



WAR OF 1812: Maryland begins celebrations

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Written by

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ANNAPOLIS — The merging of past and present was perfectly exemplified by the grey metal Navy patrol ship docked next to a three-masted Barque with a complicated assortment of ropes and sails.

With these ships as the backdrop Thursday, Gov. Martin O'Malley and Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake joined representatives from the U.S. Navy and Operation Sail, Inc. to announce a multi-year celebration of the war that secured America's freedom from England.

Celebratory cannon booms and cheerful shouts of "huzzah" signaled that Maryland's War of 1812 bicentennial celebration had officially started. The celebrations will commemorate America's fight for freedom 200 years ago and will educate visitors about some of the long-lasting national contributions made by Marylanders.

"This great country of ours has a great debt to the residents of [Baltimore]," said Jose Fuentes, the chairman of Operation Sail. Operation Sail is a non-profit organization that organizes events that bring together some of the world's remaining wind ships.

The first bicentennial event is the Star-Spangled Sailabration, an international maritime festival that will be held in Baltimore's Inner Harbor from June 13-19.

The Sailabration will be a gathering of U.S. naval vessels and tall ships from around the world. The vessels on hand for the launch of the celebration, the navy ship USS Hurricane and the Norwegian training ship Statsraad Lehmkuhl, will also be in the harbor for the festival. Other elements of the maritime festival include fireworks, living history displays and free tours of ships.

Rawlings-Blake hopes the influx of people will be a boon to Baltimore's restaurants, hotels and businesses. Hopefully the celebration will encourage repeat visits to Baltimore and tourism revenue will continue even after the event is over.

"I often say Baltimore's best days are ahead of us," Rawlings-Blake said.

The United States declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812, when America was still a young and developing nation. During the war, Baltimore played an influential role. Marylanders provided some impressive national symbols that are still important in the country today.

Notable contributions include "The Star Spangled Banner," written by Francis Scott Key as he watched the bombardment of Fort McHenry, and the creation of the 15-star and 15-stripe flag by Mary Pickersgill in Baltimore. Pickersgill had been commissioned to make the flag by Major George Armistead.

"That was the flag that people of this city gathered and rallied around," O'Malley said.

The War of 1812 celebrations will continue for a three-year period, filled with more special events and opportunities for fun and education.

"The people of this great city are in for a spectacular celebration," Fuentes said.