

Star Spangled Banner waves in war, peace

Americans take our national anthem seriously.

"The Star Spangled Banner" dates back to the War of 1812, when survival of the new United States of America was still in doubt.

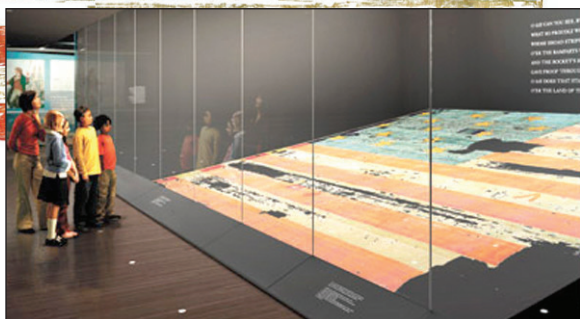
However, it was 119 years before the song became our national anthem.

Our country won its independence from England in 1783. Just 30 years later, the two nations were again at war.

British forces attacked Washington, D.C. They burned down the Capitol building and White House. A fleet of 16 British ships moved up Chesapeake Bay to assault the port of Baltimore, which was protected by Fort McHenry.

Francis Scott Key, a lawyer and poet, was on board one of the British ships with two other Americans. The British feared the men had learned too much about the attack plans. They held them until the battle ended.

The two-day battle started on Sept. 12, 1814. The Americans watched the battle day and night from the deck of the ship.



They caught glimpses of the fort with its huge flag. The flag was 42 feet long, with eight red stripes, seven white stripes and 15 white stars.

During the second night, the British stopped shelling. Keys and his friends could not tell if the fort had fallen. As the sun rose, Key looked to see if the American flag was still flying.

He scribbled the first lines of a poem on the back of an envelope. He finished the "Defense of Fort McHenry" on the way back to shore and in his hotel room.

He set the poem to a popular British melody. It was published by a music shop in Baltimore.

It grew in popularity. By 1861, it ranked with "Yankee Doodle" and "Hail Columbia"

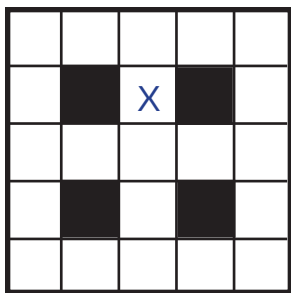
as the music of choice for patriotic occasions.

President Woodrow Wilson ordered its use at military and naval events in 1916, and Congress made it the official national anthem on March 3, 1931.

Sept. 14, the anniversary of that glorious morning in 1814, is National Anthem Day.

The Star Spangled Banner from Fort McHenry was a standard garrison flag with 15 stars and stripes to represent the nation's 15 states at the time. It measured 30 by 42 feet. Several pieces have been cut out of the flag as souvenirs.

The beloved flag has been preserved by the Smithsonian. It is displayed at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.



Cross Five

Place these words in the crossword grid:

Actor, Extra, Flags, Fleet, Stars, Tires



Newspaper in Education activity
Search for words in the newspaper that you can use to write a song for a class anthem. Work as a group to write that song. Sing it for a neighboring class.