

On the morning of Sept. 14, 1814, Francis Scott Key, aboard a ship in Baltimore Harbor, could see the “broad stripes and bright stars” of the American flag waving over Fort McHenry as British ships withdrew in the War of 1812. He was moved to compose a song destined to define a nation.

90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

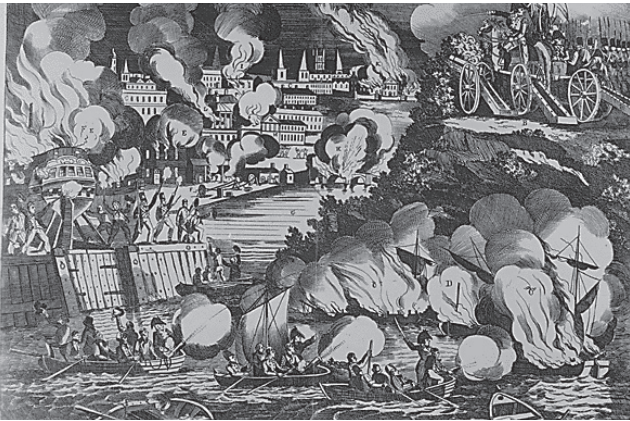
AS THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

THE WAR OF 1812

The end of the **AMERICAN REVOLUTION** brought new challenges for the fledgling United States. Nearly three decades after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, Britain and the U.S. were in conflict again, prompted by British interference with America’s **INTERNATIONAL TRADE**. Wanting to expand its global influence, Congress declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812.

Early in the war, Britain was still engaged in a conflict with France. But, with the defeat of Napoleon’s armies in 1814, Britain turned its full attention to the United States.

A series of defeats demoralized Americans. But they were stunned when British troops marched into **WASHINGTON, D.C.**, on Aug. 24, 1814, and set fire to the Capitol building and White House.



The taking of the City of Washington by the British forces under Major General Ross on Aug. 24, 1814 — Copy of engraving, 1814.

THE BATTLE

On Sept. 13, 1814, British warships bombarded **FORT McHENRY**, which protected Baltimore’s harbor, with bombs and rockets. It continued for 25 hours.

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY was aboard a ship several miles from the fort. When morning dawned on Sept. 14, Key could see that the American flag still waved above the fort, signifying the U.S. forces had survived the battle and stopped the incursion.

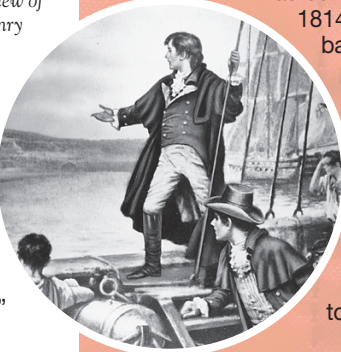
“Then in that hour of deliverance and joyful triumph, my heart spoke.”

Francis Scott Key recalling the morning of Sept. 14, 1814

Moved by the sight of the flag, Key (depicted in the moment at right) wrote “**THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER.**”



An aerial view of Fort McHenry



THE FLAG & ITS LEGACY

In 1813, **MARY PICKERSGILL**, a widow experienced in making ship flags, was asked to sew two flags for Fort McHenry — a 30-by-42-foot flag to serve as the garrison flag and a 17-by-25-foot flag for inclement weather.

The work took **SEVEN WEEKS**. Pickersgill and her assistants assembled the flag by piecing together strips of loosely woven wool bunting 12 or 18 inches wide. The larger flag overwhelmed Pickersgill’s home, requiring the operation to move to Claggett’s Brewery.

The widow was rewarded handsomely for her work, receiving **\$405.90**, more than most in Baltimore earned in a year.

The flag became a treasured keepsake of the family of **LT. COL. GEORGE ARMISTEAD**, who was commander of Fort McHenry in 1814 and an instant hero after the battle. It was often displayed at patriotic gatherings, and the family gave away dozens of small pieces of the flag. Armistead’s grandson, Eben Appleton, eventually lent the Star-Spangled Banner to the **SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION** in 1907, and in 1912 he converted the loan to a gift.

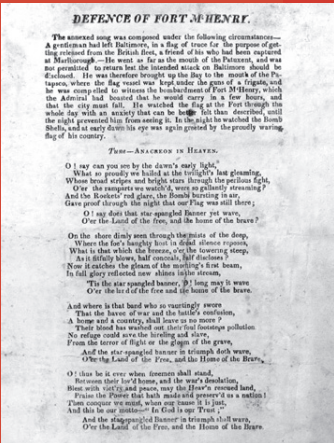


Workers at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History in Washington cover the flag that inspired the Star Spangled Banner on Friday, Nov. 20, 1998, prior to the flag’s restoration.

THE SONG

The **FIRST VERSE** of Francis Scott Key’s song was written on the back of a letter. Later, Key finished four verses. The song was printed in at least 19 papers on the East Coast by mid-October.

THE MELODY used in “The Star-Spangled Banner” was a popular English tune known as “To Anacreon in Heaven.” It was originally written as the “constitutional song” for the Anacreontic Society, a gentlemen’s music club in London, by John Stafford Smith in 1775.



A copy of the first published version of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” one of two known to exist.

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?

THE COMPOSER

Francis Scott Key was a Baltimore **ATTORNEY** and **AMATEUR POET**. He was aboard the ship in Baltimore Harbor to negotiate the release of an American civilian captured by the British. Key was detained when the bombardment of Fort McHenry began. After he penned “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Key returned to his law practice in Washington, D.C.



BECOMING THE ANTHEM

“The Star-Spangled Banner” quickly rose in popularity and gained more significance during the Civil War. In the 1890s, the military used the song for **CEREMONIAL PURPOSES**. But it wasn’t until more than 100 years after it was written that a movement arose to make it the anthem. **MRS. REUBEN ROSS HOLLOWAY**, president of the Maryland State Society, United States Daughters of 1812, and **CONGRESSMAN J. CHARLES LINTHICUM** of Baltimore successfully lobbied Congress in 1931 to deem “The Star-Spangled Banner” the anthem. It became official on **MARCH 3, 1931**.



Alma Clayburgh opens the Stage Women’s War Relief Booth by singing “The Star-Spangled Banner” on Sept. 28, 1918.