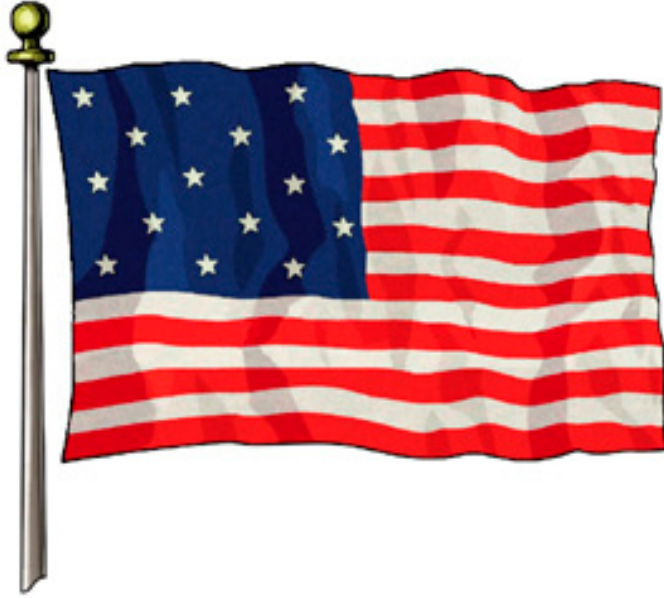




# Introducing the Star Spangled Banner



“The Star-Spangled Banner” is the national anthem of the United States of America. The lyrics come from “Defence of Fort McHenry,” a poem written on September 14, 1814, by 35-year-old lawyer Francis Scott Key after witnessing the bombardment of Fort McHenry by British ships in Baltimore Harbor during the Battle of Baltimore in the War of 1812. Key was inspired by the large American flag, the Star-Spangled Banner, flying triumphantly above the fort during the American victory.

**History:** On September 3, 1814, following the Burning of Washington and the Raid on Alexandria, Francis Scott Key and John Stuart Skinner set sail from Baltimore aboard the ship HMS Minden, flying a flag of truce on a mission to secure an exchange of prisoners. Key and Skinner boarded the British flagship HMS Tonnant on September 7 and spoke with Major General Robert Ross and Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane over dinner.

Because Key and Skinner had heard details of

the plans for the attack on Baltimore, they were held captive until after the battle.

During the rainy night, Key had witnessed the bombardment and on the morning of September 14, the smaller “storm flag” had been lowered and the larger flag had been raised. **This flag, with fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, later came to be known as the Star-Spangled Banner** and is today on display in the National Museum of American History.

Key was inspired by the American victory and the sight of the large American flag flying triumphantly above the fort. Aboard the ship the next day, Key wrote a poem on the back of a letter he had kept in his pocket. At twilight on September 16, he and Skinner were released in Baltimore. He completed the poem and titled it “Defence of Fort McHenry.”

First stanza:

**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 gal-  
lantly streaming?  
And the rocket’s red glare, the bomb burst-  
ing 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?**