

one thousand troops, ordered his men to return fire, but their guns couldn't reach the enemy's ships. When British ships advanced on the afternoon of the 13th, however, American gunners badly damaged them, forcing them to pull back out of range. All through the night, Armistead's men continued to hold the fort, refusing to surrender. That night British attempts at a diversionary attack also failed, and by dawn they had given up hope of taking the city. At 7:30 on the morning of September 14, Admiral Cochrane called an end to the bombardment, and the British fleet withdrew. The successful defense of Baltimore marked a turning point in the War of 1812. Three months later, on December 24, 1814, the Treaty of Ghent formally ended the war.

Because the British attack had coincided with a heavy rainstorm, Fort McHenry had flown its smaller storm flag throughout the battle. But at dawn, as the British began to retreat, Major Armistead ordered his men to lower the storm flag and replace it with the great garrison flag. As they raised the flag, the troops fired their guns and played "Yankee Doodle" in celebration of their victory. Waving proudly over the fort, the banner could be seen for miles around—as far away as a ship anchored eight miles down the river, where an American lawyer named Francis Scott Key had spent an anxious night watching and hoping for a sign that the city—and the nation—might be saved.

The Inspiration of Francis Scott Key: From Poem to Anthem

Friends of Dr. Beanes asked Georgetown lawyer Francis Scott Key to join John S. Skinner, the U.S. government's agent for dealing with British forces in the Chesapeake, and help secure the release of the civilian prisoner. They were successful; however, the British feared that Key and Skinner would divulge their plans for attacking Baltimore, and so they detained the two men aboard a truce ship for the duration of the battle. Key thus became an eyewitness to the bombardment of Fort McHenry.

During the 19th century, "The Star-Spangled Banner" became one of the nation's best-loved patriotic songs. It gained special significance during the Civil War, a time when many Americans turned to music to express their feelings for the flag and the ideals and values it represented. By the 1890s, the military had adopted the song for ceremonial purposes, requiring it to be played at the raising and lowering of the colors. In 1917, both the army and the navy designated the song the "national anthem" for ceremonial purposes. Meanwhile, patriotic organizations had launched a campaign to have Congress recognize "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the U.S. national anthem. After several decades of attempts, a bill making

"The Star-Spangled Banner" our official national anthem was finally passed by Congress and signed into law by President Herbert Hoover on March 3, 1931.

The Star-Spangled Banner and the Smithsonian

At the death of Armistead's widow in 1861, the Star-Spangled Banner was bequeathed to his daughter, Georgiana Armistead Appleton, who recognized that it held national as well as familial significance. As its owner, she permitted the flag to be publicly exhibited on several occasions. Eben Appleton, Armistead's grandson, inherited the flag from his mother in 1878. Faced with the public's increasing curiosity about the Star-Spangled Banner, he began to seek an appropriate repository. In 1907, Appleton lent the historic flag to the Smithsonian Institution, and in 1912 he offered the flag as a permanent gift to the nation. He later wrote, "It is always such a satisfaction to me to feel that the flag is just where it is, in possession for all time of the very best custodian, where it is beautifully displayed and can be conveniently seen by so many people."

Snippings from the Star-Spangled Banner

The Armistead family received frequent requests for pieces of their flag, but reserved the treasured fragments for veterans, government officials, and other honored citizens. As Georgiana Armistead Appleton noted, "had we given all that we have been importuned for little would be left to show." Despite efforts to limit the practice, however, over two hundred square feet of the Star-Spangled Banner was eventually given away, including one of the stars.

1914 Conservation

The flag was then displayed in a glass case in the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building. It remained on view there for nearly 50 years, except for two years during World War II, during which time it was housed in a government warehouse in Virginia, to be protected from possible bombing raids on the nation's capital. In 1964 the flag was moved to the new National Museum of History and Technology (now the National Museum of American History), where it was displayed in the central hall on the second floor.

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The Star Spangled Banner Lyrics

By Francis Scott Key 1814

Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last
gleaming?

Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous
fight,

O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly
streaming?

And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still
there.

Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the
deep,

Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence
reposes,

What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering
steep,

As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,

In full glory reflected now shines in the stream:
'Tis the star-spangled banner! Oh long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country should leave us no more!
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps'
pollution.

No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued
land

Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a
nation.

Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

The original Star-Spangled Banner, the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the song that would become our national anthem, is among the most treasured artifacts in the collections of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.



Quick Facts about the Star-Spangled Banner Flag

- ✦ Made in Baltimore, Maryland, in July-August 1813 by flagmaker Mary Pickersgill
- ✦ Commissioned by Major George Armistead, commander of Fort McHenry
- ✦ Original size: 30 feet by 42 feet
- ✦ Current size: 30 feet by 34 feet
- ✦ Fifteen stars and fifteen stripes (one star has been cut out)
- ✦ Raised over Fort McHenry on the morning of September 14, 1814, to signal American victory over the British in the Battle of Baltimore; the sight inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner"
- ✦ Preserved by the Armistead family as a memento of the battle
- ✦ First loaned to the Smithsonian Institution in 1907; converted to permanent gift in 1912
- ✦ On exhibit at the National Museum of American History since 1964
- ✦ Major, multi-year conservation effort launched in 1998
- ✦ Plans for new permanent exhibition gallery now underway

Making the Star-Spangled Banner

In June 1813, Major George Armistead arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, to take command of Fort McHenry, built to guard the water entrance to the city. Armistead

commissioned Mary Pickersgill, a Baltimore flag maker, to sew two flags for the fort: a smaller storm flag (17 by 25 ft) and a larger garrison flag (30 by 42 ft). She was hired under a government contract and was assisted by her daughter, two nieces, and an indentured African-American girl.

The larger of these two flags would become known as the "Star-Spangled Banner." Pickersgill stitched it from a combination of dyed English wool bunting (red and white stripes and blue union) and white cotton (stars). Each star is about two feet in diameter, each stripe about 24 inches wide. The Star-Spangled Banner's impressive scale (about one-fourth the size of a modern basketball court) reflects its purpose as a garrison flag. It was intended to fly from a flagpole about ninety feet high and be visible from great distances. At its original dimensions of 30 by 42 feet, it was larger than the modern garrison flags used today by the United States Army, which have a standard size of 20 by 38 feet.

The first Flag Act, adopted on June 14, 1777, created the original United States flag of thirteen stars and thirteen stripes. The Star-Spangled Banner has fifteen stars and fifteen stripes as provided for in the second Flag Act approved by Congress on January 13, 1794. The additional stars and stripes represent Vermont (1791) and Kentucky (1792) joining the Union. (The third Flag Act, passed on April 4, 1818, reduced the number of stripes back to thirteen to honor the original thirteen colonies and provided for one star for each state — a new star to be added to the flag on the Fourth of July following the admission of each new state.) Pickersgill spent between six and eight weeks making the flags, and they were delivered to Fort McHenry on August 19, 1813. The government paid \$405.90 for the garrison flag and \$168.54 for the storm flag. The garrison flag would soon after be raised at Fort McHenry and ultimately find a permanent home at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. The whereabouts of the storm flag are not known.

The War of 1812 and the Burning of Washington

Although its events inspired one of our most famous national songs, the War of 1812 is itself a relatively little-known war in American history. Despite its complicated causes and inconclusive outcome, the conflict helped establish the credibility of the young United States among other nations. It also fostered a strong sense of national pride among the American people, and those patriotic feelings are reflected and preserved in the song we know today as our national anthem.

Britain's defeat at the 1781 Battle of Yorktown marked the conclusion of the American Revolution and the beginning of new challenges for a new nation. Not even

three decades after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which formalized Britain's recognition of the United States of America, the two countries were again in conflict. Resentment for Britain's interference with American international trade and impressment of American sailors combined with American expansionist visions led Congress to declare war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812.

In the early stages of the war, the American navy scored victories in the Atlantic and on Lake Erie while Britain concentrated its military efforts on its ongoing war with France. But with the defeat of Emperor Napoleon's armies in April 1814, Britain turned its full attention to the war against an ill-prepared United States. Admiral Alexander Cochrane, the British naval commander, prepared to attack U.S. coastal areas, and General Robert Ross sought to capture towns along the East Coast to create diversions while British army forces attacked along the northern boundaries of the United States.

In August 1814, General Ross and his seasoned troops landed near the nation's capital. On August 24, at Bladensburg, Maryland, about 30 miles from Washington, his five-thousand-member British force defeated an American army twice its size. That same night, British troops entered Washington. They set fire to the United States Capitol, the President's Mansion, and other public buildings. The local militia fled, and President James Madison and wife Dolley barely escaped.

The Battle of Baltimore

With Washington in ruins, the British next set their sights on Baltimore, then America's third-largest city. Moving up the Chesapeake Bay to the mouth of the Patapsco River, they plotted a joint attack on Baltimore by land and water. On the morning of September 12, General Ross's troops landed at North Point, Maryland, and progressed towards the city. They soon encountered the American forward line, part of an extensive network of defenses established around Baltimore in anticipation of the British assault. During the skirmish with American troops, General Ross, so successful in the attack on Washington, was killed by a sharpshooter. Surprised by the strength of the American defenses, British forces camped on the battlefield and waited for nightfall on September 13, planning to attempt another attack under cover of darkness.

Meanwhile, Britain's naval force, buoyed by its earlier successful attack on Alexandria, Virginia, was poised to strike Fort McHenry and enter Baltimore Harbor. At 6:30 AM on September 13, 1814, Admiral Cochrane's ships began a 25-hour bombardment of the fort. Rockets whistled through the air and burst into flame wherever they struck. Mortars fired 10- and 13-inch bombshells that exploded overhead in showers of fiery shrapnel. Major Armistead, commander of Fort McHenry and its defending force of