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Issue 3-9

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**1827**

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Aug 1, 1779, Francis Scott Key is born. Key was present on a rainy night in 1814, when British warships sent a downpour of shells and rockets onto Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor, relentlessly pounding the American fort for 25 hours. The bombardment, known as the Battle of Baltimore, came only weeks after the British had attacked Washington, D.C., burning the Capitol, the Treasury and the President's house. It was another chapter in the ongoing War of 1812.

Key, at that time a 35-year-old American lawyer, watched from a ship in Chesapeake Bay, eight miles away. "It seemed as though mother earth had opened and was vomiting shot and shell in a sheet of fire and brimstone," Key wrote later. But when darkness arrived, Key saw only red erupting in the night sky. Given the scale of the attack, he was certain the British would win. The hours passed slowly, but in the clearing smoke of "the dawn's early light" on September 14, he saw the American Flag—not the British Union Jack—flying over the fort, announcing an American victory.

Key put his thoughts on paper while still on board the ship, setting his words to the tune of a popular English song. His brother-in-law, commander of a militia at Fort McHenry, read Key's work and had it distributed under the name "Defence of Fort M'Henry." The *Baltimore Patriot* newspaper soon printed it, and within weeks, Key's poem, now called "The Star-Spangled Banner," appeared in print across the country, immortalizing his words—and forever naming the flag it celebrated.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-story-behind-the-star-spangled-banner-149220970/>



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