We pledge allegiance to it, we parade it, and we display it on occasions both solemn and celebratory. The American flag represents the nation and its people, patriotism, and pride.

Earlier this fall, the Senator John Heinz History Center opened a major exhibition, *Stars & Stripes: An American Story*, sponsored by BNY Mellon, which details the stories of the people behind the more than 200-year history of our nation’s most enduring symbol.

The History Center developed the 7,000-square-foot exhibition working with colleagues at the Smithsonian Institution as well as the National Gallery of Art, the Warhol Museum, and a variety of private collectors. *Stars & Stripes* examines the people and events that have contributed to the flag’s endurance over the past two centuries.

The History Center opened the exhibition with a moving ceremony on the 10th anniversary weekend of 9/11. The commemoration included public officials and local Boy Scouts, along with the Thomas Jefferson High School Band and Jeff Jimerson leading patriotic songs. Dozens of regional police officers, firefighters, and EMS professionals unfurled a massive 60-foot American flag over the façade of the museum, then were invited inside along with their families to be the first to see *Stars & Stripes*.

Many of the flags in the exhibition are on loan from the collection of nationally recognized vexillologist Dr. Peter Keim. A local physician who lived with his family in Natrona Heights for more than 30 years, Dr. Keim discovered a passion for flags in 1976 when he uncovered a 13-star flag at a flea market in Kutztown, Pa. “He wanted $50 dollars for it,” Keim noted, “but I talked him down to $40.”

That purchase began a lifelong passion for the American flag, and today, Keim’s collection includes nearly 700 historic flags. Although his items have been displayed at the Smithsonian and a variety of museums across the nation, seeing his flags back home in Pittsburgh has been his greatest thrill. He points out that the flag holds different meanings for everyone.

*Stars & Stripes* is more than an exhibition of the symbol of our nation. It’s the story of everyday Americans who made history. *Stars & Stripes* is our story.

*Smithsonian Connection* by Andrew E. Masich, President & CEO

Andy Masich joined Dan Onorato and others to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 events and open *Stars & Stripes.*

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*First flag to enter Berlin, 1945*

On June 23, 1945, a convoy of U.S. military personnel entered Berlin, Germany, to confer with Russian authorities and establish control of the American sector of the jointly occupied city. The convoy vehicles bore specially ordered 48-star U.S. flags, handmade in the nearby town of Halle. Colonel John J. Maginnis, a field officer involved with the U.S. Army’s military government operations, kept one of the flags and framed it as a souvenir of the historic event.

The American flag came to symbolize the new roles and responsibilities the nation would undertake as a world power: helping to rebuild postwar Europe, forming alliances aimed at curbing future aggression, and fighting a “cold war” against the spread of communism.