



In June of 1813, Major George Armistead took command of Fort McHenry, the garrison which guarded the water entry to Baltimore, Maryland. This flag, one of two which he commissioned, measures 30 by 42 feet and was intended to fly over the fort on a flagpole about ninety feet high.

This garrison flag - known today as THE Star-Spangled Banner - has fifteen stripes and fifteen stars (unlike the modern American flag which has thirteen). Why is that? According to the Smithsonian's web site (for the National Museum of American History):

The first Flag Act, adopted on June 14, 1777, created the original United States flag of thirteen stars and thirteen stripes. The Star-Spangled Banner has fifteen stars and fifteen stripes as provided for in the second Flag Act approved by Congress on January 13, 1794.

The additional stars and stripes represent Vermont (1791) and Kentucky (1792) joining the Union. (The third Flag Act, passed on April 4, 1818, reduced the number of stripes back to thirteen to honor the original thirteen colonies and provided for one star for each state — a new star to be added to the flag on the Fourth of July following the admission of each new state.)

After Armistead's successful defense of Fort McHenry, the garrison flag remained with the Armistead family—as their private property—for ninety years. Then it was passed to the American people.

The old-and-tattered flag, depicted in this image, is the very flag which inspired Francis Scott Key as he wrote the poem which would become America's national anthem. Today it is maintained (and preserved) by the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

The huge flag, whose stars measure two feet from point to point, is still a sight to see. Because of its age and condition, it recently underwent an extensive restoration.

It is now one of America's most-significant national treasures.

Click on the image for a closer view.

Credits:

Photo online, courtesy National Museum of American History.

Quoted passage, from [Encyclopedia Smithsonian](#).

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Star-Spangled Banner and Francis Scott Key

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