

Classic Poetry Series

**Francis Scott Key**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**  
2012

**Publisher:**  
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

# Francis Scott Key(1 August 1779 – 11 January 1843)

Francis Scott Key was an American lawyer, author, and amateur poet, from Georgetown, who wrote the lyrics to the United States' national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner".

<b>Life</b>

Francis Scott Key was born to Ann Phoebe Penn Dagworthy (Charlton) and Captain John Ross Key at the family plantation Terra Rubra in what was Frederick County and is now Carroll County, Maryland. His father John Ross Key was a lawyer, a judge and an officer in the Continental Army. His great-grandparents were Philip Key and Susanna Barton Gardiner, both born in London, England, immigrated to Maryland in 1726.

He studied law at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland and also learned under his uncle Philip Barton Key.

<b>"The Star-Spangled Banner"</b>

During the War of 1812, Key, accompanied by the American Prisoner Exchange Agent Colonel John Stuart Skinner, dined aboard the British ship HMS Tonnant, as the guests of three British officers: Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane, Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn, and Major General Robert Ross. Skinner and Key were there to negotiate the release of prisoners, one being Dr. William Beanes. Beanes was a resident of Upper Marlboro, Maryland and had been captured by the British after he placed rowdy stragglers under citizen's arrest with a group of men. Skinner, Key, and Beanes were not allowed to return to their own sloop: they had become familiar with the strength and position of the British units and with the British intent to attack Baltimore. As a result of this, Key was unable to do anything but watch the bombarding of the American forces at Fort McHenry during the Battle of Baltimore on the night of September 13–14, 1814.

At dawn, Key was able to see an American flag still waving and reported this to the prisoners below deck. On the way back to Baltimore, he was inspired to write a poem describing his experience, "Defence of Fort McHenry", which he published in the Patriot on September 20, 1814. He intended to fit it to the rhythms of composer John Stafford Smith's "To Anacreon in Heaven", a popular tune Key had already used as a setting for his 1805 song "When the Warrior Returns," celebrating U.S. heroes of the First Barbary War. (Key used the "star spangled" flag imagery in the earlier song.) It has become better known as "The Star

Spangled Banner". Under this name, the song was adopted as the American national anthem, first by an Executive Order from President Woodrow Wilson in 1916 (which had little effect beyond requiring military bands to play it) and then by a Congressional resolution in 1931, signed by President Herbert Hoover.

In the fourth stanza Key urged the adoption of "In God is our Trust" as the national motto. The United States adopted the motto "In God We Trust" by law in 1956.

### <b>Later Life</b>

From 1818 until his death in 1843, Key was associated with the American Bible Society.

In 1832, Key served as the attorney for Sam Houston during his trial in the U.S. House of Representatives for assaulting another Congressman. He published a prose work called *The Power of Literature, and Its Connection with Religion* in 1834.

In 1835, Key prosecuted Richard Lawrence for his unsuccessful attempt to assassinate President of the United States Andrew Jackson.

In 1843, Key died at the home of his daughter Elizabeth Howard in Baltimore from pleurisy and was initially interred in Old Saint Paul's Cemetery in the vault of John Eager Howard. In 1866, his body was moved to his family plot in Frederick at Mount Olivet Cemetery. Though Key had written poetry from time to time, often with heavily religious themes, these works were not collected and published until 14 years after his death.

The Key Monument Association erected a memorial in 1898 and the remains of both Francis Scott Key and his wife were placed in a crypt in the base of the monument.

### <b>Other Related Items</b>

In 1861, Key's grandson Francis Key Howard, was imprisoned in Fort McHenry with the Mayor of Baltimore, George William Brown, and other locals deemed to be pro-South.

Key was a distant cousin and the namesake of F. Scott Fitzgerald whose full name was Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald. His direct descendants include geneticist Thomas Hunt Morgan, guitarist Dana Key, and the American fashion designer and

socialite Pauline de Rothschild.

Key's daughter, Alice, married U.S. Senator George H. Pendleton.

His sister, Anne Phoebe Charlton Key, married Roger B. Taney, future Chief Justice of the United States and author of the Court's Dred Scott decision.

Key's son, Philip Barton Key II was shot and killed by then-congressman and future Civil War general Daniel Sickles in 1859 after Sickles discovered that his wife was having an affair with Philip Barton Key. Sickles was acquitted in the first use of the temporary insanity defense.

Two of Key's religious poems used as Christian hymns include "Before the Lord We Bow" and "Lord, with Glowing Heart I'd Praise Thee."

While there were three efforts to save the Francis Scott Key residence, it was dismantled in 1947. The residence was located at 3516–18 M Street in Georgetown.

**Monuments and Memorials**

Two bridges are named in his honor. The first is the Francis Scott Key Bridge between the Rosslyn section of Arlington County, Virginia, and Georgetown in Washington, D.C.. Scott's Georgetown home, which was dismantled in 1947 (as part of construction for the Whitehurst Freeway), was located on M Street NW, in the area between the Key Bridge and the intersection of M Street and Whitehurst Freeway. The location is illustrated on a sign in the Francis Scott Key park.

The other bridge is the Francis Scott Key Bridge, part of the Baltimore Beltway crossing the outer harbor of Baltimore, Maryland. Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge is located at the approximate point where the British anchored to shell Fort McHenry.

St. John's College, Annapolis, which Key graduated from in 1796, has an auditorium named in his honor.

Francis Scott Key was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970.

He is buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Frederick. His family plot is next to Thomas Johnson, the first governor of Maryland, and friend Barbara Fritchie, who allegedly waved the American flag out of her home in defiance of Stonewall Jackson's march through the city during the Civil War. Fritchie's resistance was

memorialized in a poem by Poet Laureate John Greenleaf Whittier.

Francis Scott Key Hall at the University of Maryland, College Park is named in his honor. The George Washington University also has a residence hall in Key's honor at the corner of 20th and F Streets.

Francis Scott Key also has a school named after him in Brooklyn, New York. I.S 117 is a junior high school located in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn on Willoughby Avenue. It houses 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classrooms as well as a District 75 Special Education unit. The Special Education classes include children who are emotionally disturbed. For more information on the school and its programs please visit the schools main site, P369k, located in Downtown Brooklyn.

A monument to Key was commissioned by San Francisco businessman James Lick, who donated some \$60,000 for a sculpture of Key to be raised in Golden Gate Park. The travertine monument was executed by sculptor William W. Story in Rome in 1885–87. The city of San Francisco recently allocated some \$140,000 to renovate the Key monument, which was about to be lost to environmental degradation if repairs weren't made. Repairs were recently finished on the monument located in the music concourse outside the de Young Museum.

The US Navy named a submarine in his honor, the USS Francis Scott Key

# Before The Lord We Bow

Before the Lord we bow, the God Who reigns above,  
And rules the world below, boundless in power and love.  
Our thanks we bring in joy and praise, our hearts we raise  
To Heaven's high King.

The nation Thou hast blest may well Thy love declare,  
From foes and fears at rest, protected by Thy care.  
For this fair land, for this bright day, our thanks we pay,  
Gifts of Thy hand.

May every mountain height, each vale and forest green,  
Shine in Thy Word's pure light, and its rich fruits be seen!  
May every tongue be tuned to praise, and join to raise  
A grateful song.

Earth, hear thy Maker's voice, thy great Redeemer own;  
Believe, obey, rejoice, and worship Him alone.  
Cast down thy pride, thy sin deplore and bow before  
The Crucified.

And when in power He comes, O may our native land,  
From all its rending tombs, send forth a glorious band.  
A countless throng, ever to sing to Heaven's high King  
Salvation's song.

Francis Scott Key

# Defence Of Fort Mchenry (Stars And Stripes Forever)

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 rockets' 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 now shines on 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 should leave us no more?  
Their blood has wash'd out their foul foot-steps' 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.

Francis Scott Key

# Lord, With Glowing Heart I'd Praise Thee

Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise Thee,  
For the bliss Thy love bestows,  
For the pardoning grace that saves me,  
And the peace that from it flows:  
Help, O God, my weak endeavor;  
This dull soul to rapture raise:  
Thou must light the flame, or never  
Can my love be warmed to praise.

Praise, my soul, the God that sought thee,  
Wretched wanderer, far astray;  
Found thee lost, and kindly brought thee  
From the paths of death away;  
Praise, with love's devoutest feeling,  
Him Who saw thy guilt-born fear,  
And the light of hope revealing,  
Bade the blood-stained cross appear.

Praise thy Savior God that drew thee  
To that cross, new life to give,  
Held a blood sealed pardon to thee,  
Bade thee look to Him and live.  
Praise the grace whose threats alarmed thee,  
Roused thee from thy fatal ease;  
Praise the grace whose promise warmed thee,  
Praise the grace that whispered peace.

Lord, this bosom's ardent feeling  
Vainly would my lips express.  
Low before Thy footstool kneeling,  
Deign Thy suppliant's prayer to bless:  
Let Thy grace, my soul's chief treasure,  
Love's pure flame within me raise;  
And, since words can never measure,  
Let my life show forth Thy praise.

Francis Scott Key



# Song

WHEN the warrior returns, from the battle afar,  
To the home and the country he nobly defended,  
O! warm be the welcome to gladden his ear,  
And loud be the joy that his perils are ended:  
In the full tide of song let his fame roll along,  
To the feast-flowing board let us gratefully throng,  
Where, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

Columbians! a band of your brothers behold,  
Who claim the reward of your hearts' warm emotion,  
When your cause, when your honor, urged onward the bold,  
In vain frowned the desert, in vain raged the ocean:  
To a far distant shore, to the battle's wild roar,  
They rushed, your fair fame and your rights to secure:  
Then, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

In the conflict resistless, each toil they endured,  
'Till their foes fled dismayed from the war's desolation:  
And pale beamed the Crescent, its splendor obscured  
By the light of the Star Spangled flag of our nation.  
Where each radiant star gleamed a meteor of war,  
And the turbaned heads bowed to its terrible glare,  
Now, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

Our fathers, who stand on the summit of fame,  
Shall exultingly hear of their sons the proud story:  
How their young bosoms glow'd with the patriot flame,  
How they fought, how they fell, in the blaze of their glory.  
How triumphant they rode o'er the wondering flood,  
And stained the blue waters with infidel blood;  
How, mixed with the olive, the laurel did wave,  
And formed a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

Then welcome the warrior returned from afar  
To the home and the country he nobly defended:  
Let the thanks due to valor now gladden his ear,

And loud be the joy that his perils are ended.  
In the full tide of song let his fame roll along,  
To the feast-flowing board let us gratefully throng,  
Where, mixed with the olive, the laurel shall wave,  
And form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave.

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