



## This weekend, watch as the Baltimoreans really defend this house

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Defenders Day celebrates the three-day stretch when Baltimore militiamen, with a mixture of valor, guile, sharpshooting and stacked furniture, saved the young United States of America from invasion by a large and experienced British force.

Starting in April, 1814, British Gen. Robert Ross started to march his army up the Patuxent River. Standing between Ross and his 4,500 troops was Brig. Gen. William H. Winder, an inept political appointee who had been captured—and released by the British—earlier in the War of 1812.

The battle for Washington, D.C. on Aug. 24, 1814, did not last long at all, and the British torched Washington, burning the still unfinished White House, Capitol, Library of Congress and Treasury Building. President James Madison and the entire government fled the city.

Ross's men then began to march north toward the more militarily strategic target: Baltimore and its port.

They arrived on the outskirts of Baltimore on September 11, and the fighting began on Monday, Sept. 12. There were two prongs to the British attack. Ross' army attacked the Eastside, along what is now known as North Point Road. The navy sat offshore waiting for dark to start its bombardment of Fort McHenry on the Southside.

Eastsiders set up fortifications on high ground around what is now the Pagoda in Patterson Park. The gun emplacements were made of piles of household furniture and dirt, and the army of merchants and tradesmen.

Ross never got that far. He was picked off by snipers at the Battle of North Point. His soldiers managed to get as far as what is now Highlandtown on Sept. 13, but were forced to retreat. That left the conquering of Baltimore up to the British ships in the Patapsco River.

The bombardment began early in the morning of September 13 with an exchange of cannon fire. The British assessed the range of the smaller American guns and withdrew just out of range—almost to where the Key Bridge now stands—and commenced firing.

The British hammered the fort with artillery fire for the next 25 hours, but the Americans stood firm and the British ships, learning of the death of Gen. Ross and the troops' retreat from East Baltimore, stopped firing and headed back down the bay.

The battle, and the inspiring performance of Baltimore's largely civilian force, inspired attorney and amateur poet Francis Scott Key to write a poem, set to the tune of a popular drinking song, about his relief and pride in seeing the enormous American flag still flying over Fort McHenry at dawn on Wednesday, Sept. 14. The poem, of course, became the national anthem.