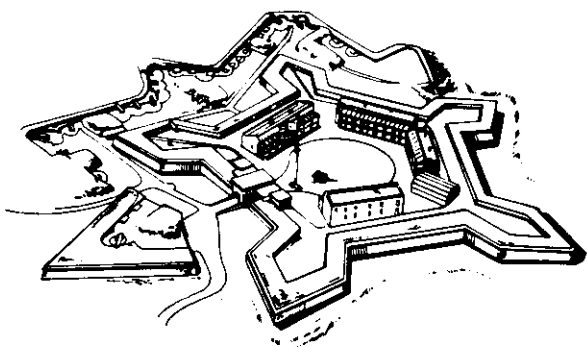


## The Star Fort



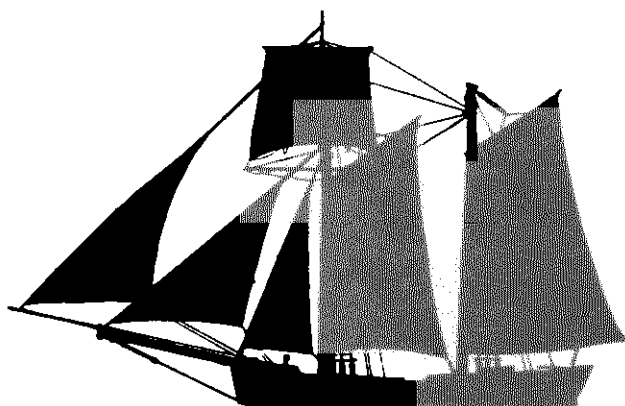
Fort M'Henry was constructed between 1799 and 1802. It was built in the shape of a five-pointed star which was a popular design during that period. The star shape served an important function. Each point of the star was visible from the point on either side; and every area of land surrounding the fort could be covered with as few as five men.

The wall of Fort M'Henry and the buildings within were constructed of brick. There were four barracks to house the garrison consisting of the Commanding Officers' Quarters, Junior Officers' Quarters, and two buildings for the enlisted men. A guardhouse stood next to the Commanding Officer's barracks. Here, soldiers of the Fort M'Henry Guard lived and worked; sometimes unruly soldiers were confined in the guardrooms. The Powder Magazine, where the gunpowder was stored, stood between the Commanding Officer's Quarters and the Junior Officers' Quarters. The magazine was of solid enough construction to protect the gunpowder from sparks, fire and explosion.

During the 1830's, major improvements were made to the fort. Second stories were added to the barracks, and two new guardhouses were built on each side of the Sally Port, to replace the two earlier ones.

While you are visiting the fort, try to imagine how it looked during its early years.

## Why Baltimore?



In the early 1800's, Baltimore was a fast growing harbor city. The population was close to 50,000. Many of the men worked in the city at skilled jobs such as sailmakers, ironworkers, shipwrights and merchants. Successful shipbuilding and the city's central location for trade helped to make Baltimore an important international seaport.

Meanwhile, France and Great Britain, at war with one another, had set up economic blockades to keep each other from getting important supplies. As a neutral carrier for both countries, America's merchant ships sometimes were caught in the blockades, and all of the goods would be confiscated by one or the other of the two countries. In addition, the British frequently captured American seamen and forced them to serve in the Royal Navy. Also, the Americans thought the British were encouraging the Indians in the West to attack frontier settlements. Shortly, the Americans became so angry with the way they were being treated that the United States declared war on Great Britain in June 1812 to protect "free trade and sailors' rights," and American rights on land.

When news of the Declaration of War reached Baltimore, some shipowners began turning their vessels into privateers. These privately owned ships were given permission from the government to capture British merchant ships. Soon, Baltimore was described as "a nest of pirates," and the British were determined to put an end to privateering.

Expecting a British attack, the people of Baltimore strengthened the city's defenses at Fort M'Henry.