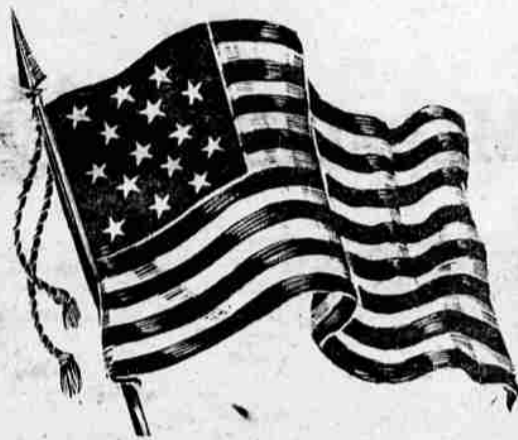


Francis Scott Key wrote the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner" 145 years ago today, and the music has been the subject of controversy ever since



Francis Scott Key wrote only the anthem's words.

## SHOULD WE CHANGE OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM?

by Alfred Balk

**F**ORMER PRESIDENT Harry S. Truman often makes news with his outspoken comments. During a televised conversation last year, for example, Mr. Truman was asked his opinion of "The Missouri Waltz," a song which virtually has become his theme.

Mr. Truman snapped, "It's as bad as 'the Star-Spangled Banner' as far as music is concerned!"

Mr. Truman, who takes his patriotism seriously, obviously meant no disrespect to the anthem as a symbol. He was speaking only of its musical qualities—and in this, despite the reverence Americans feel for their national anthem, many who have struggled to sing it must agree. As it now stands, it is hard to cope with vocally.

For several years, musicians and singers have realized this and suggested some challenging, even controversial, improvements.

For example, Deems Taylor, noted music historian and commentator, says, "The fundamental qualification for a good national anthem is that it can be sung by everybody. 'The Star-Spangled Banner' cannot be sung by everybody!"

Or take the view of Lucy Monroe, who has led the anthem publicly some 6,000 times and is probably more familiar with it than any other singer. "The people want to sing 'our song' well," says Miss Monroe, "but rather than try to make the high notes, some of them don't sing at all. This is a sad situation." Yet here is a song that should belong to all Americans, one which should inspire patriotism as we sing it with our countrymen. But are we able to sing it?

Congress, considered this problem last year in House subcommittee hearings on whether a "standard version" of "The Star-Spangled Ban-

ner" should be adopted. (We don't have an official score and verse now).

But the hearings were inconclusive. Many expressed concern about the quality of our anthem, but there was equal concern that any hasty alterations would be regretted later.

As most schoolboys know, Francis Scott Key wrote the words during the War of 1812—in fact, he wrote them 145 years ago today, on Sept. 13, 1814. A Washington attorney and amateur versifier, he was so moved while watching the British bombardment of Fort McHenry that at dawn, when the American flag still flew defiantly, he began penning his immortal stanzas.

Key did not write the music. In fact, he apparently didn't realize his poem would ever be sung. But the words fit an old air, "To Anacreon in Heaven." There were many versions of the tune then, including a drinking song, and a Baltimore music store published "The Star-Spangled Banner" to this music in 1814.

The song, though popular in Baltimore, did not appear in school song books until 1850. Soldiers picked it up during the wars of the 19th century, and by World War I it had become a favorite.

The war made us conscious that we lacked a national anthem, so a bill was introduced to make the song our official hymn. But petitions also poured in on behalf of "America the Beautiful," "Hail Columbia," and even "Yankee Doodle."

Six times "The Star-Spangled Banner" was nominated. Finally, on March 3, 1931, Congress declared that the "song known traditionally" as "The Star-Spangled Banner" was officially our anthem.

Why hasn't this closed the matter?

What puzzles the experts is—should we modify the anthem for "singability," or should an official version be adopted which adheres closely to what is considered the "original?" Or should we seek a new anthem?

A number of songs have been mentioned which seem to express the spirit of our nation as well as—and in some cases better than—the revered words of Key.

Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," for instance, has stirred whole audiences to tears. Congress already has voted him a gold medal for writing it. "America the Beautiful" has some of the most majestic descriptive phrases ever written about our country. Composer Morton Gould, among others, has said he believes it now is "more pertinent" than "The Star-Spangled Banner."

"The Stars and Stripes Forever," John Philip Sousa's grandiloquent march, as yet has no words which match its music in dignity and power. But it could be the basis of a tremendously moving national song. "America" has touched many persons deeply, including Deems Taylor, who considers it a candidate for a national anthem.

Many, however, find it inconceivable that anything but "The Star-Spangled Banner" could be our anthem. Bing Crosby, while conceding its "difficulties" says, "I genuinely deplore the abandonment of things traditional to our American heritage. Let's keep 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

**A** COMPROMISE may be to level off a few of the anthem's notes which we have trouble singing. Paul Taubman, a leading New York TV musical director, has endeavored to do this. At the request of the National Music Council, a Congressionally chartered organization of 45 leading musical groups, Taubman has made an arrangement of "The Star-Spangled Banner" which put its within everybody's vocal range without destroying the song's basic character.

In musical terms, Taubman has lowered each note a minor third for the phrases, "And the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air," and also the final "O'er the land of the free."

"Mr. Taubman's change," says Lucy Monroe, "is the only completely satisfactory solution, and I respectfully urge that it be adopted so that all of us, young and old, in every walk of life, may stand proudly and sing every note of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

From time to time, as more pressing matters are disposed of, the House subcommittee will meet again to discuss an official version. It will consider any viewpoint put forth with respect and restraint.

This includes yours, for our national anthem—above all—belongs to every American!

### Cover:

Photographer Mal Bulloch spent many pleasant hours with Mr. and Mrs. Dean Martin to get today's cover photo and other "at home" shots to illustrate the fascinating series, "This Is My Dino," which begins on page 8.

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