

We all know the story. It is a tremendously dramatic story, and I am afraid that we Marylanders are too strongly inclined to forget its importance.

The banner, seen by Francis Scott Key "in the dawn's early light," was the biggest flag in the world. It measured 42 feet long and 30 wide. Never before had our national emblem been displayed in such heroic proportions. Why did it happen on this occasion? Well it was a Maryland gesture. The banner was ordered by Maryland officers specifically for the terrible battle they knew was ahead of them. For some reason that they did not commit to the records they ordered it to be of tremendous size. They were just militia men, but they were going to wage a fight for the whole United States of America. And so, they put the flag of the whole United States in the sky above them and they put it there with emphasis. And what emphasis, indeed! Not only did they call for mighty measurements of the flag itself, but they flew this emblem of their will and their courage from a giant staff, 87 feet high. So that the enemy might know from afar that, although the capital city was lost, the American people still intended to fight to save their Republic. It is a magnificent gesture in human history, and it was a gesture made in Maryland. Yet, how often do we Marylanders think about it? We know, of course, that the Star-Spangled Banner was born in Baltimore. But I am afraid we tend to forget the drama.

We know, however, that a Maryland poet said it for us, and his words still ring in the hearts and minds of Americans when the strains are heard:

"Oh thus be it ever, when free men shall stand
Between the loved home and the war's desolation."

For, although this poet was seeing just one battle in one particular war, his poetic imagination ranged down the future, and he wrote for all time, and not for just that day. And so, the song that was born there in Baltimore Harbor, on September 12, 1814, is still valid for a whole people.

England is no longer our enemy. She is our very good friend. But there remain enemies of freedom, and the nations threatened by them know that the Star-Spangled Banner is freedom's greatest defender. "Thus be it ever." Immortal words, given to the whole world. In Maryland, by a Marylander, while Maryland soldiers faced death to save the liberty they cherished.

Let me cite another instance when Maryland stepped forward to