

A Patriotic Display For The Bicentennial

by Lynne Belluscio

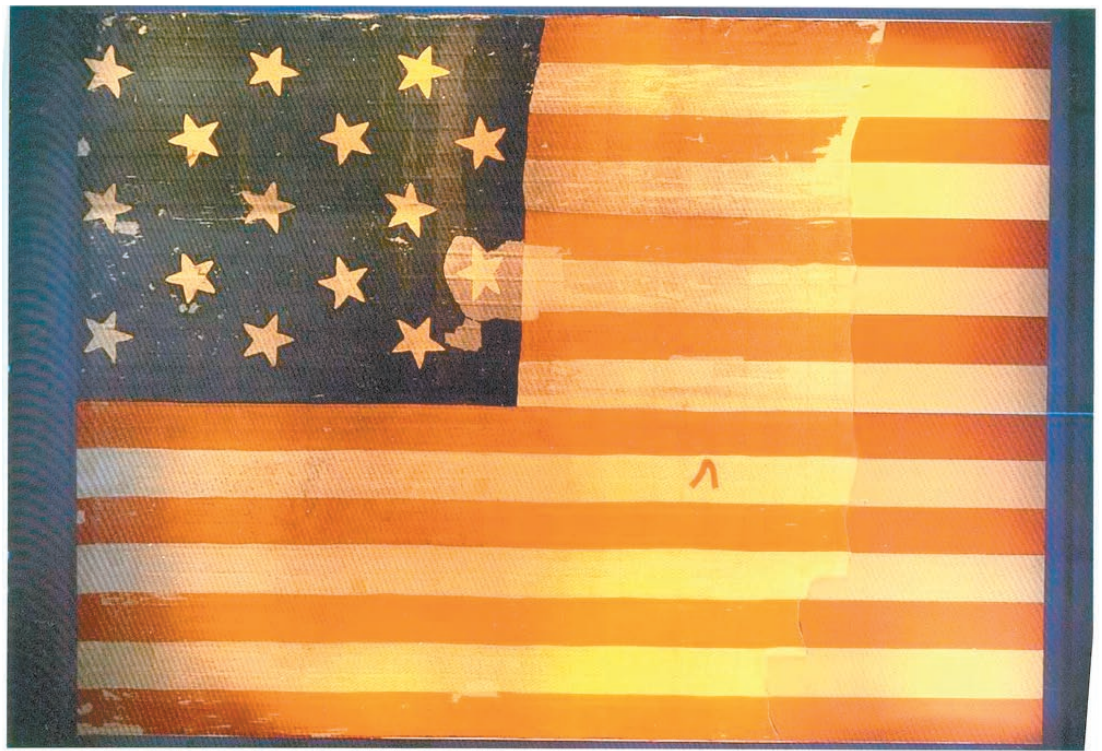
The Town of LeRoy Bicentennial Committee met last Saturday to begin the planning for the Bicentennial Celebration on June 8th. A lot of great ideas are being discussed and we have planned the next meeting for February 11th at 11 am at LeRoy House. Anyone interested in participating should plan to join us.

One of the projects for this year is to encourage everyone to fly the 1812 American flag, which we know as the Star Spangled Banner. This is the flag that had fifteen stars and fifteen stripes. It came into official use after the 1794 Flag Act, signed by President George Washington during the Second Continental Congress.

Although passed in 1794, it did not go into effect until May 1, 1795. "Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, that from and after the first day of May, Anno Domini, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-five, the flag of the United States, be fifteen stripes alternate red and white. That the Union be fifteen stars, white in a blue field." This flag was adopted after the states of Vermont and Kentucky became the 14th and 15th states in the Union.

This fifteen-star, fifteen-stripe flag was the official flag until the 1818 Flag Act. During that time the states of Louisiana, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana and Mississippi had joined the Union and the 1818 flag had 20 stars. Also, the fifteen stripes were reduced to thirteen, when it became evident that adding a stripe for each state would be difficult. The 1818 Flag Act also stated that the addition of stars for states would occur on July 4th of each year when necessary.

It is not known if anyone in LeRoy in 1812 owned an American flag. The only known extant flag from Western New York is the flag that flew over Fort Niagara. That flag was delivered to Fort Niagara in 1809 and is actually older than the Star Spangled Banner that flew over Fort McHenry that inspired the *National Anthem*



written by Francis Scott Key. But there is an amazing connection between the Fort Niagara flag and the Star Spangled Banner from Fort McHenry. Major George Armistead was stationed at Fort Niagara but hated the weather in the North. He was transferred to Fort McHenry in June 1813 where he declared that he wanted an American flag that was so big that the British "would have no difficulty seeing it from a distance."

That huge flag which Armistead became known forever as the "Guardian of the Star Spangled Banner." The Fort Niagara flag is 28 feet wide and 22 feet high, although it is believed that it was originally 36 feet wide. The flag was captured by the British during the War of 1812. British General Gordon Drummond took the flag back to his Scottish castle as a prize of war where it remained for 180 years. In 1994, after long deliberations, the flag was purchased and returned to Fort Niagara where it is on exhibit.

The Fort McHenry flag, known as the Star Spangled Banner, was made in the summer of 1813 by Mary Pickersgill, a 37 year-old widow who lived in Baltimore and made flags and ensigns. Mary enlisted the help of her daughters and several other people to complete the 30 by 42 foot flag

in seven weeks. They also made a much smaller "storm flag" for the Fort. On September 13, 1814, the smaller storm flag was flying during the British bombardment, but by the morning, the larger flag was raised and it was this huge flag that Francis Scott Key saw. He then wrote the poem "*Defence of Fort McHenry*" which was arranged with music. But it wasn't until 1931 that the "*Star Spangled Banner*" became the official National Anthem.

So it would be appropriate for LeRoy to fly the 15-star, 15-stripe flag this year. We have purchased a dozen 3x5 foot flags which we will sell on a first-come, first serve basis. They will be delivered

some time this week and I don't know the price yet, but it will be under \$40. If you are interested give us a call at 768-7433 and we will reserve one. We will be more than happy to order more if we sell out. Just as an additional note, if you are looking at other sources for a 15-star, 15-stripe flag, make sure that you look carefully at the star position. The point of the star should not point directly up, but should point to 2 o'clock.

We also hope that folks will bring their flags to the Bicentennial Celebration on June 8th, so we can have a glorious display of patriotic fervor.

Business Cards

250 - Glossy, UV Coated, 16 pt. Stock

FULL COLOR

Under
\$40

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768-2201
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