

# FRANCIS SCOTT KEY WRITES THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Washington, D.C., was burned by the British during the War of 1812.



## Battle of New Orleans

The last battle of the War of 1812 was the Battle of New Orleans.

It took place on January 8, 1815. However, the Battle of New Orleans did not need to happen at all. That is because a peace treaty had been signed between the United States and Great Britain more than two weeks earlier.

At that time, though, communication was poor. There were no phones or faxes or telegrams or e-mail.

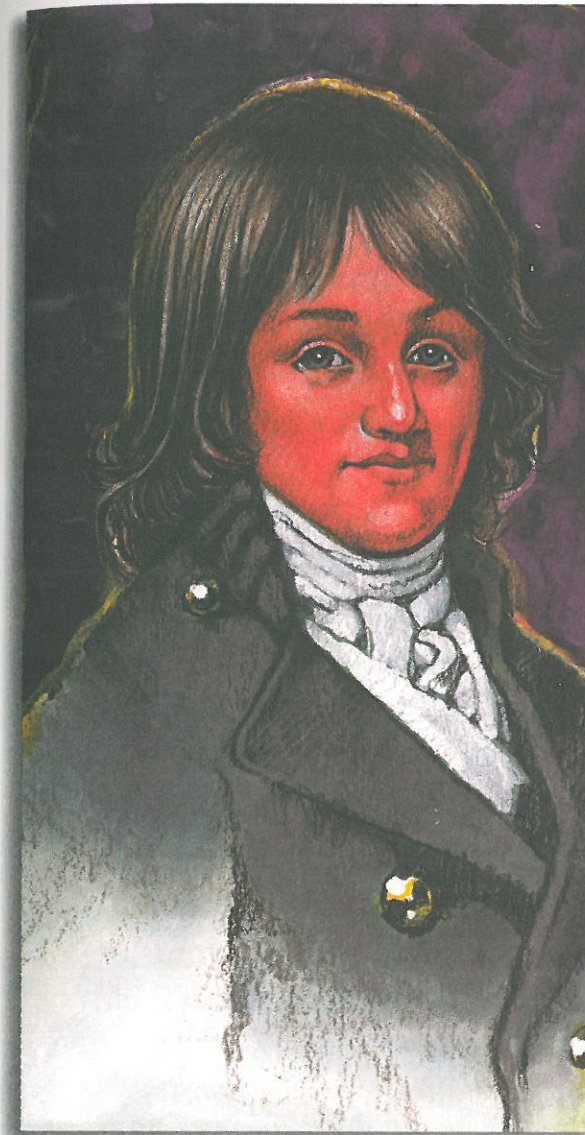
The American and British soldiers who fought at New Orleans did not know the war was already over.

By 1812, Great Britain and the United States were again at war with each other. In 1814, the British captured Washington, D.C. They burned much of our capital, including the White House.

Then, the British sailed north, up the Chesapeake Bay. They planned to take the city of Baltimore, Maryland. They started with Fort McHenry, which had been built to protect Baltimore.

## Francis Scott Key, Captive of the British

American Francis Scott Key, a lawyer and poet, and John S. Skinner, a government agent, went to see the British officers near Baltimore.



Francis Scott Key wrote the words to the "Star Spangled Banner."

They hoped to get the release of Francis's friend, Dr. William Beanes. The British had arrested Dr. Beanes because he had arrested three British sailors.

The British wanted to punish Dr. Beanes. But, John Skinner gave them letters from their own wounded men, who had been left

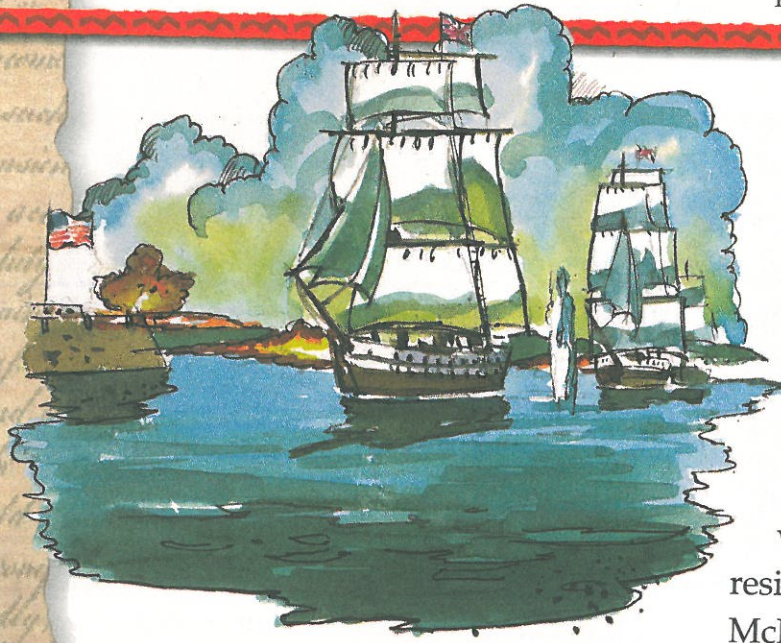
behind after a battle near Washington. The letters said the Americans were taking good care of the wounded British. Because of those letters, the British decided to let Dr. Beanes go.

There was a catch, though. The British would not allow the Americans to leave until after British ships had attacked the city of Baltimore. Francis and John were to be held on the ship *Surprise*. From where the *Surprise* was anchored, they could clearly see Fort McHenry, with a giant, 50-foot-long American flag flying above its walls. They watched that flag as long as daylight lasted. And when night fell, they waited to see if the flag still flew the following day.

## The Bombing of Fort McHenry

The British bombing of Fort McHenry began at 6:00 A.M., on the morning of September 13, 1814. All day long, the British cannons fired at the fort. The British guns were more powerful than the American guns, so the British ships could stay out of Fort McHenry's range. It wasn't until evening that the British ships moved closer, and Fort McHenry's cannons finally could do some damage to the enemy. Soon, the British pulled away again.





For hours and hours of that long night, the British fired their rockets and bombs at the fort. Then, the firing finally stopped. Francis and John could see nothing in the dark. They paced the deck, waiting breathlessly for day to break. Did the flag still fly over Fort McHenry? Or, had the fort surrendered to the British?

On the morning of September 14, dawn began to light the skies. Then, Francis and John could see that, yes, the flag still flew over Fort McHenry! The British had failed. Their ships were leaving. The American prisoners would soon be free to go.

**Francis Writes a Patriotic Poem**

Francis was deeply moved by the sight of the American flag that morning. As he stood on the *Surprise's* deck, he took a letter out

of his pocket. On the back of the letter, he began to scribble lines to a poem about that night. He finished the poem later, in a Baltimore hotel room.

The poem made its way to a printer, and the printer printed it onto a handbill. The handbill was given out to Baltimore residents and to the soldiers of Fort McHenry. The poem was also published in two Baltimore newspapers. Within a couple of months, it had been printed in newspapers all over the United States—in Washington, D.C.; Boston, Massachusetts; Richmond, Virginia; Savannah, Georgia; and Concord, New Hampshire. Soon, people began to sing the words of the poem, using the tune of an old English song for music.

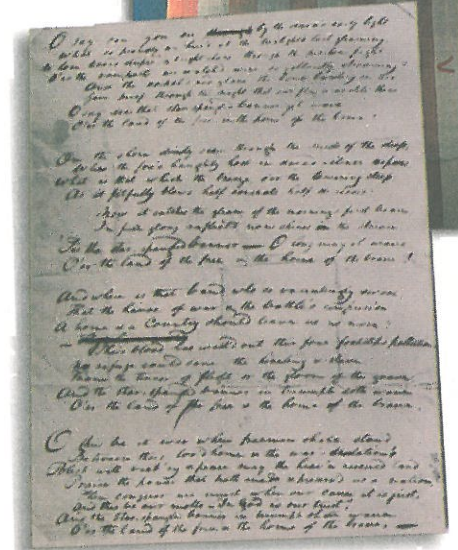
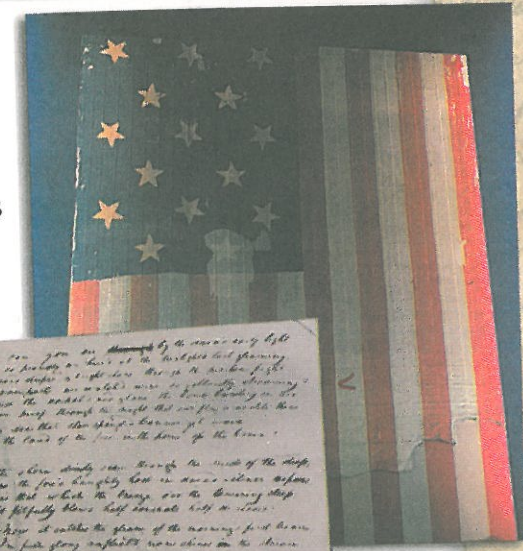
The old song was



called "Anacreon [a poet] in Heaven." Political campaigns in the country began to use the song. The army began to sing the song as it raised and lowered the flag every day. On July 4th, celebrators in cities and towns sang the song, too.

At first, the song was called "Defense of Fort McHenry." It later became known as the "Star-Spangled Banner." This is the story of how the people of the United States made the "Star-Spangled Banner" our unofficial national anthem. It wasn't until 1931 that Congress officially named it the national anthem.

Above right: This is the flag that flew over Fort McHenry when Francis Scott Key wrote our national anthem. Above left: This is a copy of Key's original poem in his own handwriting.



**Show What You Know**

In the "Star-Spangled Banner," Francis Scott Key told the story of the attack on Fort McHenry. Read the words to the first verse below. Compare the words to the story you have just read. Then, on another sheet of paper, write a poem or a song about an event or sight you have witnessed that greatly impressed you.

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, thro' 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 thro' 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 ERIE CANAL

For years, people talked about building a canal to connect Lake Erie to the Hudson River. New York's governor, De Witt Clinton, wanted the canal. In fact, he ran for office on the promise of building a canal if he were elected. The people wanted a canal. That is why they elected De Witt Clinton governor by a landslide—43,310 to 1,479. Plus, the state government agreed to pay for the building of the canal.

There was, however, one more hurdle to jump before work on the canal could begin. The money had to be approved by a special five-person government committee. Of the five, two were against building the Erie Canal and two were in favor of building it. Another one—Judge James Kent—was undecided. Here is how James Kent made up his mind and how the Erie Canal was built.

## A Threat Backfires

In 1817, Daniel Tompkins was vice president of the United States. Before he became vice president, Daniel had been New York's governor. He was opposed to the Erie Canal, and he went to speak to the committee of five before they voted.

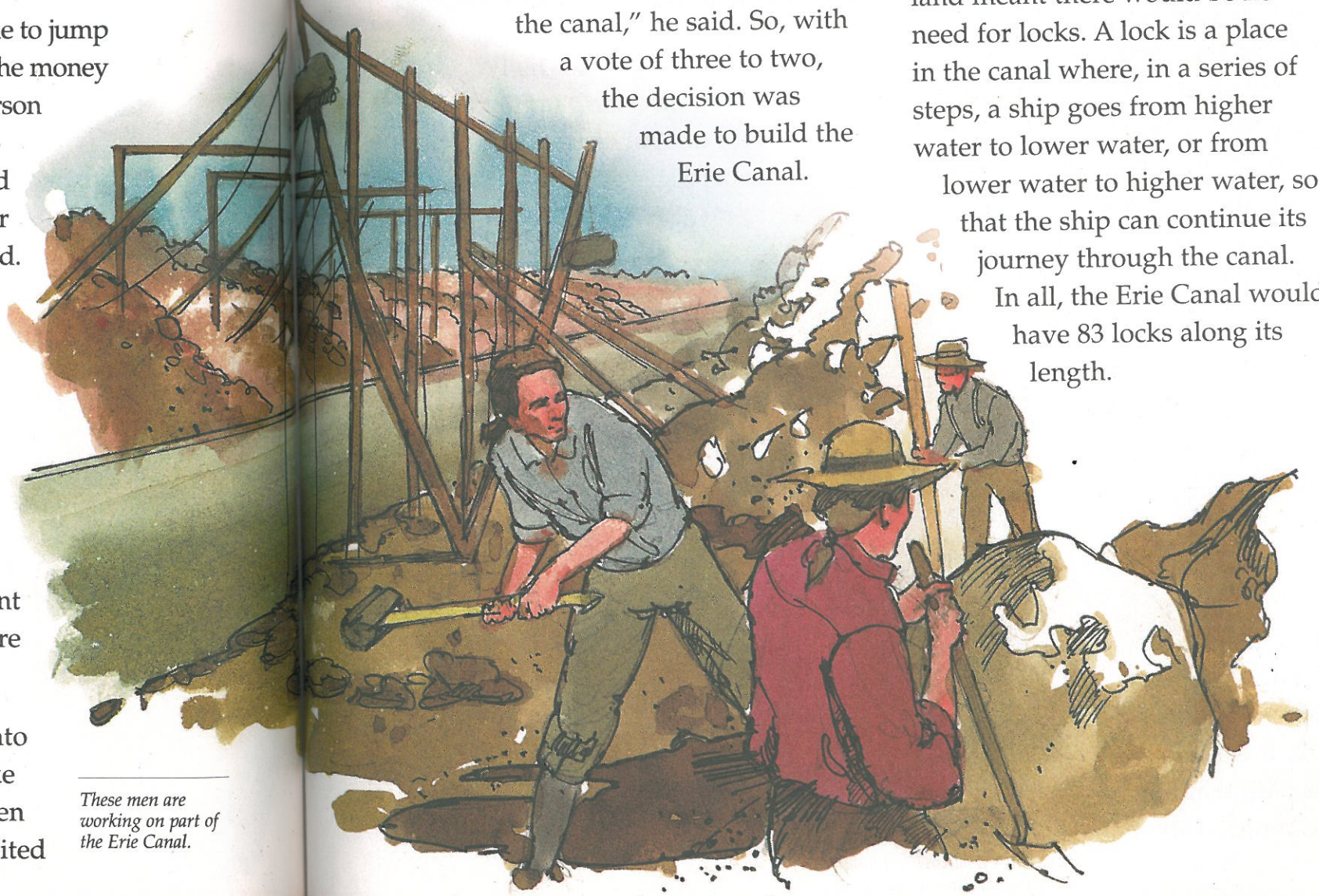
Daniel wanted to talk the group into voting against the Erie Canal. To make sure that happened, he tried to frighten them. He told them that soon, the United

States would again go to war against England. He said New Yorkers should spend their money on getting ready for war, rather than on a canal.

But Daniel's plan backfired. Judge Kent became very angry at the way the vice president tried to influence the group. The judge stood up and gave his vote. His became the third "yes" to the Erie Canal! "If we must have war or have a canal, I am in favor of the canal," he said. So, with a vote of three to two, the decision was made to build the Erie Canal.

## Work on the Canal

On July 4, 1817, the first piece of earth was turned for the Erie Canal. Construction started in the middle of the state, near the little settlement of Rome. This may seem a strange place to start, for Rome still was in the wilderness. However, the land there would be easier to dig than the land in the west or the east. That is because there were few rocks in this area, and the land was fairly flat. Flat land meant there would be no need for locks. A lock is a place in the canal where, in a series of steps, a ship goes from higher water to lower water, or from lower water to higher water, so that the ship can continue its journey through the canal. In all, the Erie Canal would have 83 locks along its length.



These men are working on part of the Erie Canal.

## "Low Bridge! Everybody Down!"

About 300 bridges were built over the Erie Canal. Some of these bridges connected roads broken in two by the canal's crossing. Other bridges were built so that farmers could reach their fields.

To save money, these bridges usually were built low, close to the canal. As canalboats approached, the pilot would yell, "Low bridge!" so that all the passengers would duck their heads. Some bridges were so low that people had to lie on the deck to fit under them!