



National Museum of American History

Don't step through the doors of this place expecting a dry chronology of the country's past. Instead, this unique museum is more like the nation's attic, a crowded but delightful hodge-podge of artefacts from every era of American life. Like any good attic, this one offers surprises and delightful discoveries at every turn. Balloon-tyre bikes stand beside hand-wringer washers, classic jukeboxes and antique farm machinery. There are one-of-a-kind items too, including George Washington's wooden teeth, the stovepipe hat Lincoln was wearing when he was assassinated, and the original Star-Spangled Banner – the 1814 flag that inspired the national anthem.

The Ground Floor

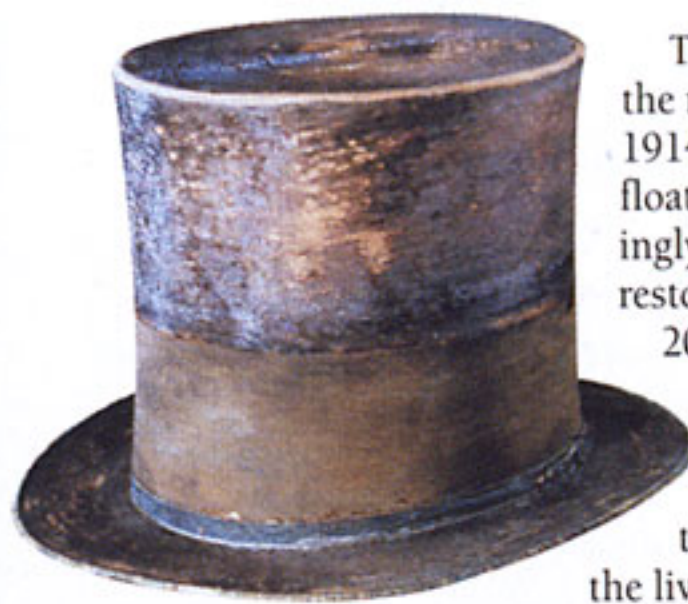
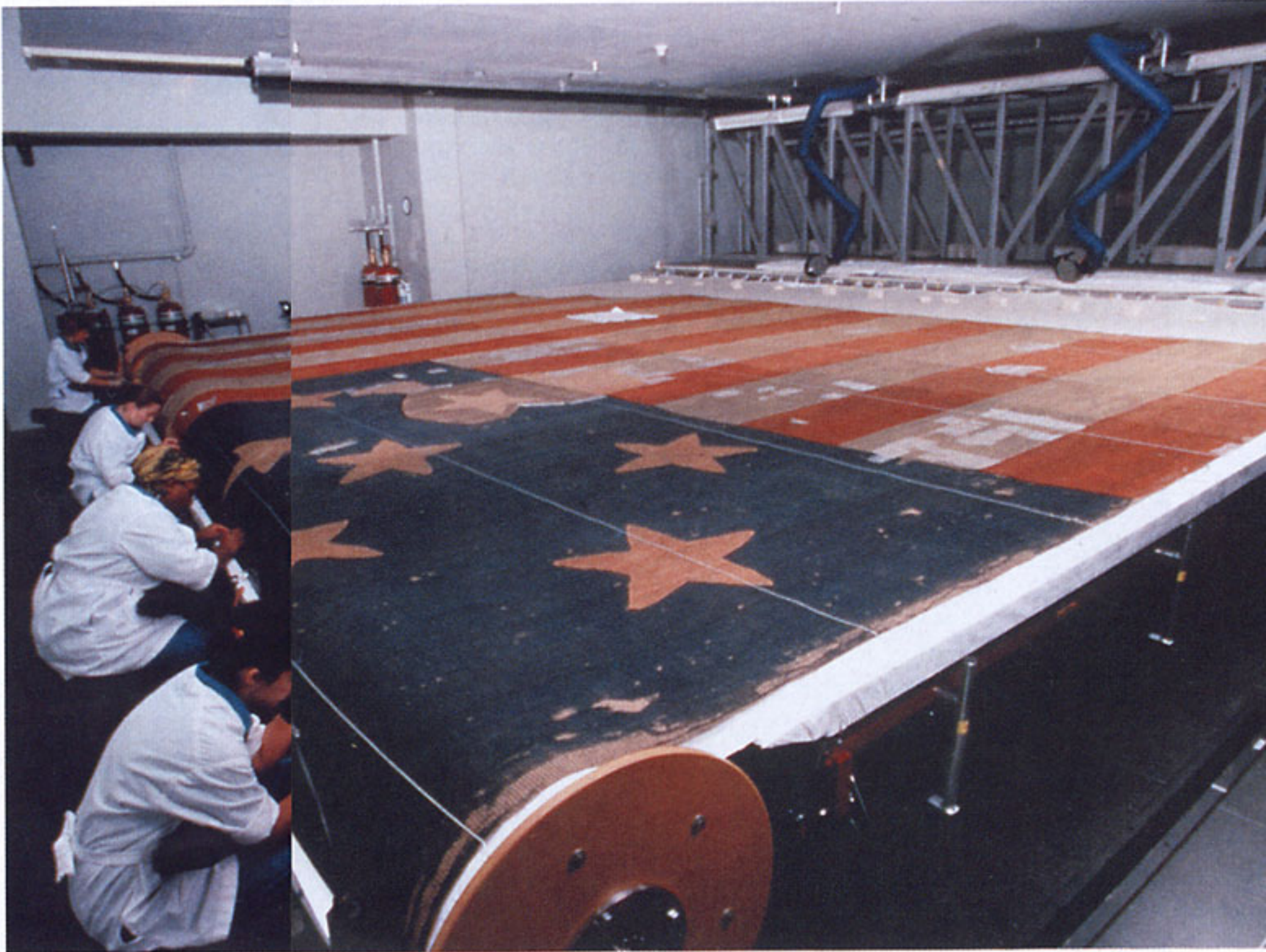
The surprises begin just inside the museum doors, where a reconstructed **19th-century general store and post office** has been built in the foyer, and from which you can still post a letter.

Also on the ground floor, you'll find one of the museum's most intriguing looking exhibits, **Material World**, which features displays of everyday items and examines the materials they were made of and how those materials have changed over the past 200 years. Visitors over the age of 30, in particular, will recognise a great number of the items on display.

Be sure to see the large galleries at the museum's eastern end, which contain several beautifully restored **steam trains** and a small but impressive collection of antique automobiles and agricultural machinery. There is also an interesting gallery dedicated to the development of **America's maritime trade**.

The First Floor

On the first floor you'll definitely want to see one of the museum's most popular displays, the **Star-Spangled Banner**. This is the original flag that flew over Fort Henry during the bombardment of Baltimore by the British in 1814, and which inspired Francis Scott Key to pen the immortal words of the American national anthem. By December 1998, the 186-year-old flag was in poor repair, and the museum undertook a years-long restoration project. Thankfully, the restoration is under way within a special glass-walled laboratory, so that visitors can watch the fascinating process.



The hat Lincoln was wearing when he was assassinated

You can watch the restoration of the Star-Spangled Banner flag

The first phase of the restoration required the removal of a linen backing applied in 1914. To do this, workers lay on special floating gantries above the flag and painstakingly removed 1.7 million stitches. The restoration work will continue through to 2003, after which the flag will be re-hung in a specially designed preservation case in the museum.

Also worth noting on this floor is the **First Ladies exhibit**, which examines the lives and contributions of the wives of American presidents.

The Second Floor

The museum's newest permanent exhibit, **The American Presidency**, is located on the second floor and is well worth exploring. Gathering artefacts from the lives of every American president, this display offers unique insights into how the roles and duties of the president have changed over two centuries.

Of particular interest are displays that highlight how the growth of the media, from newspapers to radio and television, has changed the face of the nation's highest office. Included