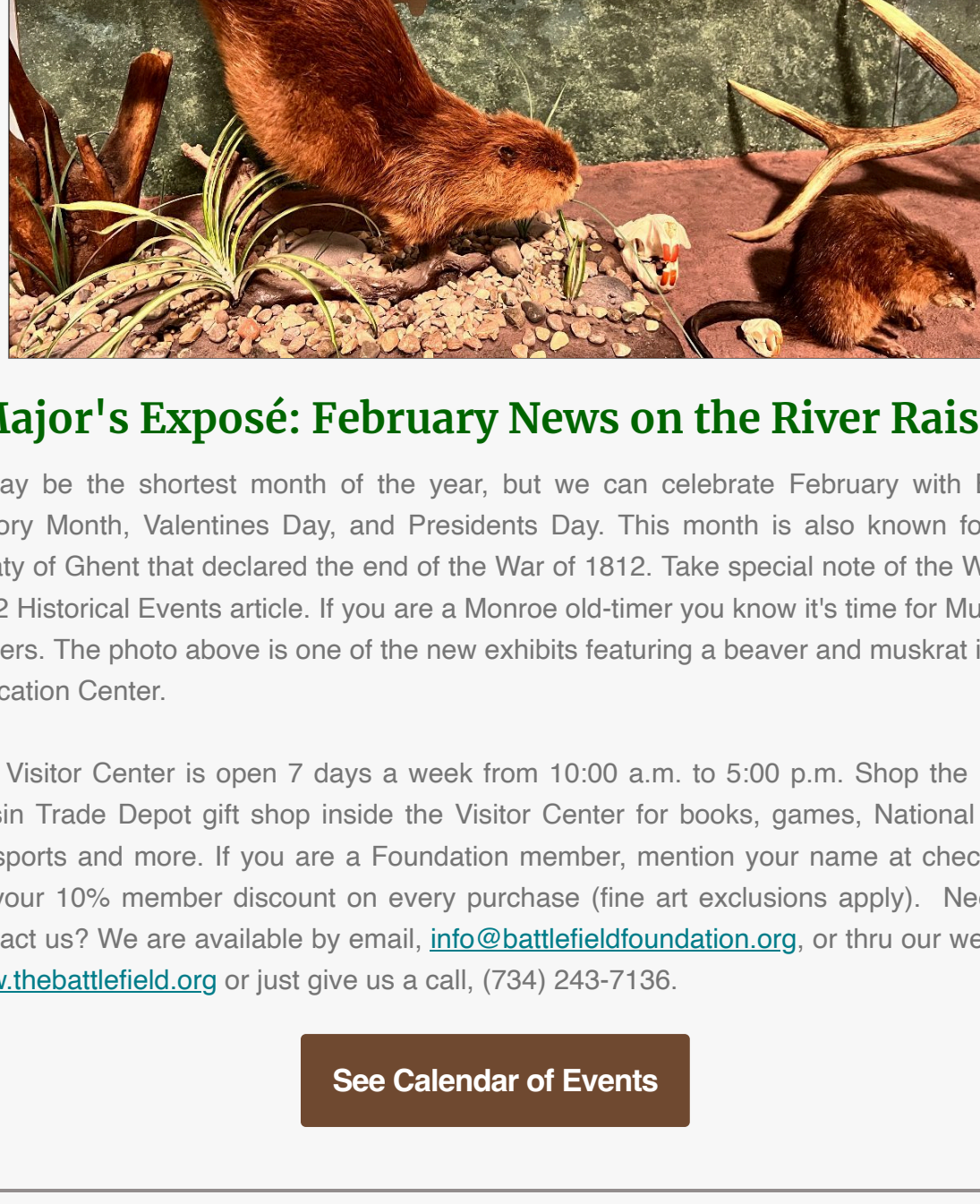


RIVER RAISIN NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK FOUNDATION

A world class educational experience to connect the past to our shared future | FEBRUARY 2024 EDITION

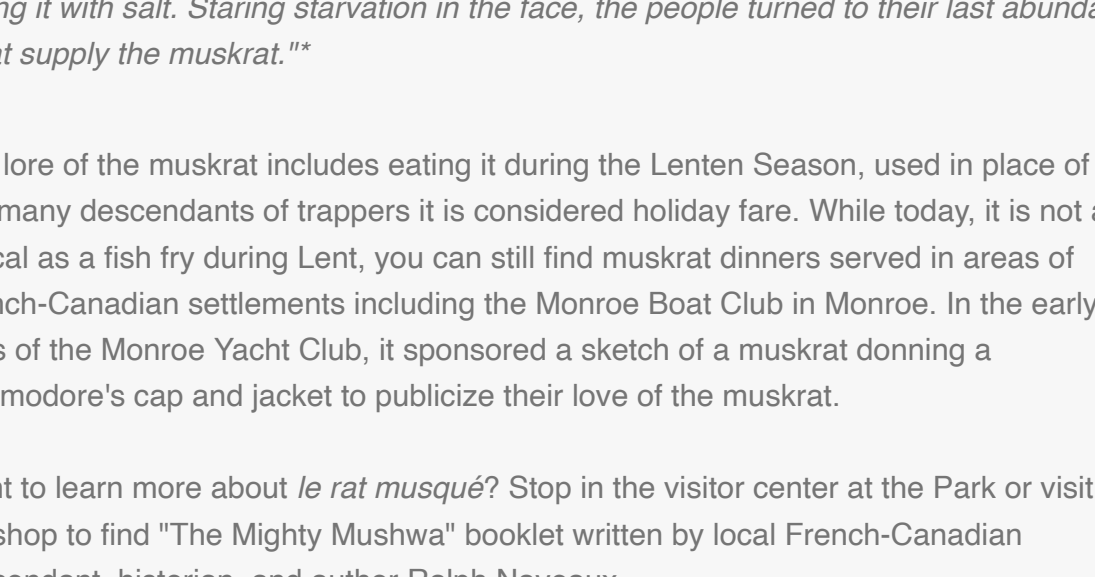


Major's Exposé: February News on the River Raisin

It may be the shortest month of the year, but we can celebrate February with Black History Month, Valentines Day, and Presidents Day. This month is also known for the Treaty of Ghent that declared the end of the War of 1812. Take special note of the War of 1812 Historical Events article. If you are a Monroe old-timer you know it's time for Muskrat dinners. The photo above is one of the new exhibits featuring a beaver and muskrat in the Education Center.

The Visitor Center is open 7 days a week from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Shop the River Raisin Trade Depot gift shop inside the Visitor Center for books, games, National Park passports and more. If you are a Foundation member, mention your name at check out for your 10% member discount on every purchase (fine art exclusions apply). Need to contact us? We are available by email, info@battlefieldfoundation.org, or thru our website www.thebattlefield.org or just give us a call, (734) 243-7136.

[See Calendar of Events](#)



Frenchtown and the Muskrat

In the early days of the Frenchtown settlement, there was no Groundhog Day where "Punxsutawney Phil" came out of his burrow to see his shadow. Instead, the habitants who were fur traders and trappers watched the muskrats to see how sturdily they built their mud and stick huts. The thicker they were, the colder the winter. The lore of the muskrat is long and tall with the French-Canadians who settled from Port Huron to Monroe in southeastern Michigan. Native Americans also used the muskrat as a source of food calling it *shishko* (Potawatomi) and *musquash* (Algonquin variant). Monroe old-timers may be familiar with the name *mushrats*.

The muskrat was very important to the French-Canadian settlers in Frenchtown because they were fur traders and trappers. The muskrats, aka little beavers, were plentiful at the River Raisin, in addition to fish and turtles. After the Battles of the River Raisin were over, the settlers that remained at Frenchtown turned to the lowly muskrat for survival during the brutal winter of 1813-1814 out of necessity.

"After the American defeat at the River Raisin in January of 1813, less than half the habitants remained. The destruction of crops and livestock and the general devastation were so great that by the following winter, the habitants were reduced to boiling hay and eating it with salt. Staring starvation in the face, the people turned to their last abundant meat supply the muskrat."

The lore of the muskrat includes eating it during the Lenten Season, used in place of fish. For many descendants of trappers it is considered holiday fare. While today, it is not as typical as a fish fry during Lent, you can still find muskrat dinners served in areas of French-Canadian settlements including the Monroe Boat Club in Monroe. In the early days of the Monroe Yacht Club, it sponsored a sketch of a muskrat donning a commodore's cap and jacket to publicize their love of the muskrat.

Want to learn more about *le rat musqué*? Stop in the visitor center at the Park or visit our gift shop to find "The Mighty Mushwa" booklet written by local French-Canadian descendant, historian, and author Ralph Naveaux.

*excerpt from "The Mighty Mushwa. The Muskrat Tradition in Monroe County, Michigan" by Ralph Naveaux, 2017.

*Muskrat illustration above by Gerry Wykes.



African-American experiences connected to the War of 1812

Saltpeter mines in caves were an important source of armament for the American Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. Today such caves and their contents are of important historical interest. Black History month is an appropriate time to share the untold stories of the War of 1812 regarding the slave labor that supported the war efforts.

Researchers at the River Raisin National Battlefield Park recently uncovered specific slave experiences related to the production of black powder to war logistics by indentured servants during the battles of the River Raisin, Battle of Lake Erie and others. One such mining site is Mammoth Cave National Park that features caves that African-Americans mined saltpeter in Kentucky. Saltpeter was an essential ingredient in black powder. Mining ventures in Kentucky caves became so lucrative that by 1806 the industry had attracted the attention of E. I. Du Pont, proprietor of a very extensive gunpowder manufactory in Philadelphia. The 1810 market price of 17¢ per pound for crude saltpeter increased to 75¢ to \$1 per pound during the War of 1812.

At the River Raisin, are working toward developing a park film and exhibits related to the African-American experience in the War of 1812. Did you know Detroit had an all-black militia established in 1807? Are you aware that slaves were used as manservants, cannoneers and shipmates during the War? Stay tuned!

Learn more:

Mammoth Cave National Park: nps.gov/macac

NPS Article "From Dirt to Gunpowder": nps.gov/saltpetre-mining

Great Saltpetre Preserve: gsp.caves.org

Partner Spotlight

We have many partnerships with indigenous tribes, the Wyandot of Anderson Nation is one of them. They support many park field trips and programs by sharing their culture. As the Michigan recognized tribe closest to the River Raisin National Battlefield Park, we appreciate their efforts to tell their stories. You have surely met Chief Ted Roll who is an integral part of the staff at the park shown in the photo below in the dugout canoe he helped to make. Thank you to our friends the Wyandot of Anderson for your support!



Shop for local art at the River Raisin Trade Depot!

Shop local at the gift shop in the Visitor Center that benefits the Foundation. You'll find Michigan items, candles, games, books, National Park and fiber artist works. Our resident fiber artist and AFA interpreter Mary Minney, of Mary Spun a Little Lamb, knits socks from a circa World War II knitting machine and has loom work featured on our fiber wall. Gift Shop is open during Visitor Center hours, 10am to 5pm, 7 days a week.

War of 1812 Historical Events in February

- February 15, 1815 The United States Senate ratifies the Treaty of Ghent
- February 18, 1815 Treaty of Ghent is declared; the War of 1812 is ended
- February 20, 1815 USS Constitution engages the HMS Cyane and HMS Levant, not knowing the war is over
- February 22, 1813 Battle of Ogneseburg



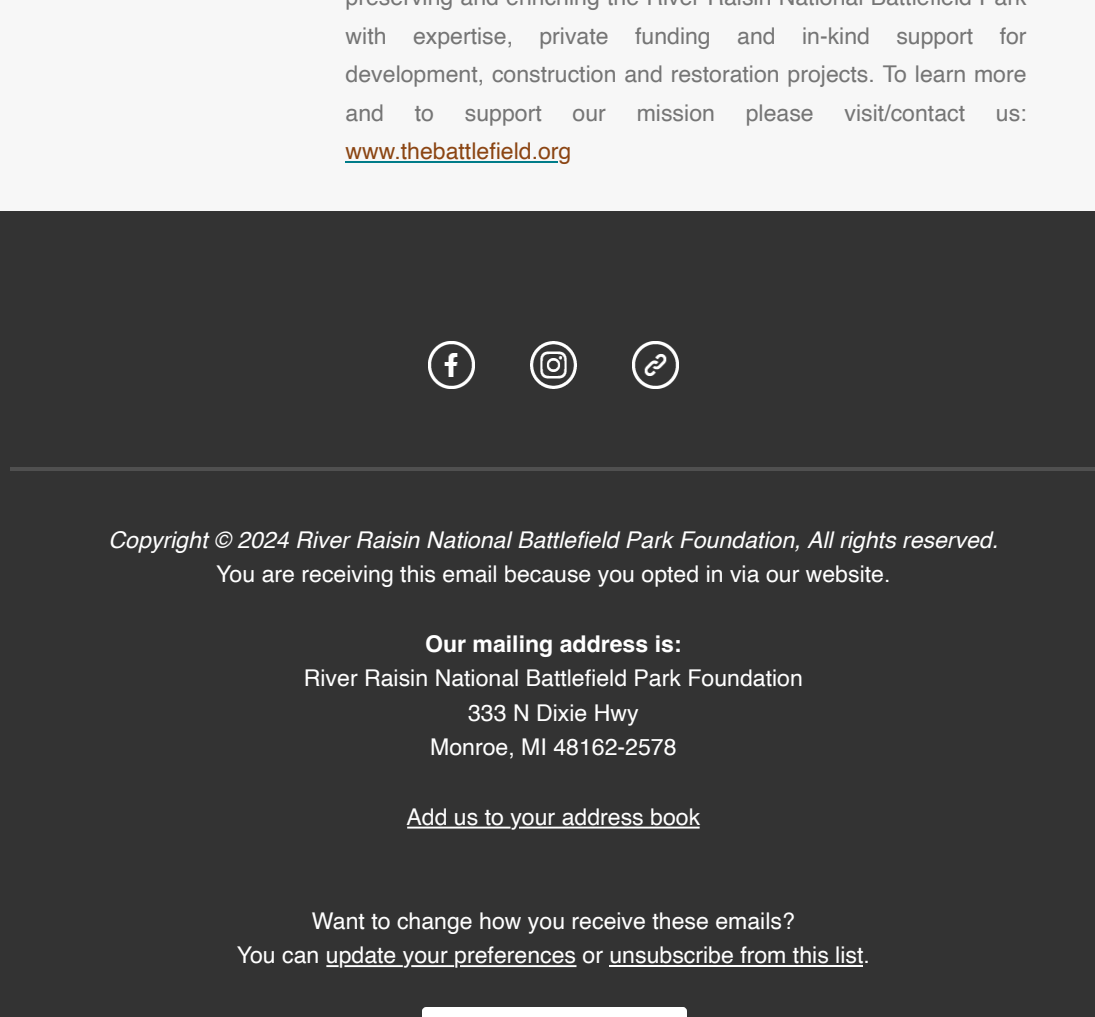
How can you help?

Without you, we can't accomplish our goals to provide a world class educational experience to connect the past to our shared future. Thank you to all of our Foundation members and donors and partner organizations for being an integral part of our success.

Whether you become a member or provide a one time donation, you are contributing to building the soon to open Education Center, providing programming, and giving vital operational funding so we can continue to seek grants and create inclusive opportunities for all who visit the park. Please consider a donation or annual membership to the River Raisin National Battlefield Park Foundation online www.thebattlefield.org or call us at (734) 243-7136.

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE NOW](#)

PARTNER EVENT:



SAVE THE DATE:



April 19, 2024
"Beautiful Bountiful Michigan Art Exhibition" 5th Annual Art Gala



Won't you be a MEMBER?

Invite a friend to join the Foundation. Memberships fund our educational and programming efforts of the River Raisin National Battlefield Park and operational funding. This includes the under-construction Education Center inside the Visitor Center. Exclusive Members Only events showcase our progress and offer special themed activities. Membership benefits include 10% discount in the River Raisin Trade Depot Gift Shop, Major's Exposé Newsletter, and event ticket discounts. Help us reach our goal to grow membership in 2024! Forward this newsletter to a friend and ask them to join the Foundation!

Contact the Foundation for Gift Memberships at info@battlefieldfoundation.org or call (734) 243-7136 ext. 171.

[Become a member here](#)
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**About the River Raisin National
Battlefield Park Foundation**

The mission of the River Raisin National Battlefield Park Foundation is to build enduring, diverse relationships through a world-class experience that shares the untold stories of the Battles and their aftermath inspiring conversation, understanding, and respect.

The River Raisin National Battlefield Park Foundation is the nonprofit partner of the National Park Service dedicated to preserving and enriching the River Raisin National Battlefield Park with expertise, private funding and in-kind support for development, construction and restoration projects. To learn more and to support our mission please visit/contact us:

www.thebattlefield.org

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