

Letter from Eben Appleton to Charles Walcott, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1912.

New York
December 12th, 1912

Mr. Charles Walcott, Secty
Smithsonian Institute
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

If agreeable to you and the authorities in charge of the National Museum, I shall be very glad to present to that Institution that flag owned by me, and now in possession of the Museum as a loan from me, and known as the Star-Spangled Banner.

It has always been my intention to present the flag during my life time to that Institution in the country where it could be conveniently seen by the public, and where it would be well cared for, and the advantages and the appropriateness of the National Museum are so obvious, as to render consideration of any other place unnecessary.

Whilst realizing that the poem of Mr. Key is the one thing which renders this flag of more than ordinary interest, it is only right to appreciate the fact that there was a cause for his inspiration. Being detained temporarily on board a British Man of War, he witnessed the bombardment of Fort McHenry, and was inspired by that dramatic scene to give to the Nation his beautiful lines. I must ask therefore, as a condition of this gift, and injustice to the Commandant of the Fort, and the brave men under him, that their share in the inspiration of this poem be embodied in the inscription to be placed in the case containing this flag. I have had forwarded to me copies of the inscriptions contained in the case at present, and do not think they could be improved upon, but as I desire now to make a specific choice, will say that the following is the one which I prefer, and should like to be assured by you will be the official marking--

The Star Spangled Banner

Garrison Flag of Fort McHenry, Baltimore, during the bombardment of the Fort by the British Sept. 13-14, 1814, when it was gallantly and successfully [sic.] defended by colonel George Armistead, and the brave men under him. Francis Scott Key, detained with the British Fleet, had eagerly watched for this Flag during the fight, and as he saw it still waving over the fort on the morning of September 14th he was inspired to write the verses of the "Star Spangled Banner."

Presented to the National Museum, Washington, D.C., by Mr. Eben Appleton, of New York, Grandson of Col. George Armistead.

The fact of my preferring the above as the official inscription does not imply that I would like the others removed from the case. Thanking you for the good care you have taken of the flag during the past few years, and for the beautiful manner in which it has been displayed, and awaiting the pleasure of your reply, I beg to remain.

Very truly yours,

Eben Appleton

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