charles Lewis / Buffalo News

Witness to history: Jaxson Bass, 2, is held by his godfather, Paul Woolston, during a ceremony Sunday to dedicate the first U.S. War of 1812 Bicentennial Peace Garden at 269 Dearborn St. in Buffalo



Sharing the moment: Arlene White, executive director of the Binational Economic & Tourism Alliance, speaks at the War of 1812 Bicentennial Peace Garden dedication as Mary Ann Kedron of the Black Rock-Riverside Planning Alliance looks on.

Charles Lewis / Buffalo

News