



THE FLAG FLOATED OUT PROUDLY

Through early morning mist and battle smoke on September 14, 1814, Francis Scott Key sees the flag still flying over Fort McHenry.

## The Birth of The Star-Spangled Banner

"THE Star-Spangled Banner" is our National Anthem. Its words and music stir our patriotism—our love for our country. This great song was born in the mind of Francis Scott Key during the bombardment of Fort McHenry.

At that time, September 12-15, 1814, the United States and Great Britain had been fighting the War of 1812 for about 17 months. On the sea the Americans had done well. On land the war had gone against the United States. In August 1814 a force of British soldiers had even captured Washington, the nation's capital. After burning many public buildings, they had marched back to their vessels in the Patux-

ent River. On their way, at the small Maryland town of Upper Marlboro, they had made a prisoner of a 65-year old doctor named William Beanes.

The British claimed that the physician had promised not to fight against them. Yet he had caused the arrest of three of their soldiers who had lagged behind the main army. One of them had escaped and reported his adventures to his officers. Returning to Upper Marlboro, the British had freed the other soldiers and carried off Dr. Beanes.

### AN ERRAND OF MERCY

SEVERAL DAYS later Francis Scott Key, a





FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

The Maryland lawyer-poet who wrote the stirring words of our National Anthem.

Maryland lawyer living in Georgetown, near Washington, was asked to try to free Dr. Beanes. Already the United States government had written letters asking for his release. Key's experience in law might help. As a close friend of the doctor, the lawyer agreed. From government officials he obtained permission to visit the British fleet, somewhere in the Chesapeake Bay. On September 3 he set out for Baltimore.

Arriving in Baltimore the next day, Key joined John S. Skinner, a civilian employed by the United States to exchange prisoners of war. The two men sailed from Baltimore in a Chesapeake Bay sloop. In peacetime this small vessel carried cargo and passen-

gers between Baltimore and Norfolk. Now she was chartered, or rented, by the United States for use as a cartel, or flag-of-truce boat. To show that she was neutral the sloop flew a white flag.

Far down the Chesapeake Bay, near the mouth of the Potomac River, Key and Skinner sighted the British fleet late on September 7. After signaling for permission, they boarded the flagship *Tonnant*. The British officers welcomed them politely, and Skinner presented several official messages from the United States government. He also turned over a package of letters from wounded British soldiers still at Upper Marlboro. When the Americans asked for the release of Beanes, however, the British had only one answer. They accused the doctor of breaking his promise not to fight. They would take him to Canada for trial.

During dinner Key argued that the elderly physician was an honorable and peaceful man. If he had broken the rules of war, he had done so unknowingly. The British reply was unchanged.

After dinner, however, Major General Robert Ross, commander of the British soldiers, gave Skinner a letter to be carried to the United States government. He had written, the general said, that he had acted properly in making Dr. Beanes a prisoner. Since then, however, he had learned that the Americans had treated the British wounded at Upper Marlboro with kindness. Dr. Beanes' release was in return for that kindness.

The British also stated that they were preparing to attack Baltimore and could not risk having the Americans carry ashore



information about their plans. Not until after the attack, therefore, would they free Key, Skinner, and Dr. Beanes. Because the *Tonnant* was crowded, on September 8 the British transferred the Americans to the *Surprise*. Then the fleet sailed up the bay toward Baltimore.

### WATCHING THE BOMBARDMENT OF FORT MCHENRY

ON September 11 the vessels entered the Patapsco River and anchored west of North Point in Old Roads Bay. Again Key, Skinner, and Dr. Beanes were transferred, this time back to their flag-of-truce boat, where they were guarded by British marines. Before dawn on September 12 British soldiers began landing on North Point.

About four miles up Long Log Lane, now called North Point Road, the British clashed with a strong American scouting force. Scattered fighting began before noon

and became heavy about 3:00 p.m. For over an hour the battle raged fiercely. On their cartel vessel, anchored south of Soler's Point, the three Americans could hear the firing and see the battle smoke. Later they saw wounded soldiers being carried to the British transports. Yet they could only guess what had happened.

Meanwhile, about 16 British bombardment vessels had sailed up the Patapsco River toward Baltimore. At 6:00 a.m. on September 13 explosions crashed as they opened fire on Fort McHenry. Far to the northwest the three Americans could barely see the Stars and Stripes flying over the fort. All day the British gunfire continued, but Fort McHenry seldom fired back. Its guns could not reach the British vessels.

All day, however, Key, Skinner, and Dr. Beanes watched the American flag flying above the fort. Once, before their eyes, a shell tore away one of the 15 white stars.

### MAKING THE FLAG THAT INSPIRED KEY

Mary Pickersgill, helped by her daughter and her mother, made the American flag which flew over Fort McHenry during the British bombardment. General John Stricker and Commodore Joshua Barney ordered the banner.





O say can you see, ~~through~~ by the dawn's early light,  
 what so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,  
 whose broad stripes & bright stars through the perilous fight  
 O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?  
 And the rocket's red glare, the bomb bursting in air,  
 gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,  
 O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
 O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
 where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
 what is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,  
 As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?

Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
 In full glory reflected now shines in the stream,  
 'Tis the star-spangled banner — O long may it wave  
 O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,  
 That the havoc of war & the battle's confusion  
 A home & a Country should leave us no more?  
 — ~~Their blood~~ Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.  
 No refuge could save the hireling & slave  
 From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,  
 And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave  
 O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave.

O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand  
 Between their lov'd home & the war's desolation,  
 Blest with vict'ry & peace may the heav'n rescued land  
 Praise the power that hath made & preserved us a nation!  
 Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
 And this be our motto — "In God is our trust."  
 And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
 O'er the land of the free & the home of the brave.

#### THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT OF "THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER".

Written from his notes, the first full version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" is now enshrined at the Maryland Historical Society. The manuscript was handed down in the Key family.

Knowing that as long as the banner flew Americans still held the fort, the men continued their troubled watch. Darkness fell. At times the older Dr. Beanes went below to rest. The bombardment went on.

Throughout the night Key and Skinner paced the deck of their sloop. Battle smoke

was thick, clouds hung low, and sometimes rain fell. Anxiously the two men peered through the darkness. Only when the flag was briefly lighted by bursting bombs or glaring rockets could they glimpse it waving above the fort.

About midnight the sky seemed to split



## 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 Patuxent, 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.

*Tune—ANACREON IN HEAVEN.*

O! say can you see by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?  
And the Rocket's red glare, the Bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our Flag was still there;  
O! say does that star-spangled Banner yet wave,  
O'er the Land of the free, and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,  
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
In full glory reflected new shines in the stream,  
'Tis the star spangled banner, O! long may it wave,  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore  
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,  
A home and a country, shall leave us no more?  
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.  
No refuge could save the hireling and slave,  
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave,  
O'er the Land of the Free, and the Home of the Brave.

O! thus be it ever when freemen shall stand,  
Between their lov'd home, and the war's desolation,  
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n rescued land,  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto—"In God is our Trust;"  
And the star-spangled Banner in triumph shall wave,  
O'er the Land of the Free, and the Home of the Brave.

### THE FIRST PRINTING OF OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM

Only two existing copies of this handbill, printed within hours after Key finished his poem, are known. One is at the Maryland Historical Society.

with thundering blasts. The cannon in the fort opened a heavy fire, and the British guns answered. For about an hour the tremendous bombardment roared. This increased gunfire was caused by a British attempt to land soldiers behind Fort McHenry. The Americans beat off the

attempt, but again Key and his friends had no way of knowing what was happening.

Finally the fort's guns slowed their fire. Toward morning they threw only an occasional shell. Key was wild with excitement and worry. Had Fort McHenry been captured?



## KEY INSPIRED

FOR YEARS the lawyer had found pleasure in writing verse. Now he was filled with a strong urge to write a poem describing the brave defense of Baltimore. On the back of an old letter he began jotting down ideas and phrases. Often he paused and strained his eyes toward the fort, or looked impatiently at his watch. Minutes dragged. Would dawn ever come? Would the flag still be there?

At last the morning light of September 14 touched the flag—but what flag? The air was still. The banner hung down, close to the pole. Then it stirred briefly and partly unfolded only to hang lifelessly again. Was it British or American?

Finally the breeze strengthened, and the flag floated out gracefully and proudly. It was "the star-spangled banner"—the

American flag! Through 25 hours of heavy bombardment the fort had held out. Baltimore was safe. As the British vessels fell back to North Point, Key and his friends were proud and happy.

All day the Americans watched the British reload their vessels. Their soldiers, too, had failed to capture Baltimore. After the battle on North Point, they had marched up Long Log Lane and in the Philadelphia Road toward the city. On Hampstead Hill, near the present Patterson Park, a powerful force of Americans awaited them in stongly built fortifications. The discouraged British had retreated.

While watching the troops reload, Key worked on his ideas for a poem. Not until 1:30 p.m. on September 15 were the British vessels ready to sail. Then as fast as their cartel could take them, Key and his

FIRST SHEET MUSIC PRINTING OF OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM

One of the few remaining copies is in the Maryland Historical Society. This printing was made only a few weeks after Key wrote his poem.

# THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

A PATRIOTIC SONG.

Baltimore. Printed and Sold at CARBS Music Store 36 Baltimore Street.  
Air, As it was in Heaven.

Com. Sp. (C)

Flag was still there, O! say does that star spangled Banner yet wave, O'er the  
Land of the Free, and the home of the brave

Sym. T. H.

Com. Sp. (C)

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
Where the flexing barks had hid their sails,  
What is that dark breeze, o'er the towering deep,  
As it fitfully blows half conceal'd among the reeds,  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
In full glory reflected new shines in the stream,  
Tis the star-spangled banner, O! say may it live,  
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

Com. Sp. (C)

And where is that land, so so vainly we swore,  
In the heart's confusion,  
A home and a country, shall leave us no more,  
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' stains,  
No refuge could save the hireling and slave,  
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,  
And the star-spangled banner, in triumph doth  
O'er the Land &c.

Com. Sp. (C)

Of this bell ever when Freedom shall stand,  
Between their lov'd home and the tyrant's domination,  
Bliss with victory and peace, may the heav'n restored land,  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation,  
This conqueror we adore, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: 'In God is our Trust';  
And the star-spangled banner, in triumph shall wave,  
O'er the Land &c.

Com. Sp. (C)

For the Flute,  
Soprano

Com. Sp. (C)

Buckets red glare, the Bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our

Com. Sp. (C)

(Adapt & Arr'd by T.C.) (Pl. f.) (Trob.) (Adapt & Arr'd by T.C.) (Pl. p.)





#### THE FLAG THAT INSPIRED KEY

The original "Star-Spangled Banner", torn and scarred by gunfire, is now in the United States National Museum in Washington, D. C.

friends sailed back to Baltimore. During the trip the lawyer-poet continued trying to say in verse all that he had seen and felt.

That night, in a room at the Indian Queen Hotel, at Baltimore and Hanover Streets, Key sat at a desk and studied his notes. Then, without bothering with a title, he wrote out his poem. By now the lines were clear in his mind. Only twice did he scratch out words and substitute others.

His finished stanzas described the bombardment of Fort McHenry as he had lived

through it. They told of his anxiety during the long night, of his pride and joy in seeing the "star-spangled" flag in the morning. They appealed to his fellow countrymen always to trust in God and to fight for justice and freedom.

#### KEY'S POEM BECOMES OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM

NEXT MORNING Key showed the poem to his brother-in-law, Judge Joseph H. Nicholson. The judge liked its patriotic spirit and



THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER SHRINE

The original manuscript of "The Star-Spangled Banner", shown on p. 66, is permanently enshrined at the Maryland Historical Society.

suggested that its words could be sung to a tune called "To Anacreon in Heaven". At the office of the *Baltimore American*, Nicholson had the poem printed as a small handbill with the title "The Defence of Fort McHenry." The author's name was not given.

In the same form the stanzas appeared on September 20 in the *Baltimore Patriot and Evening Advertiser*. The next morning's *Baltimore American* also printed the poem.

On October 18 the program of the Balti-

more Theatre on Holliday Street carried the announcement that:

After the Play, Mr. Harding will sing a much admired NEW SONG, written by a gentleman of Maryland, in commemoration of the GAL-LANT DEFENCE OF FORT McHENRY, called

The STAR SPANGLED BANNER

Under the same title Carr's Music Store on Baltimore Street soon printed the song in sheet music form.

In popularity "The Star-Spangled Banner" grew slowly but steadily. For years it was best known in our armed forces. During the Civil War it was frequently sung and played. Finally it became the favorite patriotic song of the people.

In 1904 the Secretary of the Navy ordered "The Star-Spangled Banner" played morning and evening when the flag was raised and lowered. In 1916 President Woodrow Wilson ordered all of the armed forces to use the song as the National Anthem. In March 1931 President Herbert Hoover signed a bill making the patriotic hymn the official National Anthem of the United States.

Americans today think of "The Star-Spangled Banner" as being more than a poem about the defense of Fort McHenry. Instead, Key's words represent our love for our country and our belief that with God's help we can defend our nation from danger.



This is the fourteenth Wheeler Leaflet on Maryland History. Written by Harold R. Manakee and edited by James W. Foster, it is published by the Maryland Historical Society in cooperation with the Committee on Maryland History in the Schools, Dr. Harry Bard, Chairman.

Sources of illustrations follow: p. 63 drawn by Lauretta A. Lauchner; p. 64 from a portrait of Key, courtesy of a descendant; p. 65 courtesy of the Flag House, Baltimore; p. 69 courtesy of the United States National Museum, Washington, D. C. Others Maryland Historical Society.

The series was named in honor of Dr. Joseph L. Wheeler, Librarian of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, 1926-1945, who originated the idea. *Single copies, ten cents. Inquire for discount on quantity orders. Address MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 201 WEST MONUMENT STREET, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201.*