

125th Anniversary of the Stars & Stripes Forever

In his 1928 autobiography, *Marching Along*, Sousa wrote that he composed the march on Christmas Day, 1896. He was on board an ocean liner on his way home from a vacation with his wife in Europe and had just learned of the recent death of David Blakely, the manager of the Sousa Band. He composed the march in his head and committed the notes to paper on arrival in the United States. It was first performed at Willow Grove Park, just outside Philadelphia, on May 14, 1897, and was immediately greeted with enthusiasm.

"The Stars and Stripes Forever" was an immediate hit. From 1897 until the band stopped touring, whenever they performed, the audience would expect to hear "The Stars and Stripes Forever." When it was played, the audience would stand up as though it were the national anthem. At first it was not unusual for the band to play it two or three times in a performance, each time receiving louder applause than before.

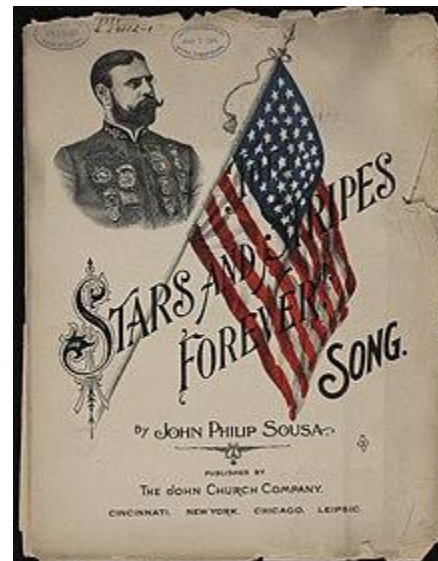
Following an Act of Congress in 1987, it was officially adopted as the national march of the United States of America.

And there is an Iowa connection. Mason City native, Meredith Wilson played the special piccolo part for a while in the Sousa band.

Can you name the last time you heard the march and where you were?

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