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BALTIMORE 200TH ANNIVERSARY 1729-1929



SEPT. 12-13-14-15

... *Program* ...

EXERCISES AT FORT McHENRY

SEPTEMBER 12, 1929

3 to 4 o'clock P. M.—Concert by the Municipal Band,
Nelson C. Kratz, Director.

4 P. M.—Invocation—The Reverend William Rollins Webb, Chaplain of the
Society of the War of 1812 in Maryland.

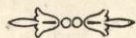
Introduction of Speaker—General Clinton L. Riggs, Chairman

Address: Gen. Charles P. Summerall, Chief of Staff, U. S. A.

Benediction by the Reverend Henry Branch, D.D., Chaplain General
(Emeritus), Society of War of 1812

Parade by Third Battalion of Twelfth Infantry, United States Army,
Major A. M. Patch, Commanding

Baltimore in the War of 1812



By JAMES E. HANCOCK

THE story of Fort McHenry is largely a story of Baltimore, whose people erected a battery at Whetstone Point in 1775 to defend the town against a possible attack by the British, during the Revolutionary War. In 1794, while on the verge of another war with Great Britain, the citizens of Baltimore, at their own expense, began to build the present star bastion fort several hundred feet in the rear of the old batteries. This fortification was designed by Major J. J. Ulrich Rivardi, and was named Fort McHenry, in honor of James McHenry, of Baltimore, who had been secretary to General Washington during the Revolution and who served as Secretary of War from 1796 to 1800. It was formally ceded by the General Assembly of Maryland to the United States Government, January 30th, 1816, sixteen months after its dramatic bombardment by the British Fleet.

The quarter of a century that preceded the War of 1812-14 had been a period of social, political and economic changes. On the other side of the Atlantic, the French Revolution had occurred and this had been followed by the Napoleonic Wars. Ours was an agricultural country and our merchants were demanding transportation to supply the needs of the nations of Europe for food, and because of her shipping interests, Baltimore had rapidly grown to be the third city of commercial importance in the Union.

Jefferson's Embargo Act and his policy of non-aggression had proven a boomerang to American commerce and the British seemed determined either to make American shipping tributary to her interests or keep it off the high seas by Orders of Council. Foodstuffs and supplies frequently accumulated on our wharves and were spoiled before they could be shipped. The credit of our merchants was seriously affected and when the charter of the Bank of the United States was permitted to lapse in 1811, without a substitute being provided for it, American affairs were thoroughly demoralized. The United States Government was compelled to protect itself against the tyrannies of Great Britain by declaring war on June 18th, 1812, and many of the swift ships for which Baltimore was noted were privately armed and sent out to help our little navy of seven ships to fight the enemy. Because of this activity Baltimore was a marked city and the British blockaded the Chesapeake early in the war. We knew that we would be attacked, and realizing that little support could be looked for from the Federal Government, our militia was ordered out for training, and the City Council of Baltimore appropriated \$20,000 while the citizens of Baltimore subscribed \$500,000 and required every able bodied man to report with pickaxes, shovels and wheelbarrows to build the earthworks around the city.

Several times in 1813, the British fleet appeared in the Patapsco prepared to make an attack on Baltimore, but our growing defenses persuaded them that it was not possible to carry the city without a supporting army. Early in the summer of 1814, their reinforced fleet, accompanied by Wellington's Invincibles appeared in the Chesapeake and forcing Barney up the Patuxent, they compelled him to burn his fleet of Baltimore built gun boats. Here the British landed and followed him to Bladensburg, where the Americans were defeated. Washington was taken, and the Capitol and other public buildings were burned. The British then returned to their ships and sailed for Baltimore, landing their troops at North Point on the morning of September 12th, while their fleet came up the Patapsco, to bombard Fort McHenry and the Lazaretto at the mouth of the harbor. Two years of preparation, however, had helped us to organize our defenses and our citizen soldiers went out and met the enemy near the head of Bear Creek, where their commander, General Ross, was killed and their advance was checked. Their fleet, which had moved up the river and taken its position began the bombardment of Fort McHenry and our troops who had fought at the battle of North Point, fell back to protect their established defenses. Fort McHenry was bombarded until 7 o'clock on the morning of the 14th, when the British, not having carried a single position, stopped firing and dropped down the river, and their army returned to their transports. During this bombardment, Francis Scott Key, who had been detained by the British under a flag of truce, witnessed the terrific fire against the fort, and was inspired to write the "Star Spangled Banner" at the dawn of September 14th, when his anxiety was relieved by seeing that "our flag was still there."

The campaigns against Canada had been dismal failures. Early in 1811, the finances of the government had collapsed and every bank in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, the District of Columbia and Virginia, had been compelled to suspend specie payment. Business had become demoralized, credits had been ruined, and New England was planning to secede from the Union, while our border states were disgruntled at their lack of defense.

The success of the Baltimore privateers and the defeat of the British at North Point and Fort McHenry, undoubtedly saved the Union at a dark hour of national peril and hastened the signing of the Treaty of Ghent December 24th, 1814. The war of 1812-14 made us a more united people than we had been before and by establishing a respect for our nationality among the governments of the world, it enabled the succeeding administration to proclaim the "Monroe Doctrine" and forcefully tell the European Powers that they could no longer exploit the western hemisphere.



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