

History of Fort McHenry

Fort McHenry's history began in 1776 during the Revolutionary War. The people of Baltimore feared an attack by the British, and wanted to build a fort for protection. Anticipating an attack at any time, a fort of earthen mounds was constructed quickly. Originally, it was called Fort Whetstone, because of its location on Whetstone Point.

Whetstone Point was an excellent location for a fort for two reasons. It was located far enough from Baltimore to provide protection without endangering the city, and the area was a peninsula — a body of land surrounded on three sides by water. Constructing the fort on this site meant that enemy ships, sailing into Baltimore, would have to pass the fort first.

The Revolutionary War ended without an attack on Baltimore, but improvements to the fort continued. In 1798, A French engineer was directed by the Secretary of War to draw plans for a new fort on Whetstone Point. These plans were expensive, and it was difficult for the people of Baltimore to raise money for construction. However, James McHenry, a well-known politician, was instrumental in raising funds for the new fort. The fort was renamed "Fort McHenry" in his honor.

Fort McHenry became famous when the British tried to attack Baltimore during the War of 1812. When the bombardment began on September 13, 1814, there were 1,000 soldiers defending the fort. Some were federal soldiers who were stationed at

Fort McHenry all the time. Many were volunteers from the city of Baltimore. Their commanding officer was Major George Armistead. For 25 hours, the British bombarded Fort McHenry, but the fort's artillery fire kept the British away. Baltimore was saved.

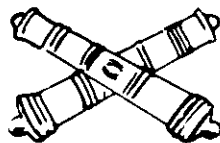
In the 1860's the United States was torn apart by the Civil War. Union troops were stationed at Fort McHenry to help keep Baltimore out of the hands of those who would have Maryland join the southern cause. The fort's guns were turned toward the city. Fort McHenry was used as a prison where political prisoners suspected of being Confederate sympathizers were held, often without trial. Many Confederate soldiers were imprisoned at the fort as well.

In 1917 during the first World War, General Hospital No. 2 was established at Fort McHenry by the War Department. It was the largest military hospital in the country with over 100 temporary buildings to accommodate wounded American soldiers returning from the war in Europe.

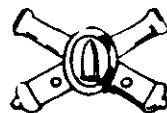
When the war ended, the need for the hospital slowly diminished, and in 1925 the temporary buildings were torn down. Fort McHenry became a national park which today is administered by the National Park Service as the country's only National Monument and Historic Shrine. Exhibits around the fort will help you visualize life at Fort McHenry during the various stages of its history.



*3rd Artillery
War of 1812*



*Civil War
Artillery*



*Coast
Artillery
(early 1900's)*



*Medical
Corps
WWI*



*National
Park
Service*

Insignia of Organizations Stationed at Fort McHenry During Its History

