***Take Part in the Sailabration!***

By Ingeborg Westfall

No, I’m not getting overly creative with language. Sailabration refers to an upcoming week-long event in Charm City itself, Baltimore. Planned for the week of June 13 to 19, Sailabration is part of the celebration of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812. It begins June 13 with the arrival of more than thirty-six vessels, including U.S., British, and Canadian Navy ships along with tall ships from several countries (the U.S., Ecuador, Colombia, Indonesia, and Mexico). From June 14 to 18, free tours of the naval vessels and tall ships will be offered. Additional festivities include Angels over Baltimore on June 16 and 17, featuring the U.S. Navy’s Blue Angels. On those same two days, there will be a Star-Spangled Festival with U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine, and U.S. Coast Guard aircraft on display at a nearby airport.

I visited the Inner Harbor and Fort McHenry in late May, a nd even without the Sailabration, it’s definitely an area where everyone can find as much to do in a day as his or her energy will allow. When I mingled with the crowds, I could well believe the statement on a street sign that credited Baltimore’s Inner Harbor with welcoming more visitors annually than Disney World. Its many shops and wide range of eateries, from burger places to pizza to seafood and pubs, make it hard to explore it all in a limited time. Plus there’s the National Aquarium and any number of harbor cruises. I’m usually indifferent to such sightseeing boat rides, but the one I went on offered an entertaining and informative narrative describing the places we passed and their parts in America’s history.

Of course, one of the best reasons to visit the Inner Harbor, anytime, is to experience Fort McHenry. In August 1814, the British were attempting to capture Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Their efforts in Washington were successful and the Capitol and White House were burned. The flames, in those days before electricity, were visible in Baltimore forty miles away. Three weeks later, a fleet of nineteen British Naval vessels and five thousand soldiers moved on Baltimore, known as “an anti-British hotbed.” Around daylight on September 13, 1814 and continuing through a night of lightning and rain, the British Navy carried out a bombardment of the fort with bombs, rockets, and cannonballs, some 1500 shells. Baltimore citizens watched from Federal Hill, wondering if their city would be torched as well. One of the volunteers at the fort during the battle wrote, “We felt like pigeons tied by the legs to be shot at.”

Another American watching as he was held under British guard on a truce ship on the Patapsco River was a Georgetown lawyer, Francis Scott Key. Even if we’re all familiar with the rest of the story, it’s worth reviewing it at Fort McHenry. Run by the National Park Service and with a newly-renovated Visitor and Education Center, the fort provides a real feel for this part of our nation’s history. I found the introductory video moving, the exhibits and printed information engrossing. Park Rangers offer tours and talks throughout the day. After one of their talks, you’ll remember the size of that large flag (forty-two feet by thirty feet), what it was made of (wool bunting), where it is now (the Smithsonian National Museum of American History), and who was paid around $405 for its making (Mary Pickersgill).

If you’re looking for a fun and educational way to celebrate this summer, look no further than Baltimore’s Sailabration. As the saying goes, it has something for everyone, and there’s lots more scheduled than I‘ve been able to mention here. For more information, visit www.StarSpangled200.com.