# Fort McHenry

NATIONAL MONUMENT AND HISTORIC SHRINE • MARYLAND

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## ADMINISTRATION

Fort McHenry is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Baltimore, Md. 21230, is in immediate charge.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

*O say can you see, ~~through~~ by the dawn's early light,*
*What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,*
*Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight*
*O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?*

The present site of Fort McHenry was recognized early in the Revolutionary War as a strategic location for military defenses to protect the water approaches to Baltimore. Fort Whetstone, a temporary fortification with exterior batteries, was constructed here in 1776 and its presence deterred British cruisers operating in Chesapeake Bay from molesting the city.

In the 1790's when war with either England or France seemed likely, it was decided that Baltimore was sufficiently important to merit a more permanent defense. The Federal Government and the citizens of Baltimore both contributed funds for this purpose. The outer batteries were rebuilt and strengthened and a new fort was constructed, called Fort McHenry in honor of James McHenry of Baltimore, sometime secretary to George Washington during the Revolution and U.S. Secretary of War from 1796 to 1800. The new star-shaped fort was replete with bastions, batteries, magazines, and barracks.

Until the War of 1812, life at Fort McHenry was routine and uneventful. In 1814 British troops, fresh from the capture and burning of Washington, appeared at the mouth of the Patapsco River. A joint land and naval attack on Baltimore was planned and on September 12 a landing was made at North Point. Encountering only moderate resistance, the British forces advanced to within 2 miles of the city, where they awaited the arrival of the fleet before attempting to storm Baltimore's defenses.

At dawn on September 13, a British fleet of 16 war ships anchored about 2 miles below Fort McHenry and commenced a heavy bombardment of this key defense work. During the next 25 hours, between 1,500 and 1,800 bombs, rockets, and shells were fired by the British but they inflicted only moderate damage to the fort. Casualties also were low—4 men killed, 24 wounded. Convinced that Fort McHenry could not be taken, the British cancelled their attack on Baltimore and withdrew their forces. The siege was over and the city was saved.

Fort McHenry never again came under enemy fire, although it continued to function as an active military post for the next 100 years. During the Civil War the fort was used by the Federal Government as a prison camp for captured Confederate soldiers. From 1917 until 1923, a U.S. Army General Hospital was located here to serve returning veterans of World War I. In 1925 Congress made Fort McHenry a national park; later it was redesignated a national monument and historic shrine.

## "THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER"

Fort McHenry and our national anthem will be forever associated in the minds of Americans. "The Star Spangled Banner" is actually an account of the emotions felt by Francis Scott Key as he witnessed the September 13-14, 1814, attack on Fort McHenry. Key, who had come to Baltimore to secure the release of a friend seized by the British, remained on the deck of an American truce ship throughout the bombardment, anxiously watching the fort and reassured by the sight of its large flag. At night, when the flag was no longer visible, he knew that his countrymen still held the fort so long as the British continued to fire rockets and bombs. There were several lulls in the bombardment, and for Key these were moments of suspense and anxiety. At dawn, he again saw the flag—still waving defiantly over the ramparts. Even as the British fleet prepared to leave, Key began writing "The Star Spangled Banner" to express what he felt.

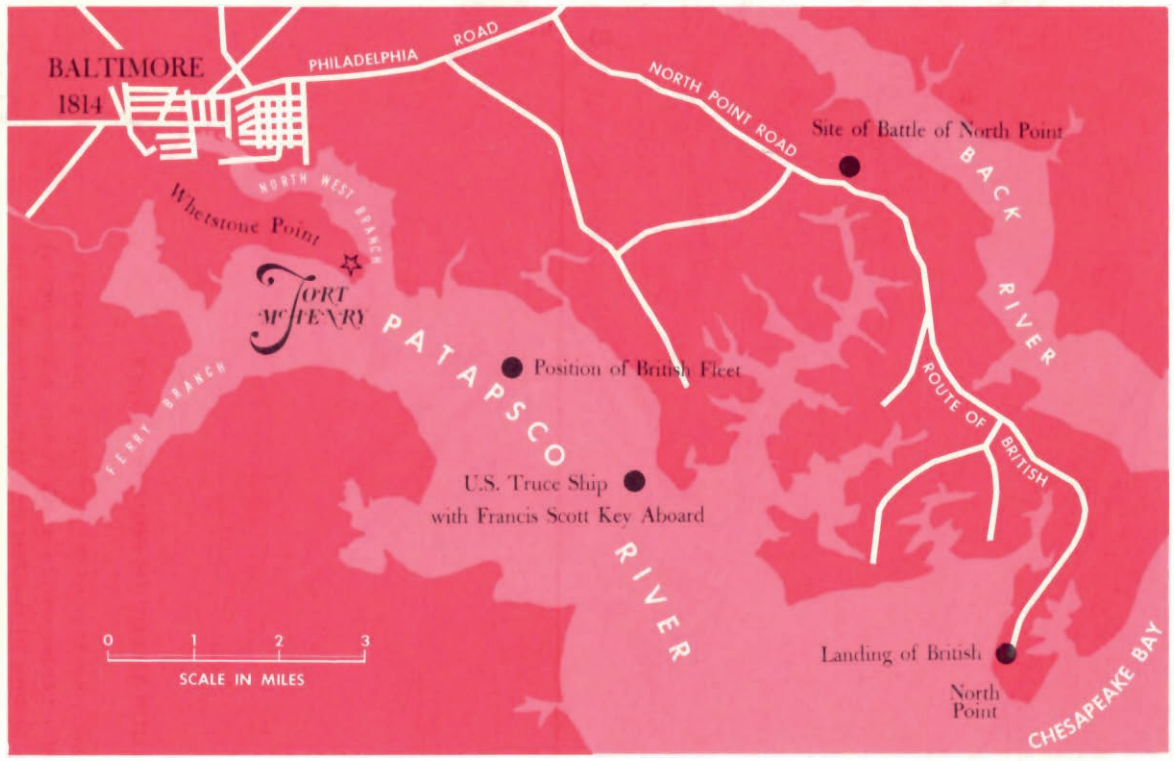
On the day following Key's return to Baltimore, printed copies of his poem were widely circulated through the city. Soon the poem was being sung to the music of an English song, "To Anacreon in Heaven." The song increased so much in popularity that in 1931 Congress declared it our national anthem.

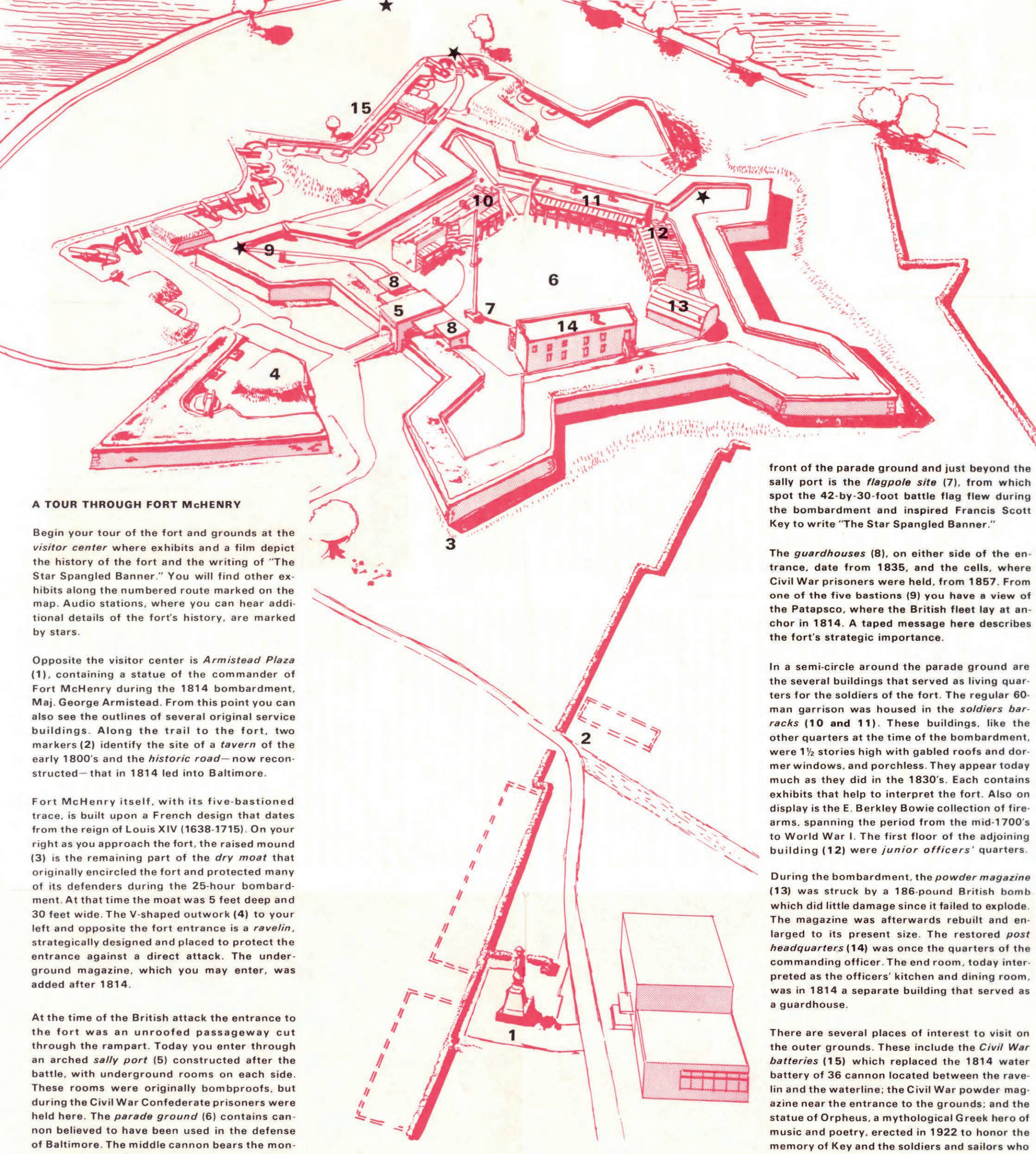
## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine is 3 miles from the center of Baltimore, and is readily accessible over East Fort Avenue, which intersects Md. 2.

The fort is open 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. From mid-June through Labor Day, the visiting hours are from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Groups receive special services if advance arrangements are made with the superintendent.

You can make your visit safe and enjoyable by observing commonsense rules of safety. Climbing on the cannons, monuments, and trees, venturing too close to the edge of the fort walls, and walking on the seawall are not allowed. Please help preserve all natural and historical features.






## A TOUR THROUGH FORT McHENRY

Begin your tour of the fort and grounds at the *visitor center* where exhibits and a film depict the history of the fort and the writing of "The Star Spangled Banner." You will find other exhibits along the numbered route marked on the map. Audio stations, where you can hear additional details of the fort's history, are marked by stars.

Opposite the visitor center is *Armistead Plaza* (1), containing a statue of the commander of Fort McHenry during the 1814 bombardment, Maj. George Armistead. From this point you can also see the outlines of several original service buildings. Along the trail to the fort, two markers (2) identify the site of a *tavern* of the early 1800's and the *historic road*—now reconstructed—that in 1814 led into Baltimore.

Fort McHenry itself, with its five-bastioned trace, is built upon a French design that dates from the reign of Louis XIV (1638-1715). On your right as you approach the fort, the raised mound (3) is the remaining part of the *dry moat* that originally encircled the fort and protected many of its defenders during the 25-hour bombardment. At that time the moat was 5 feet deep and 30 feet wide. The V-shaped outwork (4) to your left and opposite the fort entrance is a *ravelin*, strategically designed and placed to protect the entrance against a direct attack. The underground magazine, which you may enter, was added after 1814.

At the time of the British attack the entrance to the fort was an unroofed passageway cut through the rampart. Today you enter through an arched *sally port* (5) constructed after the battle, with underground rooms on each side. These rooms were originally bombproofs, but during the Civil War Confederate prisoners were held here. The *parade ground* (6) contains cannon believed to have been used in the defense of Baltimore. The middle cannon bears the monogram of King George III of England. At the front of the parade ground and just beyond the sally port is the *flagpole site* (7), from which spot the 42-by-30-foot battle flag flew during the bombardment and inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star Spangled Banner."

The *guardhouses* (8), on either side of the entrance, date from 1835, and the cells, where Civil War prisoners were held, from 1857. From one of the five bastions (9) you have a view of the Patapsco, where the British fleet lay at anchor in 1814. A taped message here describes the fort's strategic importance.

In a semi-circle around the parade ground are the several buildings that served as living quarters for the soldiers of the fort. The regular 60-man garrison was housed in the *soldiers barracks* (10 and 11). These buildings, like the other quarters at the time of the bombardment, were 1½ stories high with gabled roofs and dormer windows, and porchless. They appear today much as they did in the 1830's. Each contains exhibits that help to interpret the fort. Also on display is the E. Berkley Bowie collection of firearms, spanning the period from the mid-1700's to World War I. The first floor of the adjoining building (12) were *junior officers'* quarters.

During the bombardment, the *powder magazine* (13) was struck by a 186-pound British bomb which did little damage since it failed to explode. The magazine was afterwards rebuilt and enlarged to its present size. The restored *post headquarters* (14) was once the quarters of the commanding officer. The end room, today interpreted as the officers' kitchen and dining room, was in 1814 a separate building that served as a guardhouse.

There are several places of interest to visit on the outer grounds. These include the *Civil War batteries* (15) which replaced the 1814 water battery of 36 cannon located between the ravelin and the waterline; the Civil War powder magazine near the entrance to the grounds; and the statue of Orpheus, a mythological Greek hero of music and poetry, erected in 1922 to honor the memory of Key and the soldiers and sailors who participated in the 1814 defense of Baltimore.