

The Anniversary of the Battle of Baltimore at Fort McHenry and the Star-Spangled Banner



Image source: Baltimore.org

Fort McHenry was constructed on the site of Fort Whetstone, an earthen star fort that served to help protect Baltimore during the American Revolution. The new fort was named after James McHenry, a Scots-Irish immigrant and Maryland signer of the United States Constitution and Secretary of War. Construction of the improved fort was completed in 1803.

Great Britain and France had been embroiled in global conflict since 1793. The United States, wishing to continue to trade with both countries, declared themselves neutral. The British not only rejected America's claim of neutrality over the conflict but stopped American ships at sea and "impressed" American sailors—forcibly recruiting them into the Royal Navy on the spot. Additionally, the British armed Native American tribes to restrict America's expansion westward. To preserve "Free Trade & Sailor's Rights," the United States declared war against Great Britain on June 18, 1812,

The American forces' war efforts were mixed. After defeating Napoleon's forces in April 1814, Britain was able to focus its strength solely on the Americans. In August, a British force of about 4,500 men landed in Maryland. They quickly overcame the Maryland militia and captured and burned the public buildings in Washington, D.C., including the White House. The defeat was disheartening to the young nation.

Newspaper Activities:

- Look through the news for construction projects to improve existing structures. Will the finished project be used for the same purpose or something new?
- Look for news and information about two or more nations in a current conflict. Compare and contrast this conflict with the U.S. and Great Britain during the War of 1812.
- Following the Battle of Baltimore, both the flag and the anthem became symbols of national pride. Look for examples of the use of local, state or national symbols.

Next, those same forces, with the support of the Royal Navy, attempted to seize Baltimore. Starting in the early morning hours of September 13, 1814, British warships attacked Fort McHenry. Francis Scott Key, a Washington lawyer who had come to Baltimore to negotiate the release of a prisoner of war, witnessed the bombardment from a nearby truce ship. When he saw the garrison flag flying over Fort McHenry on the morning of September 14 after the 25 hour bombardment, Key was inspired to write the words of a poem which ultimately became our national anthem.

The flag that flew over Fort McHenry that day consisted of 15 stars and 15 stripes, (based on the number of states at the time) and was known as the "Star-Spangled Banner," which is where the anthem got its name.

For more information and lessons about this time in history go to the Smithsonian's website at <https://amhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/educational-resources.aspx>. To test your knowledge about our national symbols - our flag and anthem, go to <https://tinyurl.com/1814Baltimore>.

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