



*Honor The Past – Build The Future*

**The American Flag Foundation, Inc.**

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**Annual Pause for the Pledge of Allegiance Flag Day USA June 14, 7:00 p.m. EDT**

**The Living American Flag in Baltimore - Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine**

**Symbolic.....You Bet!  
Spine-tingling Sight.....Absolutely!  
Beautiful.....Without A Doubt!**

Of all the thrills one can experience in this great country of ours, the sight of Old Glory waving in the breeze can hardly be surpassed. The sight of it can stir a memory, evoke a tear, or cause one to step more lively. This symbol of our country has been displayed and depicted in many ways, but none more enthusiastically than when formed by 3,000 to 5,000 school children. Our Flag then waves and ripples in the breeze – a living, breathing, pulsating entity.



At the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, located in Baltimore, Maryland, a “Human Flag” first lived and breathed on Defender’s Day, September 12, 1914. That date was the one-hundredth anniversary commemorating the War of 1812’s successful defense of Baltimore from the British. The date also honored the anniversary of Francis Scott Key’s penning the words to what is now our National Anthem. The City of Baltimore, then led by Mayor James H. Preston, had planned a week-long extravaganza in observance of the Battle of North Point and the bombardment of Fort McHenry in Baltimore’s harbor. The event in September of 1914 featured 6500 local school children who, cloaked in red, white and blue, formed a giant replica of the Flag, which was appropriately named, “The Wonderful Human Flag.” Each child wore a hooded fingertip length red, white or blue mackinaw-type jacket. As the children took their places, they were also given a handkerchief of matching color so that it would be waved creating a rippling effect. After speeches by Mayor Preston, United States Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan (President Wilson’s official representative), and others, the children rose to their feet and sang patriotic hymns accompanied by a 250-piece band.

The Human Flag was not performed again until 1983. In that year, the newly created National Flag Day Foundation, currently named The American Flag Foundation, Inc., decided to sponsor an annual re-enactment of this patriotic experience. The genesis of the group came about in 1980 with a group of interested Star Spangled Banner Flag House board members. On December 9, 1982, three Baltimore businessmen, Mr. Herbert E. Witz, Mr. Louis V. Koerber, and Mr. Richard M. Patterson, with a vision and a dream, chartered the Foundation. The American Flag Foundation, Inc. believes that sharing patriotic experiences like the Living American Flag and the annual National Pause for the Pledge of Allegiance give students a critical understanding of the history of our Flag and its importance to all Americans.

Through 2008, each year in May, area school children gathered at Fort McHenry to create their own “Living American Flag.” Most students came from the third, fourth, and fifth grades to create a living scene from their American history lessons. They came not only from Baltimore City Public Schools, but also from the surrounding county public systems, private, parochial and home schools.

As school bus transportation was required for the children, entertainment was provided as approximately 90 yellow buses arrived throughout the morning. Entertainment was provided by local school groups performing

The Living American Flag in Baltimore - Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine  
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synchronized drills, choral arrangements and dramatic presentations. Professional entertainment ranged from a bagpiper and military bands to choral groups.

Historic characters, portrayed by actors and impersonators, interacted with the students. Background information about each character was available on our website [www.americanflagfoundation.org](http://www.americanflagfoundation.org) for attending schools and students to learn important facts about each character. Both students and impersonators found the experience very rewarding. Historic characters have included: Francis Scott Key and his wife; Abraham Lincoln; Mary Pickersgill; Dolley Madison; Francis Bellamy; Harriet Tubman; Uncle Sam; Benjamin Banneker; Bonnie Fairbanks; George Washington; Benjamin Franklin; 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Soldier; General George Meade; Fort McHenry Seaman; and Clara Barton. Buffalo soldiers set up an encampment complete with tents, cooking facilities, and costumed characters.

The opening of the Fort for teacher and/or parent-led structured tours was later added to the program and was accessible prior to the filling of the "Flag grid," a grid marked out on the grassy slope in front of Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. As children entered the grid, they were handed a large red, white, or blue placard, coordinated with their assigned station in the grid. The children ultimately held the cards over their heads to create the Flag image. Special students were selected to hold the stars in the blue field. Together, the students created the fifteen-stripe, fifteen-star Star Spangled Banner Flag that flies over Fort McHenry and inspired Francis Scott Key to pen our national anthem years ago.

A solemn high point of the Living American Flag program was the ceremonial passing of the "Baton of Patriotism," in early years done by a participant of the first Living American Flag, the 1914 Human Flag. Each year, one student was selected from among that year's group of Philip F. Haxel Sr. Patriotism Honor Roll Essay contest participants to represent all of the students and receive the red, white, and blue-beribboned Baton of Patriotism. This was indeed a significant moment for each of the generations represented.

All this was prior to the big moment when the Flag was formed. Arms were raised skyward holding their colored placard overhead, and thus, Old Glory appeared! It was a spectacular sight! It was then that the Living American Flag was photographed from the air to be shown on televised news programs and on the front page of the local newspaper. The children were thrilled to see what they had created and could usually identify their position in the Flag.

Over one hundred volunteers from groups such as the Baltimore Rotary Club, the Masonic Order, the Telephone Pioneers, the Knights of Columbus, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, and the Civil Air Patrol generously donated their time and energy to participate in this event each year.

The Philip F. Haxel, Sr. Patriotism Honor Roll was established in 1999 to increase and enhance patriotism in America. The award was created to honor Mr. Philip F. Haxel, Sr., then Chairman of the F. W. Haxel Flag Company. Mr. Haxel, since deceased, was a community leader who exhibited patriotism by generously donating Flags to the community, to many schools and to children's parade groups. He was a faithful sponsor of the Living American Flag and other American Flag Foundation educational programs. He was an important figure at the Living American Flag ceremonies. The American Flag Foundation is proud to have the Honor Roll Award serve as a legacy honoring Mr. Haxel. Today, Mr. Philip F. Haxel, Jr., President of the F. W. Haxel Flag, Banner, Flagpole, & Sign Company has continued this tradition.

Since 2009, and a slackened economy, many school budgets were unable to extend to student transportation to the Fort. The American Flag Foundation promptly created and produced the Traveling Living American Flag program. Each year, The American Flag Foundation selects several schools, through county and city social studies supervisors, to participate in the traditional month of May in a Living American Flag at their school, with a coordinated study program and essay contest leading to the Big Day. In close coordination with the school

principals, lead teachers, PTA and school curriculum, foundation volunteers operate the historic program on a smaller, personalized level. In addition, the foundation continues to conduct sizeable Living American Flag events, by request and charter at large venues such as Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine in Maryland, Staten Island Stadium in New York, Montpelier Plantation in Virginia, and more.

The American Flag Foundation, Inc. is a 501 (c) 3 organization whose purpose is to develop the resources and create the opportunities for all citizens, especially children, to learn the history of our nation, the symbol of our Flag, and their role in building the future. For additional information on the Living American Flag, for help in staging a similar event, or to become a volunteer committee member for this program, call The American Flag Foundation office in Baltimore at 410-563-FLAG (3524), or visit our website: [www.americanflagfoundation.org](http://www.americanflagfoundation.org).