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Illinois will remember territory's role in War of 1812

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EDWARDSVILLE • The Illinois Territory may have been a backwater in the War of 1812, but it wasn't untouched by the conflict. A statewide commission is gearing up to commemorate the war's bicentennial.

There were no major battles in the sparsely settled territory but a lot of unrest and sporadic violence, said Lola DeGroff, of Troy, Ill., a member of the Illinois War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission.

"A lot of things happened locally," said DeGroff, noting that what is now called the Metro East area was home to much of the population of the frontier territory in 1812. Numerous forts and blockhouses protected residents from Indians who were allied with the enemy, Great Britain. On occasion, lives were lost to Indian attacks.

Perhaps the most prominent of the military emplacements was Fort Russell, near Edwardsville, manned by 35 regular Army soldiers to protect the governor and seat of the territorial government.

The fort's exact site is the subject of some disagreement that DeGroff and other volunteers hope to settle. Anyone with information on it is invited to a meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Edwardsville Public Library, 112 South Kansas Street.

"A lot of smart people are interested in this," DeGroff said. "We'll entertain any ideas or even educated guesses."

DeGroff said the project is in line with the commission's mission. "Basically, we're about education," she said.

There are plans for movies and multimedia presentations.