



Foundation Document Overview

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine

Maryland



Contact Information

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Purpose



FORT McHENRY NATIONAL MONUMENT AND HISTORIC SHRINE preserves the natural and cultural resources of the park and interprets the birthplace of our national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," written by Francis Scott Key, who was inspired by the American flag and the defense of Baltimore during the War of 1812.



Significance

Significance statements express why Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Withstanding the British Royal Navy's 25-hour bombardment on September 13–14, 1814, Fort McHenry successfully defended the city of Baltimore during the Chesapeake Bay Campaign, a significant turning point during the War of 1812.
- Fort McHenry's resistance against the British during the 1814 Battle of Baltimore and the massive 30-by 42-foot American flag that flew over the fort at the battle's conclusion inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner."
- The historic events that took place at Fort McHenry during the War of 1812 forever connected the American flag to "The Star-Spangled Banner," leading the song and flag to become two of the most recognizable symbols of the United States.
- The Fort McHenry Star Fort, primarily constructed between 1797 and 1805 to defend Baltimore Harbor, was originally built as part of the US military's First System of coastal fortifications designed to protect strategic harbors along the US coastline. The fort's current configuration reflects the evolution of 19th century fort design and includes elements associated with Second and Third system coastal fortifications.
- During the American Civil War, Fort McHenry became a symbol of federal authority and part of constitutional history when President Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus as a wartime measure resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of Maryland militia lieutenant John Merryman at Fort McHenry, an act that was challenged by US Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney.
- Since Fort McHenry's designation as a national monument and historic shrine, the grounds surrounding the fort have become a landscape for commemorating the birth of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and reflecting on national identity and American patriotism.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Fort McHenry Structure and Buildings**
- **Historic Core Landscape**
- **Commemorative Features**
- **Museum Collections**
- **Archeological Resources**
- **Views and Vistas**
- **Connections Between the American Flag and National Anthem**

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Passive Recreational Opportunities**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

Primary Themes

- Theme 1: The defense of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812 and the sight of the American flag waving over the fort inspired Francis Scott Key to compose a song that celebrated American resolve and provided the words for the national anthem.
- Theme 2: Fort McHenry's significance is derived from its association with the national anthem and the American flag. It is regarded as the "birthplace" of "The Star-Spangled Banner."
- Theme 3: After the fall of Washington, DC, to the British Army during the War of 1812, the successful defense of Fort McHenry by diverse citizens and soldiers not only saved the city of Baltimore from capture, it boosted American morale, provided a symbol of national resolve, and helped establish the international legitimacy of the United States.

Secondary Themes

- Subtheme 1: An example of First System fortification, Fort McHenry's advantage was its location on Chesapeake Bay, a setting that allowed the defense of the trade and commerce of the port city of Baltimore and, over the years, to play a role in the evolving history of the US military during the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.
- Subtheme 2: During the Civil War, Fort McHenry became a battleground over constitutional rights and federal authority.
- Subtheme 3: Chesapeake Bay has always played an important role in the history of Fort McHenry—influencing the fort's location, construction, and living conditions as a harbor defense, determining military strategy during the War of 1812, encouraging continued use by the military into the 20th century, and now serving as catalyst for discussions of environmental stewardship and resource management policies.
- Subtheme 4: Commemoration is part of Fort McHenry's history as successive generations of Americans expressed their reverence and honored the "The Star Spangled Banner" through memorials, plaques and ceremonies, and tree plantings.

Description

Known as “The Birthplace of the National Anthem,” Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine commemorates the successful defense of Fort McHenry from British attack during the War of 1812. Fort McHenry was built between 1797 and 1805 as part of the country’s first system of forts along the eastern seaboard. International tensions responsible for Fort McHenry’s development ultimately led to the young United States declaring war on Britain in June 1812.

As the War of 1812 raged on, the British launched a maritime invasion of the Chesapeake region in 1814. After burning the Capitol and White House on August 24, 1814, the British set their sights on Baltimore. On the morning of September 13, British warships amassed on the Patapsco and began a bombardment on Fort McHenry that continued throughout the day and into the rainy night lasting for 25 hours. Georgetown lawyer Francis Scott Key watched the shelling of Fort McHenry from the deck of an American truce ship. As light dawned on the foggy morning of September 14, Key spied the fort’s 30-by 42-foot 15-star and 15-stripe US flag, brazenly signaling that Fort McHenry had withstood the fight. As the British withdrew their ships, Francis Scott Key began to record the event in a few poetic lines. The completed poem, which was set to the tune of a familiar English drinking song and took on the title of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” quickly became a patriotic rallying cry among Americans during the remainder of the war and would continue to grow in popularity throughout the United States over the course of the 19th century.

Bolstered by a visit from President William G. Harding in 1922, Fort McHenry was established as a national park under the administration of the War Department in 1925, recognizing the fort’s national significance as the birthplace of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The poem was subsequently by Congress as the United States National Anthem in 1931. In 1933, jurisdiction of Fort McHenry was transferred to the National Park Service under the Department of the Interior. In 1939, the park was officially redesignated as a national monument and historic shrine, the only unit in the national park system bestowed with a dual designation.

The park unit presently occupies approximately 43 acres in a high-density, industrial / residential setting on the eastern tip of Locust Point Peninsula at the confluence of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor and the Upper Patapsco River. The site encompasses the original boundaries of Fort McHenry during the British bombardment of 1814 and additional acreage purchased by the War Department as part of the expansion of the installation in 1836. The park features the historically significant masonry Star Fort, a Civil War-era powder magazine, statues, and the surrounding cultural landscape. Visitors begin in the Visitor and Education Center, completed in 2011, where they can watch a short orientation film, view interpretive exhibits, and visit the gift shop before heading to the Star Fort. Ranger talks and twice-daily flag change programs supplement interpretive exhibits within the Star Fort buildings. Special events including living history, military ceremonies, concerts, and hundreds of educational programs for schools continue to highlight Fort McHenry’s power of place and the site’s evocative connection to “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

