

= Mary Young Pickersgill =

Mary Pickersgill (born Mary Young ; February 12 , 1776 ? October 4 , 1857) , was the maker of the Star Spangled Banner Flag hoisted over Fort McHenry during the Battle of Baltimore in the War of 1812 . The daughter of another noted flag maker , Rebecca Young , Pickersgill learned her craft from her mother , and , in 1813 , was commissioned by Major George Armistead to make a flag for Baltimore 's Fort McHenry that was so large that the British would have no difficulty seeing it from a great distance . The flag was installed in August 1813 , and , a year later , during the Battle of Baltimore , Francis Scott Key could see the flag while negotiating a prisoner exchange aboard a British vessel , and was inspired to pen the words that became the United States National Anthem .

Pickersgill , widowed at the age of 29 , became successful enough in her flag making business , that , in 1820 , she was able to buy the house that she had been renting in Baltimore , and later became active in addressing social issues , such as housing and employment for disadvantaged women . From 1828 to 1851 , she was president of the Impartial Female Humane Society which had been founded in 1802 , incorporated in 1811 , and helped impoverished families with school vouchers for children and employment for women . Under Pickersgill 's leadership , this organization built a home for aged women and later added an Aged Men 's Home which was built adjacent to it . These , more than a century later , evolved into the Pickersgill Retirement Community of Towson , Maryland which opened in 1959 .

Pickersgill died in 1857 and was buried in the Loudon Park Cemetery in southwest Baltimore , where her daughter erected a monument for her , and where some civic @-@ minded organizations later erected a bronze plaque . The house where Pickersgill lived for 50 years , at the northwest corner of Albemarle and East Pratt Streets in downtown Baltimore , became known as the Star @-@ Spangled Banner Flag House in 1927 . The house was saved through the efforts of many preservation @-@ minded citizens who were motivated by the Centennial Celebrations of 1914 .

= = Early life = =

Born in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania on February 12 , 1776 , Mary Young was the youngest of six children born to William Young and Rebecca Flower . Her mother , who became widowed when Mary was two years old , had a flag shop on Walnut Street in Philadelphia where she made ensigns , garrison flags and " Continental Colors " for the Continental Army . Her 1781 advertisement in the " Pennsylvania Packet " read , " All kinds of colours , for the Army and Navy , made and sold on the most reasonable Terms , By Rebecca Young . " Young moved her family to Baltimore , Maryland when Mary was a child , and it was from her mother that Mary learned the craft of flag making .

On October 2 , 1795 , at the age of 19 , Mary married John Pickersgill , a merchant , and moved back to Philadelphia with her husband . Of Mary 's four children , only one survived childhood , a daughter named Caroline . Mary 's husband traveled to London to work for the United States Government in the British Claims Office , but died in London on June 14 , 1805 , leaving Mary widowed at the age of 29 . In 1807 Mary then moved back to Baltimore with her daughter Caroline and her 67 @-@ year @-@ old mother Rebecca .

The small family rented a house at 44 Queen Street (later 844 East Pratt Street , which became the Star Spangled Banner Flag House and 1812 Museum) , where Pickersgill took in boarders and opened a flag @-@ making business , selling " silk standards , cavalry and division colours of every description . " Her customers included the United States Army , United States Navy , and visiting merchant ships .

= = The Fort McHenry flag = =

In 1813 the United States was at war with Great Britain , and Baltimore was preparing for an eventual attack as the fleet of the British Royal Navy had complete maritime control of the Chesapeake Bay . Major George Armistead , the U.S. Army commander of the Infantry and Artillery units that defended Fort McHenry in Baltimore , felt that the fort was prepared for an attack , except

it lacked a flag . In a letter to the head of the Maryland Militia and military commander for Baltimore , Major General Samuel Smith , he wrote , " We , sir , are ready at Fort McHenry to defend Baltimore against invading by the enemy . That is to say , we are ready except that we have no suitable ensign to display over the Star Fort and it is my desire to have a flag so large that the British will have no difficulty seeing it from a distance . " A delegation consisting of Armistead , Smith , Brig. General John Stricker , and Commodore Joshua Barney , Pickersgill 's brother @-@ in @-@ law , visited with Pickersgill , and discussed the particulars of the desired flag . They commissioned Pickersgill to make two flags , " one American ensign , 30 X 42 feet , first quality bunting " and another flag 17 by 25 feet . " A task as large as the making of these flags was beyond the capability of one person to complete , and Pickersgill not only drew on members of her own household for help , but also contracted labor from the immediate neighborhood . In early summer 1813 , she began the job with the assistance of her daughter , Caroline , her two nieces , Eliza Young and Margaret Young , a free African American apprentice , Grace Wisher , and likely her elderly mother , Rebecca Young . An additional unnamed African American who boarded in the house is also listed as helping in some sources , as were additional local seamstresses who were hired during the summer . Often working late into the evening , until midnight at times , Pickersgill 's team was able to complete the job in six weeks . Pickersgill 's daughter , in an 1876 letter to Georgiana Armistead Appleton , the daughter of Major Armistead (later breveted a lieutenant colonel) , wrote these particulars about the flag :

The flag being so very large , mother was obliged to obtain permission from the proprietors of Claggetts [sic] brewery which was in our neighborhood , to spread it out in their malt house ; and I remember seeing my mother down on the floor , placing the stars : after the completion of the flag , she superintended the topping of it , having it fastened in the most secure manner to prevent its being torn away by (cannon) balls : the wisdom of her precaution was shown during the engagement : many shots piercing it , but it still remained firm to the staff . Your father (Col. Armistead) declared that no one but the maker of the flag should mend it , and requested that the rents should merely be bound around .

The large flag contained over 400 yards (366 meters) of fabric , and included 15 stripes and 15 stars , one for each of the 15 states of the union . The stars were made of cotton and the stripes and blue canton were of English wool bunting . Each stripe was two feet (60 cm) wide and each of the stars measured 24 inches (60 cm) across from tip to tip . The women did much of the work in the evening after the brewery closed , sometimes working until midnight , and Pickersgill delivered the flags to Fort McHenry on August 19 , 1813 , a full year before the Battle of Baltimore .

The main flag weighed about 50 pounds (23 kg) , and it took 11 men to raise it onto a 90 @-@ foot (27 @-@ meter) flagpole . The result was an enormous American flag that could be seen for several miles from the Fort . On October 27 , 1813 a receipt was given to Pickersgill and her niece Eliza Young in the amount of \$ 405 @.@ 90 for the larger flag , and \$ 168 @.@ 54 for the smaller one (which was also used at Fort McHenry as a storm flag) . The small flag may have been flying when the British initially attacked Fort McHenry during the Battle of Baltimore on September 13 , because of the inclement weather that night with the driving rainstorm (which would have made the woolen bunting material soggy and too heavy to blow out in any breeze) . However , it was Pickersgill 's large flag that was flying over the fort at daybreak on September 14 , 1814 , after the British had ceased firing on the fort . A diary entry from a British sub @-@ altern on board ship and recently returned from the North Point battlefield , George Glebe , described that sunny morning when the Americans at the distant fort " fired their (" wake @-@ up ") morning gun salute and raised a splendid ensign " over the battlements . While negotiating a prisoner exchange aboard a British ship , Francis Scott Key saw the flag , and this inspired him to pen the words to the poem " The Defence of Fort McHenry " that later became the National Anthem of the United States in 1931 .

After the 1814 battle , George Armistead took possession of the large flag , and after his death in 1818 his widow , Louisa Hughes Armistead , kept it . During her four decades of ownership , she allowed it to be displayed on a few occasions , and also removed pieces of it to be given as gifts , a common practice of the day . Following her death in 1861 the flag went to her daughter , Georgiana

Armistead Appleton , and then later to her grandson , Eben Appleton . The flag was moved to various locations over a 40 @-@ year period until 1907 when Eben Appleton loaned it to the Smithsonian . In 1912 the loan became permanent , and the flag underwent a variety of restorations . Beginning in December 1998 , the flag began an \$ 18 million conservation treatment (not a restoration) and now this flag that was hand crafted by Pickersgill and her helpers in 1813 is one of the most important artifacts , and the centerpiece of the redesigned National Museum of American History .

= = Later life = =

By 1820 Pickersgill had become sufficiently successful in her business to purchase the house she had been renting , and lived there for the remainder of her life . Her business success allowed her to become active in addressing social issues such as housing , job placement , and financial aid for disadvantaged women , decades before these issues became prominent concerns in society . The Impartial Female Humane Society had been established to help needy Baltimore families with educating their children , and to help destitute women find employment . Pickersgill served as the president of this society from 1828 to 1851 , and under her presidency a home for aged women was finally opened in West Baltimore in 1851 after a long planning and construction process . Following her tenure as president , a home for aged men was then established adjacent to the women 's home in 1869 . In 1959 the two homes were combined and moved from west Baltimore to Towson , Maryland , and in 1962 the new facility was named the " Pickersgill Retirement Community " in honor of the woman who had been instrumental in its creation .

Pickersgill died on October 4 , 1857 , and is buried in Loudon Park Cemetery in southwest Baltimore . Her daughter Caroline erected a monument for her , and later the genealogical heritage organization United States Daughters of 1812 and the Star Spangled Banner Flag House Association , which had organized to save and preserve the Flag House in 1927 , placed a bronze plaque at the foot of her grave .

= = Legacy = =

Besides making the flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to compose the words to the United States National Anthem , Pickersgill is also remembered for her humanitarian contributions to society , evident in her decades @-@ long presidency of the Impartial Female Humane Society , which eventually evolved into the Pickersgill Retirement Community of Towson , Maryland . She is also remembered for her house , known as the Star @-@ Spangled Banner Flag House and later renamed the Flag House and Star @-@ Spangled Banner Museum , which stands at the corner of East Pratt Street and Albemarle Street in eastern downtown Baltimore and is a National Historic Landmark .

About the time of the American Bicentennial , noted artist Robert McGill Mackall created a painting depicting Mary Pickersgill and her helpers in the malt house of a brewery , sewing the " Star @-@ Spangled Banner " . A copy of the painting is maintained by the Maryland Historical Society .

Mary Pickersgill was the namesake of a World War II Liberty ship , the SS " Mary Pickersgill " , launched in 1944 . In addition , a type of flower is known as the Mary Pickersgill Rose .

Concerning Pickersgill 's famous flag , In 1998 , I. Michael Heyman , Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution wrote :

= = Family = =

Pickersgill 's uncle , Colonel Benjamin Flower , fought during the American Revolutionary War , and was presented a sword by General George Washington , commander of the Continental Army . The presentation was made for Flower 's masterful evacuation of Philadelphia during the British occupation of that city , the first American capital , in late 1776 .

Of Pickersgill 's five siblings , her oldest brother , William Young , was also a flag maker , and it is

likely that his two daughters were Pickersgill 's nieces that assisted in making the Star Spangled Banner flag . Her sister , Hannah Young , married Captain Jesse Fearson , a privateer ship commander during the War of 1812 who was captured by the British , imprisoned in Havana , Cuba , and later escaped .

Pickersgill 's one surviving child , Caroline (1800 @-@ 1884) , married John Purdy (1795 @-@ 1837) . The couple apparently had no surviving children , because in a letter written late in her life to the daughter of George Armistead , Purdy called herself " widowed and childless . " She had become somewhat destitute late in life , and in the same letter requested some financial assistance , but also provided some history about her mother and the making of the Star @-@ Spangled Banner flag .