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GENERAL SOCIETY OF THE WAR OF 1812

FOUNDED SEPTEMBER 14, 1814



President General
Hon. Herbert K. Zearfoss
532 Candace Lane
Villanova, PA 19085-1702

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16 January 1998

Dear Compatriot,

As you are aware, the Smithsonian Institution is in the process of restoring the 30' x 42' Star Spangled Banner which flew over Fort McHenry on September 12-14, 1814 that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the song that later become our National Anthem.

Our society is taking the lead in assisting in the restoration of this great national treasure. Our ancestors won the war and this flag played a major part of the history of that conflict.

To support this worthy project please send whatever amount you feel you can afford. All donations are tax deductible. Please fill out the form below and return with your check in the envelope provided to Treasurer General Wallace G. Taylor, 34 Londsdale Lane, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania 19348-2045. Checks should be made out to the **Society of the War of 1812** and annotated in the lower corner "*Star Spangled Banner Project*".

Thank you very much for your help on this project.

Very truly yours,

To the Society of the War of 1812

Please accept \$ _____ as my tax exempt donation to assist in the restoration of the Star Spangled Banner.

Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
State Society _____

JAN 30 1998

Time has taken toll on star-spangled banner

WASHINGTON (AP) — Time and pollution are doing what the British could not: They're slowly destroying the huge red, white and blue flag that inspired *The Star-Spangled Banner* back in 1814.

Preserving the banner, which hangs in the Museum of American History on the Mall, could cost up to \$15 million. And experts, anxious to make the right moves as they restore the flag, haven't decided how to proceed.

"I think it's our duty to make it available to people for as long as we can," said Associate Museum Director Ron Becker, in charge of saving the flag.

Visitors now see the flag as they enter the museum's main door. It hangs from the ceiling, stretching 40 feet down a wall — the size of a four-story building.

The banner had to be big for composer Francis Scott Key to spot it from the deck of a small storm-tossed sloop, rolling in the Patapsco River 9 miles away, in the dawn's early light of Sept. 14, 1814. Key got help from "bombs bursting in air" — a new invention of the time.

The flag still flew from its staff after an all-night British naval bombardment of Baltimore's Fort McHenry during the War of 1812, signifying the fort remained in U.S. hands.

Now, unless the flag is taken down and subjected to extended high-tech preservation, it may crumble.

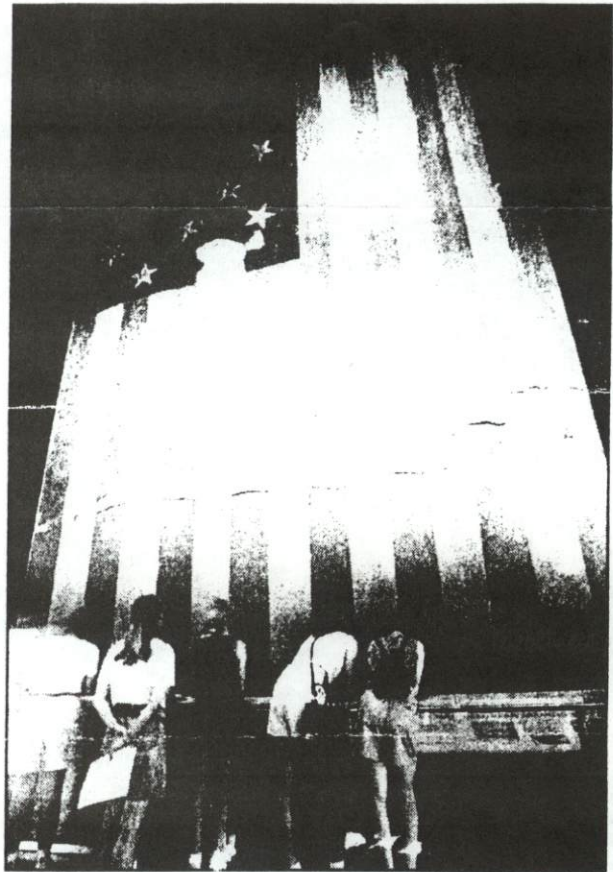
The flag's natural fibers have been inevitably damaged by air pollution and decay, said Suzanne Thomasen-Krauss, the museum's authority on textiles. The 15 stripes and blue field are wool, and the stars — 2 feet across, point to point — are cotton. Sewn with linen thread, the flag had cost \$405.90 by the time Baltimore widow Mary Young Pickersgill and her 13-year-old daughter, Caroline, finished it a month before the attack.

The flag used to have a huge plain cloth hung over it, raised every hour so visitors could see it as the national anthem played. But conservationists decided the cloth gave little protection from visitors' breath and fibers in the atmosphere, so the flag is now on permanent display.

The star-spangled banner also got a light vacuuming in 1982, but nothing like the effort now planned, Thomasen-Krauss said.

"We used a vacuum with very low suction, so as not to remove any of the original fiber," she said. "It just took off the same light dust you'd find on your furniture."

In November, Becker assembled about 50 conservators who met for two days, then broke up into groups. Each deals with a part of the problem — how to take down the flag without damage, how to build a case for it, how to control the environment inside.



Associated Press

Museum of American History on the Mall visitors are dwarfed by the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key in 1814.

Many problems still need discussion.

It's uncertain just how much the flag weighs. Becker estimated 125 to 175 pounds.

Building a case would require about 7 tons of glass. Experts could decide glass is not the right material because it scratches too easily.

Becker won't estimate how long the job will take but said he will try to keep the banner visible as work continues. By comparison, it took museum conservators more than a year to restore "Old Glory," a flag only 17 feet long.

BOOM from 1A

JAN 30 1998