

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

Carroll's Yesteryears  
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Francis Scott Key never forgot Taneytown roots  
by Joe Getty

Highlights of Taneytown's heritage will be featured at the Historical Society of Carroll County's annual dinner meeting Nov. 7. Carroll County's most illustrious native son, Francis Scott Key, was closely associated with the people and activities during the early history of Taneytown.

Francis Scott Key was born August 1, 1779, at his family's plantation called Terra Rubra. This property, where Key grew up, was located south of Taneytown. After his rise to prominence as author of the Star Spangled Banner, Key fondly recalled his family heritage in this region of Maryland and his fondness for the red lands and scenic vistas of his homestead.

Reminiscences of Francis Scott Key's close relationship to the people of Taneytown were recorded in Clotworthy Birnie's History of Taneytown, published in 1894. Key became famous not only for his poetry, but also as a public speaker, writer, political leader and attorney.

Birnie relates that Key attended a political meeting in the Taneytown region and that after dinner the following toast was made: "Francis S. Key, a friend of the administration, and an incorruptible patriot, worthy of being honored wherever genius is admired or liberty cherished, as the author of the Star Spangled Banner." Key's answer to the toast is this: "He had never forgotten, and never should forget, that he was a native of the county whose citizens were now assembled upon an occasion so gratifying to his feelings. Though no longer a resident, its scenes had never ceased to be dear to him. His annual visits here had always been anticipated with pleasure, and never, even from his boyhood, had he come within view of these mountains, without having his warmest affections awakened at the sight."

Birnie described Key's character in this manner: "Every one who knew Mr. Key speaks of him as a delightful companion; sincere in his friendship, earnest, genial and full of fun, he had the respect of every one in the community. I have often heard my father speak of an incident that occurred in Taneytown when Mr. Key was nearly 50 years old. In those days what were called Magistrate's Courts were held at different places through the counties, at which three magistrates sat and tried cases. An old man from the neighborhood who had known Key from boyhood, was called before one of these courts, for some offense of which he was innocent. The hour appointed for the trial was 2 p.m. and as the time drew near, the old man, apparently without friends, was patiently waiting for the court to open.

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"Some one asked him, 'Who is your lawyer?'

"He answered 'Frankie Key.'

" 'But it's time for the trial to begin and he's not here; what are you going to do?' said the other.

" 'He'll be here,' said the old man, 'He said it would be all right, and I know it will; Frankie never tells lies.'

"Just at the hour, Key arrived and brought his client off triumphantly, the old man's only comment being, 'I knew it would be all right, because Frankie said so.'"

One of the prominent artifacts in the Historical Society's collection is the cast-iron fireback from Terra Rubra. A fireback was used to protect the back wall of a fireplace. The Terra Rubra example is quite large with the dimensions being approximately four feet wide and three feet high.

The house was built in 1770 and the fireback is dated "1771" by the inscription cast in the center between two S-scroll curves with volutes. An additional cast motif is the cast eight-point star at the top. Decorative features include the shaped top that is closely related to the crest rail on a high-style Chippendale chair. It also has a thumbnail edge similar to furniture designs of lips on tabletops and drawer fronts during this period.

The upcoming historical society dinner meeting will include a program about the unique artifacts relating to Taneytown and its craftsmen. Objects that are preserved in the historical society's collection will be featured in a slide presentation by curator Jay Graybeal.

In addition, highlights about Taneytown's history will be presented by Joe Getty, director of the historical society. The evening will also include the premiere showing of a videotape program about the architecture of Taneytown produced by the historical society and Prestige Cablevision.

This dinner meeting will be Nov. 7, at the Taneytown Firemen's Activities Building, adjoining the Taneytown Memorial Park. Dinner will begin at 6:30 p.m. The menu will be a family style oyster and turkey supper with mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, sauerkraut, rolls dessert and coffee. Reservations are required by Oct. 31. Tickets are available at the cost of \$15 per person.

For additional information, contact the historical society at 848-6494.

*Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County*

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*Photo caption: The cast-iron fireback from Francis Scott Key’s homestead, Terra Rubra, will be featured in a slide presentation at the historical society’s annual dinner meeting.*