



O Say Can You See?

BY RICH WARREN

Yes, you can! Baltimore is celebrating 200 years of the national anthem

IT'S A STORY we all learned in school — how Francis Scott Key, detained on a British warship, witnessed the all-night bombardment of Fort McHenry overlooking Baltimore's harbor during the War of 1812. In the morning, "by the dawn's early light," he saw our nation's flag still flying over the fort and knew that we had prevailed. He was so moved he took out pen and paper and composed a poem, which was eventually set to music and in 1931 became our national anthem.

Anyone who's seen that original Star Spangled Banner in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History knows that it's enormous — 30 feet by 42 feet. But did you know that it had been pur-



On days when weather conditions are right, an enormous flag matching the size of the original Star Spangled Banner still flies over Fort McHenry.

posefully made that large for the purpose of taunting the British? The people of Baltimore, having seen the glow of Washington burning in the night sky just a few weeks earlier, knew that the British would be coming for them soon. So they'd had plenty of time to prepare and to have an extra-special flag made.

And did you know the 200th anniversary of that battle — and of America's most famous flag — is taking place in September? Baltimore is throwing a big party, and you're invited (see our sidebar, next page). But even if you can't travel there next month, there are enough flag-related exhibits all year round to give a Star Spangled Banner theme to any visit to what's now called "Charm City." Here's our guide to best bets.

• **The Star-Spangled Banner Flag House** — This was the home of Mary Pickersgill, a flag maker who was given the commission to put together the huge flag that Key saw signalling the American victory. For six solid weeks, from dawn until late at night, Pickersgill, her daughter, three nieces and an indentured servant stitched together the flag using 400 yards of bunting that ironically had come from Great Britain. The house contains period furniture and oftentimes features costumed characters willing to share their stories. A museum in the rear contains exhibits and an interesting film.

• **The Maryland Historical Society** — Here, once an hour for just 10 short minutes, the lights dim, a screen slides back, and you can see Key's actual handwritten composition of the poem he himself called "The Defence of Fort M'Henry." You may find it interesting that there are three more stanzas in addition to the one we all sing. And note Key's editorial choices. He originally wrote "through," not "by," the dawn's early light, thought better, and crossed it out. Elsewhere in this museum, there's an exhibit called "In Full Glory Reflected" that focuses on Maryland during the War of 1812.

• **The National Anthem Tour by Land and Sea** — Take a 60-minute boat ride in Baltimore's harbor that goes past Fort McHenry and other Baltimore highlights such as the iconic "Domino Sugar" sign. A recorded narration points out all the sights in addition to telling the story of the part Baltimore played in the War of 1812. A separate 75-minute trolley tour takes in the highlights on land, or these tours can be combined for a total immersion experience.

• **Maryland Science Center** — An IMAX film entitled *Star-Spangled Banner: Anthem of Liberty* allows you to visualize how intense Fort McHenry's bombardment really was, as well as the burning of Washington. Afterwards, stroll through the huge dinosaur exhibits!

• **The Babe Ruth Birthplace Museum** — In this tiny house where the "Babe" was born, you can see not only displays featuring his career but also a film entitled *O Say Can You See: The Star Spangled Banner in Sports* that shows the beginnings of the national anthem being played at sporting events, dating all the way back to the first game of the 1918 World Series.

• **Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture** — Because Mary Pickersgill's indentured servant was African American, this museum has mounted a special exhibit in her honor. Entitled "For Whom It Stands: The Flag and the American People," it focuses on



Fife and drum corps presentations in period dress are among the living history presentations taking place at Fort McHenry during August. (Photos courtesy of Tim Ervin)

images of the American flag in popular art through the decades, some of them reverent, others much less so. Remember Bicentennial beer cans?

• **American Visionary Art Museum** — This museum focusing on folk and primitive art is amazing in itself (think robots made out of car parts and toasters or a Marie Antoinette "Let Them Eat Cake" mannequin with actual cakes erupting out). (Continued on page 32)



Fort McHenry

Plan for a long visit here, where even on an ordinary day, you can help participate (weather permitting) in raising an enormous flag matching the size of the original Star Spangled Banner. Other ranger programs that take place daily include interactive programs that focus on Francis Scott Key, the Battle of Baltimore and an early-evening flag lowering ceremony. On weekends, you might encounter costumed characters taking the roles of Key, Mary Pickersgill (who made the flag) and both British and American soldiers who took part in the battle.

If you go in August, you will see special "Living History" programs that take place Wednesdays through Sundays. These include actual cannon firings, a fife and drum corps and programs such as "Citizens Stand" that focus on flag making, 1814 fashions and life on the home front. A children's program allows those young at heart to drill with wooden muskets or cutlasses, help stitch a flag, or try on replicas of historic outfits. At our press time, it was uncertain whether these programs would continue in September.

Also, don't miss the fascinating museum at the Visitor Center, and be sure to stay for the film. When it's over, the screen is raised to reveal a breathtaking view of Fort McHenry, the flag gloriously waving above it.



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of it), but the connection to the national anthem is outside on the sidewalk where, for 520 feet, a mural has been painted with visually creative patriotic interpretations.

• **The Inner Harbor** — OK, we realize you may want to do things in Baltimore other than pay homage to the national anthem. The Inner Harbor is where you'll find an amazing number of tourist attractions clustered in one place — the National

Aquarium, historic ships like the U.S.S. *Constellation*, the Maryland Science Center and even a Ripley's Believe It or Not museum. Take the convenient water taxi around the harbor or loll around in dragon-shaped paddle boats. It's just a short walk to Camden Yards, and if there's not a ball game going on, stop in at the adjacent Sports Legends Museum. Don't miss Geppi's Entertainment Museum upstairs for a stroll down memory lane of popular culture through the decades. ☞

For more information on Baltimore in general and Star Spangled Banner attractions in particular, call 800-343-3468 or visit www.baltimore.org.



Star-Spangled Spectacular

The bicentennial observance of the Battle of Baltimore takes place Sept. 10 through 16 and will feature tall ships, naval vessels and the U.S. Navy Blue Angels arriving in the city's Inner Harbor for a week of special events, which include patriotic concerts, baseball games and street festivals featuring family fun zones and Chesapeake Bay food and beverages. There will be a spectacular fireworks display the night of Sept. 13, and on Sept. 14, the actual bicentennial of the national anthem's composition, a special ceremony and flag raising will take place at Fort McHenry.

For more information, call 800-266-5699 or visit www.starspangled200.com.

A side trip to Annapolis

If you've got time for a very short road trip out of Baltimore, head to Maryland's capital city, Annapolis, a charming, compact and quite walkable city with a skyline of 18th-century domes and church spires, all situated on a gorgeous harbor filled to the brim with both sailboats and large pleasure boats. Plus, there are a number of sites associated with both Francis Scott Key and also — surprisingly — a few Ohio connections.

Key graduated from St. John's College in Annapolis, still a shady and lovely liberal arts campus. Additionally, you can see the house where he got married, the remarkable Chase-Lloyd House (Annapolis has the largest collection of Georgian brick homes in the country) and the church where he worshipped, St. Anne's, the spire of which is one of the principal orienting points in the town. The other is the Maryland State House, the oldest statehouse in

