



FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

Ever since I was a young boy, sitting on my grandmother's knee or resting in my mother's lap, I have loved the sound of words and poetry. It was the childhood experience of listening to my mother and my grandmother, as they read to me from the Bible and from the sonnets and plays of William Shakespeare, that instilled in me a love of words and poetry.

I was born on August 1, 1779 on my father's plantation, Terra Rubra (which is Latin for "red earth",) in what was then still part of Frederick County, Maryland. It is now located in Carroll County.

My father, John Ross Key, was a veteran of the Revolutionary War. He fought with General Washington at the battle of Trenton. My mother has a very long name - Anne Phoebe Penn Dagworthy Charlton Key. I have one sister, whose name is also Anne.

I am married, and my wife's name is Mary. We have eleven children. We live in Georgetown, near Washington, D.C. where I practice law.

In 1814, during the War of 1812, I was asked by President James Madison to negotiate with the British (with whom our country, the United States, was at war) for the release of an American doctor, William Beanes, who had been taken prisoner. I had to sail out on the Chesapeake Bay to do my negotiating. Soon after I obtained Dr. Beanes' release, I witnessed the British bombardment of Fort McHenry. That is what inspired me to write the "Star Spangled Banner."

In later years, I helped to establish a school for poor children in Georgetown, where I was also an active member of the Episcopal Church. In 1833, President Andrew Jackson appointed me to be district attorney for Washington, an important job.

Although I never lived in Baltimore, business affairs brought me to the city on many occasions, the last being in January of 1843.