

The Business Connector

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A Star-Spangled Networking Adventure

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We all know the story of Francis Scott Key. He was aboard a British warship just off the coast of Baltimore, Maryland during the War of 1812.

After 25 hours of continual bombardment, Key was an eye witness to the fact that the British were unable to get the United States to surrender. Inspired, Key wrote a poem, which eventually became our national anthem.

This historical overview is relatively well known. Less known, however, is the circumstances that led Key to his place in history. In summary, networking put Francis Scott Key in a unique position to write *The Star Spangled Banner*.

In 1812, war broke out over Britain's attempts to regulate American shipping and other activities. By the evening of the 24th of August 1814, the British had entered Chesapeake Bay and invaded and captured Washington, setting fire to the Capitol and the White House.

Following the attack on Washington, the British returned to Chesapeake Bay and set their sights on the city of Baltimore. Before returning to their ships, however, they arrested a 65 year-old physician, Dr. William Beanes and detained him on their flagship the *Tonnant*.

Dr. Beanes' friends went to work almost immediately trying to win his release. As he was well connected, his friends were able to contact several high-ranking state and federal government officials, including Secretary of State James Monroe. Despite encouraging words, there was no progress towards obtaining the release of Dr. Beanes.

Discouraged, but not giving up hope, the doctor's patients thought that a lawyer with governmental contacts might be a better approach. One of his patients knew of such a lawyer – Richard West.

Networking through his wife, West contacted his wife's brother-in-law, Francis Scott Key – an attorney with experience as a United States District Attorney – and convinced him to take up the cause.

Key, however, had no political authority to negotiate with the British. Undeterred, he networked through his contacts to the President of the United States, James Madison. Once connected, Key requested permission to visit the British fleet under a flag of truce and negotiate for the release of Dr. Beanes.

In summary, networking put Francis Scott Key in a unique position to write The Star Spangled Banner.

Although President Madison considered the request, he knew he was not in a position to connect Key with Dr. Beane's captors. At that time the only open contact permitted with the British on matters related to the release of prisoners was through the Exchange Officer for Prisoners of War, Colonel John S. Skinner.

In an effort to remedy this deficiency, President Madison introduced Key to the Commissioner General of Prisoners, General John Mason, who then united Key with Skinner. With this team in place, President Madison

approved the request and formally appointed Colonel Skinner and Key to undertake the mission jointly.

On the morning of September 3rd, Skinner and Key set sail from Baltimore. Working through the Colonel's contacts, they located and boarded the British flagship on the 7th of September.

Using Skinner's skills and contacts, within days they were able to obtain a pledge from the British to release Dr. Beanes. They, however, were not permitted to leave pending the execution of the British's new strategy – an attack on Baltimore.

At approximately 7:00 on the morning of September 13th, the British began to bomb Ft. McHenry, Baltimore's only defense. Key knew that so long as the shelling continued, Ft. McHenry had not surrendered.

Although before dawn the bombing stopped, as the sun rose Key was able to see the U.S. flag still flying over Fort McHenry. Being uniquely inspired, he began to write a poem, which conveyed perfectly the strange combination of fear, defiance, suspense and sheer ecstasy of the event.

Back in Baltimore, Key showed his work to Judge Joseph Nicholson, his wife's brother-in-law, who used his connections to have the poem printed and distributed as handbills. This led to it being printed in the Baltimore Patriot, then in papers as far away as Savannah, Georgia and Concord, New Hampshire.

In short, Key's poem – which became the national anthem of the United States in 1931 by an Act of Congress – was brought to life through the power of networking. ✓

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