

The Star-Spangled Banner

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What role did Frances Scott Key play in transforming the image of the Flag flown at Fort McHenry?

By giving the flag a starring role in one of the most celebrated victories of the war, Francis Scott Key's song established a new prominence for the flag as an expression of national identity, unity, and pride. And by giving it a name – that Star-Spangled Banner – Key transformed the official emblem into something familiar and evocative, a symbol that Americans could connect with and claim as their own.

How was the Flag made and who made it?

By assembling the blue canton and the red and white stripes of the flag by piecing together strips of loosely woven English wool bunting that were only 12 or 18 inches wide. In the summer of 1813, Mary Pickersgill (1776–1857) was contracted to sew two flags for Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland. Pickersgill, a thirty-seven-year-old widow, was an experienced maker of

ships' colors and signal flags. Helping Pickersgill make the flags were her thirteen-year-old daughter Caroline; nieces Eliza Young (thirteen) and Margaret Young (fifteen); and a thirteen-year-old African American indentured servant, Grace Wisher. Pickersgill's elderly mother, Rebecca Young, from whom she had learned flag making, may have helped as well.

What was the Battle of Baltimore?

On September 13, 1814, British warships began firing bombs and rockets on Fort McHenry, which protected the city's harbor. The bombardment continued for twenty-five hours while the nation awaited news of Baltimore's fate.

What did Key's poem say?

Key declared that "our flag was still there," he fused the physical symbol of the nation with universal feelings of patriotism, courage, and resilience.

Describe the meaning of the Flag as a national symbol.

The flag was no longer just an emblem of the nation; it became a representation of the country's values and the ideals for which it stands.

What does each of the 25 circles on the interactive Flag tell us about this national symbol?

What the Flag was made of and the experiences it had went through.

Why is preservation of this particular Flag so important?

This Flag not only inspired the National Anthem of our country; it became a representation of the country's values and the ideals for which it stands.

Why was it necessary to restore the Flag?

Appleton donated the flag with the wish that it would always be on view to the public. Museums constantly balance the desire to display an object with the need to protect it from the damage created by light, dust, and other environmental factors. The Smithsonian has had to balance its effort to fulfill his wishes with the need to care for the fragile and damaged object. Plus, the increasing popularity of Key's anthem and the American public's developing sense of national heritage transformed the Star-Spangled Banner into a national treasure.