

GENERAL JOHN STRICKER - Talk given at the unveiling of the statue of John Stricker at Zion Lutheran Church, 9/18/22

John Stricker was born in 1759 and raised in Frederick, Maryland. His paternal grandparents had emigrated from Switzerland to North Carolina and then moved to Frederick. His grandmother was French Swiss while his grandfather was German Swiss. His mother, whose family name was Springer, also was of Swiss background. During the Revolutionary War of 1776-82, he served in Washington's army and with General Sullivan in his campaign in the New York's Finger Lakes region. At the end of the war, he first settled in Philadelphia and married Martha Bedford, and then had six daughters and one son. He soon moved to Baltimore, becoming a prominent merchant. He also served in the militia and was promoted to the rank of brigadier general, commanding Baltimore's militia. In 1801, he was appointed to the naval agency of the port of Baltimore and served for 10 years, acquitting himself well, according to all accounts.

America and Britain went to war again in 1812. For the next two years, most of the action took place along the Canadian frontier with inconclusive results. The British, however, commanded the seas and dispatched a fleet to the undefended Chesapeake with 5000 troops in the summer of 1814. They marched on Washington and routed the unprepared militia at Bladensburg on August 24 and burned the public buildings in the capital. Then they returned to their ships and prepared to attack Baltimore. The British called America's third largest city of 50,000 inhabitants a "nest of pirates," as it was the home port for numerous privateers which had captured the largest number of British merchant ships during the war. Baltimoreans feared the destruction of their city, if the British were successful.

The British planned a two-pronged attack; the fleet was to bombard Fort McHenry into submission, while the British army would land at North Point and advance on Baltimore. General Samuel Smith, in charge of Baltimore's overall defenses, anticipated the British attack. Under his direction, civilians, both blacks and whites, built fortifications at Hampstead Hill (now Patterson Park) starting as early as August 28. Military units from all over the region congregated in Baltimore and drilled for the coming attack. Farmers donated food, and women

rolled bandages and donated linens to hospitals and provided water and coffee for the drilling soldiers. Banks loaned funds to purchase supplies, and citizens donated building materials and tools.

The British fleet arrived on the Patapsco on September 11. General Smith dispatched the Baltimore Brigade under John Stricker to the North Point peninsula. The British forces landed on September 12 and advanced towards Baltimore. Stricker chose a location half way up the peninsula, where the British would have to cross an open field without cover. Stricker's militia engaged the British and then withdrew in good order to Hampstead Hill. Americans had 213 overall casualties, compared with 341 for the British, who lost their commander General Ross. The next day, the British advanced to Hampstead Hill, which was defended by 15,000 soldiers and 100 cannon. At the same time, the British failed to take Fort McHenry; the British commanders then decided to pull their ground forces back to their fleet and sail away.

Coming after the debacle at Bladensburg and the humiliating capture and burning of Washington, the victorious defense of Baltimore rallied the nation. The stirring words of Francis Scott Key, set to music, became popular throughout the country. The British soon decided that there was no reason to continue the war and agreed to a compromise peace treaty in December 1814.

We should note that the Baltimoreans largely defended their city by their own efforts. The federal government had few resources to offer. The military forces were mostly militia, that is, citizen soldiers from Baltimore and the surrounding area. Most of the material for the fortifications and all of the labor was freely given by Baltimore's residents.

On September 12, 1815, one year later, Baltimoreans gathered on Calvert Street, a few blocks from here, to lay the cornerstone of the Battle Monument, to memorialize the 39 soldiers who fell in the defense of Baltimore. General John Stricker, General Samuel Smith, and Lieutenant Colonel George Armistead, the commander of Fort McHenry, all attended.

To sum up, General Stricker is best known for his hour of glory at North Point. This was just part of his life-long military service; he served in a civic capacity of well as Vice-President of the German Society of Maryland from 1817 until his death in 1825 and also as President of the Bank of Baltimore. He helped obtain a charter

for the German Society from the Maryland General Assembly in 1818. He was offered a seat in the Maryland Senate and was asked to be a mayoral candidate for Baltimore, both of which he declined. John Stricker played a key role in the defense of Baltimore and, without personal ambitions exemplifies the ideal of the citizen-soldier and public servant for the common good. It is indeed fitting that the German Society of Maryland honor him this way.