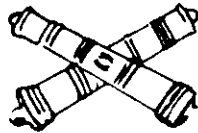


Fort McHenry

National Monument
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

FORT McHENRY: AN AMERICAN FORT, 1794-1994 Celebrating 200 Years



Revolutionary War 1776-1783

Fort McHenry's history began in 1776 when the citizens of Baltimore Town feared an attack by British ships. An earthen star fort known as Fort Whetstone was quickly constructed. The fort, like Baltimore, was never attacked during our first conflict with England.

The Formative Years, 1794-1811

In 1793, France declared a war on England that became known as the Napoleonic Wars. In 1794, Congress authorized the construction of a series of coastal forts to protect our maritime frontier. Construction began on Fort McHenry in 1798 and, by 1803, the masonry walls we view today were completed. The fort was named for James McHenry, our second Secretary of War. In 1809, the U.S. Army's first light artillery unit was organized here.

The War of 1812

On June 18, 1812, the United States declared war on England, in part to "preserve Free Trade & Sailor's Rights." In August 1814, British forces marched on Washington, defeated U.S. forces, and burned the Capitol. Then, on September 13-14, the British attacked Fort McHenry. The failure of the bombardment and sight of the American flag inspired Francis Scott Key to compose "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Construction Period, 1829-1842

Following the War of 1812, new methods of coastal defense brought about changes that resulted in the fort we view today. Among the changes was the addition of a second story with porches on the buildings and the completion of new earthen battery with larger guns.

The Mexican War, 1846-1848

During the war years, Maryland units, as well as federal units, were trained here before being sent to war with Mexico. Soon after this conflict, Colonel R.E. Lee came to Baltimore to supervise construction of Fort Carroll (1848-1852) in Baltimore harbor.

The Civil War, 1861-1865

During the war, Baltimore was an important rail and communications center. Union troops occupied Baltimore to ensure that Maryland remained in federal control. In 1861, members of the Maryland Legislature were imprisoned at Fort McHenry to prevent any passage of an Act of Secession. Following the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, nearly 7,000 Confederate soldiers were imprisoned here.

Spanish - American War, 1898

While "Remember the Maine" became the battle cry of Americans in our war with Spain, Fort McHenry's only involvement was the training of the 6th U.S. Artillery here before being sent to Cuba. Several forts were built along the Patapsco River to protect the approach to Baltimore.

Farewell Fort McHenry, 1912

By the late 19th century Fort McHenry was of little military value. On July 20, 1912, the last active garrison, the 141st Coastal Artillery Company, departed Fort McHenry ending over 110 years of service at the fort. Two years later the City of Baltimore held the centennial celebration of the Battle of Baltimore.

World War I Period, 1917-1925

In 1917, the U.S. Army established General Hospital No.2, a 3,000 bed facility to treat wounded soldiers returning from Europe. The hospital developed into a major surgical center, specializing in neuro and reconstructive surgery. In 1922, two years after the hospital closed, the army began to remove the buildings. In 1925, Fort McHenry was established as a national park under the War Department.

U.S. Army Restoration Period, 1925-1933

With the closure of the hospital, the U.S. Army began the first restoration of the fort to its mid-nineteenth century appearance. In the 1930's the Works Progress Administration continued the work. The fort's present view is a result of that work.

National Park Service, 1933-Present

In 1933, by executive order, Fort McHenry was transferred to the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. In 1939 it was redesignated a national monument and historic shrine. Today, nearly 600,000 visitors visit annually. Park Rangers provide a variety of interpretive services and special programs.

World War II, 1942-1945

Although a national park land, a portion of the fort was leased to the U.S. Coast Guard for port security work and as a fire training station aboard ships for nearly 28,000 U.S. Coast Guardsmen. They also kept a watchful eye on the nearby shipyards where Liberty ships were being built.

The 21st Century: The Next 200 Years

For 200 years Fort McHenry has guarded the American flag in war and peace. Today, the professional fields of research, archeology, architecture and interpretation continue to provide new and innovative tools for the National Park Service to develop productive resource management guidelines to help preserve this special place.

