

“Francis Scott Key Descendant Made Address in 1926”

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By Jay A. Graybeal

When Carroll County was founded on January 19, 1837, local residents celebrated the birth of the new county. Celebrating the County’s founding was revived by the Carroll County Society of Baltimore in 1920. Each year the group of transplanted Countians held a dinner with a lecture on an important topic in county history. The 1926 dinner focused on Francis Scott Key and featured remarks by his great-grandson. A description of the event was published in the January 22nd issue of the Democratic Advocate newspaper:

“Francis Scott Key-Smith, great-grandson of the author of “The Star Spangled Banner,” was the speaker at the annual dinner of the Carroll County Society at the Hotel Rennert, Baltimore, Tuesday evening, and said in part:

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, of the Carroll County Society of Baltimore: The pleasure which I experience in being with you tonight is enhanced by many pleasant recollections of happy boyhood days spend amount the green hills and valleys of Maryland. I cherish many fond recollections of the native state of my mother and my maternal ancestors, and look back upon the happy days of my boyhood spent with my mother’s relatives in Maryland as among the happiest of my life.

In response to your kind invitation it is my especial privilege tonight, to make you a brief address concerning American patriotism and a bit of Maryland and American history, through which a native son of Carroll county gained the high and exalted distinction of christening the flag of his country, “The Star Spangled Banner,” and writing his name indelibly upon its folds to endure as long as that banner shall wave. Who, looking at the flag today does not inwardly exclaim, “Tis the Star Spangled Banner,” and at the same time recall the name of the author of the song. This is indeed a great honor for any man, and well may Carroll county and his native state and country feel proud to have produced a character whose Christian life and unswerving patriotism were equal to the occasion when man and opportunity met, for the birth of the nation’s national anthem.

No state or city has a greater right to be proud or feel the tingle of the wild pulsations which these words have for every red-blooded and true American than Maryland and Baltimore, the stubborn and courageous defense of whose citizens, against fearful odds, gave rise to the occasion for writing the National Anthem. The story is well known, but will bear a brief repetition tonight. Dr. Beanes, a citizen of Marlborough, had been taken prisoner by the British during the War of 1812 when the British, after ransacking and burning the National Capitol, retreated through Marlborough to their ships at anchor in the Patuxent River. Francis Scott Key, a practicing attorney in the District of Columbia, was requested by friends of the doctor to go to the British fleet under a flag of truce and intercede for the release of the Maryland physician. Securing letters of marque from the government, Key started out alone upon his hazardous mission, making the tiresome journey from Washington to Baltimore by stage, over rough roads. Arriving in this city he sought, according to his instructions, the aid of Colonel John Skinner, the then United States agent for the parole of prisoners. Together with Colonel Skinner, aboard the U.S. Cartel ship Minden, he proceeded from Baltimore by the way of the Chesapeake Bay to the mouth of the Patuxent River—those were the days of sail boats, and the distance was a hundred miles. Meeting with the British fleet at the mouth of the Patuxent, he boarded the British Admiral’s flagship under a flag of truce and sought an interview with him. He was politely received, but the Admiral was in no mood to grant his request for the release of Dr. Beanes and frankly told him so, adding that he intended

hanging the Doctor from the yard arm of his vessel. Without relating the details, Mr. Key finally succeeded in securing the consent of the Admiral to the release of the doctor, but he was advised, as the British contemplated another attack upon the shores of America before leaving the Chesapeake, he and his party, including the doctor, would be detained until after the attack. Shortly after his interview with the Admiral, the British fleet weighed anchor and proceeded up the Chesapeake in the direction of Baltimore. Upon reaching the mouth of the Patapsco, Key and his companions including the doctor, were placed aboard their own little ship under guard of British marines and anchored in a position from which they could view the British offensive, no doubt that their humiliation might be the greater at the defeat which the British was confident of making over their countrymen, such are the fortunes of war. British troops were now landed at North Point, a distance of twelve miles from Baltimore, and the British fleet moving up the Patapsco prepared to attack Fort McHenry simultaneously with the march of their troops from North Point.

That Baltimore was the object of attack was not plain to Key and his companions aboard the *Minden*. The ease with which the British had defeated the untrained militia which had defended Washington, a week or so previous, was fresh in the mind of Key and knowing that Baltimore was likewise defended by untrained militia he had but little hopes but that the fate of Baltimore would be the same as that of Washington. General Ross had boasted before them that he would take Baltimore and make it his winter headquarters if it rained militia.

Anxious, expectant, hopeful, yet fearing to hope, he watched the bombardment from the time it began until the darkness of night prevented his longer seeing the fort or its flag. Consolation was sent him and his little party, however, by "The rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air", which, as he tells us, "Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there."

Shortly before dawn the battle ceased and even this means of proof that his native state's proud city had not fallen captive to the British was denied him.

At last the day dawned and with first streak of sunlight which shot athwart the heavens; lifting the mists of the deep, his pent-up emotion burst forth in a song of patriotic praise and thanks to Heaven as his weary eyes caught sight of the flag gallantly waving from the ramparts of the fort, gloriously beautiful in the delicate hues of morn, a challenge to the silenced guns of the enemy, and the national anthem was given birth.

The seventh annual dinner of the Carroll County Society of Baltimore will be remembered by every one attending as the best and most interesting annual meeting that the Society has held.

The program and menu contained a photograph sketch of Francis Scott Key, this itself is quite a souvenir, for it is doubtful if ever a picture of Mr. Key like it was seen in Carroll County. The dinner itself was the best that we have ever had is the general statement from each one attending. The invocation was delivered Rev John T. Ensor, D.D. Miss Alice Shriver Reckord sang, with Miss Ruby E. Maldeis accompanist. More than one hundred persons attended the dinner.

Carroll Countians who did not attend this dinner missed something that was worth much to us all, great talks by such men as T. Murray Maynadier, President Maryland Society of War 1812; T. Foley Hisky, James E. Hancock, all of the Society of War 1812. Charles R. Miller former President of the Carroll County Society. The Recording Secretary, George R. Babylon, read a letter from P. B. Englar, of Taneytown, giving a portion of the local views of Francis Scott Key during his day. He also read a letter

from Miss Mary B. Shellman of Tulsa, Oklahoma, expressing good wishes to the Society, and paid a great tribute to Charles R. Woods, the former President and organizer of the Society. At the suggestion of the Toastmaster William E. More, the President of the Society all-present stood for one minute as a tribute to Mr. Woods."

The Carroll County Society of Baltimore continued the County Birthday observance for several decades. The group also sponsored annual summer outings to Carroll County communities for their members. In recent years the Historical Society of Carroll County has observed the County Birthday with a program on January 19th. This year we will look at the histories of two historic properties recently acquired by the Society.



*Members of the Carroll County Society of Baltimore visited the Historical Society's newly acquired Shellman House on August 6, 1941. Historical Society of Carroll County, gift of J. Carbery Boyle, 1941.*