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REPORT

ON

“The Star-Spangled Banner”

“Hail Columbia”

“America”

“Yankee Doodle”

COMPILED BY

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PREFATORY NOTE

In December, 1907, I received instructions from the Librarian of Congress to "bring together the various versions both of text and of music with notes as to the historical evolution" of "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Hail Columbia," "America," and "Yankee Doodle." The report was to be brief and light of touch, but accurate enough for practical purposes. This task would have been comparatively easy had the literature on the subject been reliable. Unfortunately it crumbled under the slightest critical pressure, and it became imperative to devote more research and more analytical and synthetic thought to the report than had seemed advisable at first. This and the fact that the report had to be compiled without neglect of current duties accounts for the delay in submitting it.

In form the report is frankly not a history of the subject, such as one would write for popular consumption. Rather, in this report data are collected, eliminated, or verified; popular theories founded on these data are analyzed, their refutation or acceptance is suggested, and, of course, some theories of my own are offered for critical consideration. All this is done in such a form that the reader is at no step supposed to find a locked door between himself and the argument. He is not supposed to accept a single statement of fact or argument unless the evidence submitted compels him to do so. This *plein air* treatment of a popular theme distinguishes the report somewhat from the bulk of the literature on the subject. In short, though not intended for popular consumption, it may be used for popular consumption with reasonable assurance of accuracy.

O. G. SONNECK
Chief, Music Division

HERBERT PUTNAM
Librarian of Congress
Washington, D. C., August, 1909

THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

Opinions differ widely on the merits of "The Star-Spangled Banner" as a national song. Some critics fail to see in Francis Scott Key's inspired lines poetry of more than patriotic value. Some look upon it merely as a flag song, a military song, but not as a national hymn. Some criticize the melody for its excessive range, but others see no defects in "The Star-Spangled Banner" and feel not less enthusiastic over its esthetic merits as a national song than over its sincere patriotic sentiment. This controversy will be decided, whether rightly or wrongly, by the American people regardless of critical analysis, legislative acts, or naïve efforts to create national songs by prize competition. This report does not concern itself at all with such quasi esthetic problems, nor is it here the place to trace the political history of "The Star-Spangled Banner" beyond what is necessary for the understanding of its history as a national song.

As has been well known for a long time, the first though brief account of the origin of "The Star-Spangled Banner" appeared in the *Baltimore American* on September 21, 1814, under the heading of:

DEFENCE OF FORT M'HENRY.

The annexed song was composed under the following circumstances: A gentleman had left Baltimore, in a flag of truce for the purpose of getting released from the British fleet a friend of his who had been captured at Marlborough. He went as far as the mouth of the Patuxent, and was not permitted to return lest the intended attack on Baltimore should be disclosed. He was therefore brought up the Bay to the mouth of the Patapsco, where the flag vessel was kept under the guns of a frigate, and he was compelled to witness the bombardment of Fort M'Henry, which the Admiral had boasted that he would carry in a few hours, and that the city must fall. He watched the flag at the fort through the whole day with an anxiety that can be better felt than described, until the night prevented him from seeing it. In the night he watched the Bomb Shells, and at early dawn his eye was again greeted by the proudly waving flag of his country.

This account is followed by the text of Key's poem without special title, but with the indication: "Tune: Anacreon in Heaven."

As this account was printed almost immediately after the events therein described took place, and were in every reader's memory, the newspaper editor, of course, omitted specific dates, but it is a matter of history that the gallant defense of Fort McHenry under Major Armistead began on the morning of Tuesday, September 13, and lasted until the early hours of September 14, 1814. The *gentleman*