

The Flag of the United States of America

By

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Grand Union Flag	6
St George’s Cross	6
St. Andrew’s Cross	6
Union Jack or Union Flag.....	6
Sons of Liberty Flag.....	7
Grand Union Flag	7
Early Colonial Flags	8
Continental Army.....	9
Continental Navy Jack	10
Selected Thirteen-Star U.S. Flags.....	11
John Hulbert Flag.....	12
Washington’s Commander-in-Chief Flag.....	12
Margaret Manny and ship <i>Alfred</i>	13
Correspondence between George Washington and Richard Peters	13
Designer of First United States Flag.....	14
Betsy Ross.....	15
Francis Hopkinson	16
Fifteen-Star U.S. Flag	17
Samuel Chester Reid Flags	17
Twenty-Star U.S. Flag	18
Twenty-One-Star U.S. Flag	18
Twenty-Five-Star U.S. Flag.....	19
Twenty-Six-Star U.S. Flag.....	19
Great Star Flags.....	20
Twenty-Seven-Star U.S. Flag	20
Twenty-Eight-Star U.S. Flag	21
Diamond Pattern Flags.....	21
27-Star US Truncated Diamond Pattern Flag ¹⁵⁵	22
29-Star US Diamond Pattern Flag	22
Twenty-Nine-Star U.S. Flag	22
Thirty-Star U.S. Flag.....	22
Thirty-One-Star U.S. Flag.....	22
Thirty-Two-Star U.S. Flag.....	23
Thirty-Three-Star U.S. Flag.....	23
Thirty-Four-Star U.S. Flag.....	23
Thirty-Five-Star U.S. Flag	24
Thirty-Six-Star U.S. Flag.....	24
Thirty-Seven-Star U.S. Flag	25
Thirty-Eight-Star U.S. Flag.....	26
Forty-Three-Star U.S. Flag	27
Forty-Four-Star U.S. Flag.....	27

Forty-Five-Star U.S. Flag 27
Forty-Six-Star U.S. Flag 28
Forty-Eight-Star U.S. Flag..... 28
Forty-Nine-Star U.S. Flag..... 29
Fifty-Star U.S. Flag..... 29
Flag Nicknames 30
“Star-Spangled Banner” 30
“Old Glory” 30
Patriotism 31
Flag Day..... 31
Pledge of Allegiance 32
Conclusion 32

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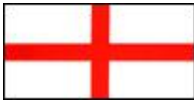
Introduction

The Flag of the United States of America evolved over time. Initially, flags were made so that American ships could recognize other American ships and be identified by other nations. Flags were also made to identify Continental battalions. When the Continental

Congress finally passed legislation to create a flag in June 1777, very few details were specified. After the legislation, many variations of flags were created when a new state entered the union. It was not until 1912 that President Woodrow Wilson signed an executive order that established the arrangement of stars. This paper will discuss the United States flag from the time the Colonies were a part of Great Britain to the present.

Grand Union Flag

St George's Cross



The St George's Cross originated with the Crusades.¹ Richard I *Coeur de Lion* adopted St George as his personal patron² during his reign from 1189 to 1199.³ St George is often depicted as a knight in armor,⁴ battling dragons or other fiery serpents.⁵ However, those images did not appear until about the ninth century.⁶ Edward III, King of England from 1327 to 1377,⁷ flew different versions of the St. George's cross during his military campaigns and by 1734, the red cross of St George was the standard of England.⁸

St. Andrew's Cross



King Angus, one of the surviving inhabitants of Picts, dreamt that St Andrew appeared on the eve of a battle and a silver saltire appeared in the sky the next day.⁹ Following this battle, the Picts adopted the diagonal white cross as their national banner.¹⁰ In 843, Kenneth McAlpin adopted the saltire as the flag of all Scotland.¹¹ The Scottish Parliament declared the St Andrew's cross the national emblem in 1385, to be worn on the front and back of the surcoats of Scottish and French soldiers when fighting the English.¹³ St Andrew was a disciple of St John the Baptist and the first of Jesus' disciples.¹⁴ Even though tradition indicates St Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross, there are no sources or references of such an event.¹⁵

Union Jack or Union Flag

James, son of Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, and Mary, Queen of Scots, was crowned as James VI, King of Scots in 1567 and James I, King of England in 1603, and he reigned until he died in 1625.¹⁶ After his ascension, British ships were obliged to fly two flags: the crosses of both St George and St Andrew.¹⁷ English sailors flew St George in the victorious position and Scots flew St Andrew on top.¹⁸ However, two flags flying from one mast indicated that a military engagement occurred, and the victor's flag hung from the top.¹⁹

By about 1606, two designs became acceptable with ships flying either a Scottish version or an English version. The Union Flag for England placed the cross of St George over that of St Andrew and the Union Flag for Scotland placed the cross of St Andrew over that of St George.²⁰ A white border surrounded the Red Cross for

reasons of heraldry that required two colors never to touch each other.²¹

In 1681, King William and Queen Mary ordered royal vessels from the combined English and Scottish navies to fly the Red Ensign, a red flag with the Union Flag in the canton.²² This flag was known as the Red Ensign or Meteor Flag of Old England.



In 1707, England and Scotland were united under the name of Great Britain, and all flags, banners, standards, and ensigns would include the red cross of Saint George, patron saint of England, conjoined with the Saltire of Saint Andrew, patron saint of Scotland, at sea and on land.²³



This flag was used until 1801.²⁴

Sons of Liberty Flag



The Sons of Liberty were a secret, underground organization founded in Boston in July 1765 to oppose the Stamp Act.²⁵ The Stamp Act was passed by Parliament to tax the colonies to pay for the costs of the French and Indian War.²⁶ Over the following year, colonists formed chapters in all thirteen colonies.²⁷ In 1767, chapters began flying a flag with nine alternating red

and white vertical stripes,²⁸ known as the “Rebellious Stripes.”²⁹ The flag’s creator, the date it was created, and the place where it was first flown, are not known.³⁰ Nine stripes represented the nine colonies present at the Stamp Act Congress: Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Rhode Island, New York, Maryland, and South Carolina.³¹ After Great Britain outlawed the display of the flag,³² it was changed to thirteen horizontal alternating red and white stripes,³³ representing the expansion of the organization throughout all thirteen American colonies.³⁴



Grand Union Flag

The Grand Union Flag combines the Meteor and Sons of Liberty Flags.³⁵ The thirteen alternating red and white stripes represent the thirteen colonies. The canton in the upper left corner features the flag of Great Britain. It was known by different names that included Continental Colors, Continental Union Flag, first Navy Ensign, Cambridge Flag, and Union Flag.³⁶ The Grand Union Flag is considered the first national flag of the colonies of Great Britain in North America.³⁷



Byron DeLear writes:

“History is yet to discover any primary source documents relating to the provenance of the Grand Union flag. Its origin is shrouded in mystery as there is simply no historical record of when—or more importantly why—the Grand Union flag’s particular design was proposed and adopted. And yes, in a relatively uniform manner, starting in December 1775, the Grand Union became the de facto standard of the American colonies, and following the Declaration of Independence in July 1776, the “Union Flag of the American States.”³⁸

Many surviving reports of the new flag come from unofficial colonial press accounts or the British side. The few accounts from American leaders were brief and perfunctory. Details of the flag’s adoption and purpose have not yet been discovered which suggests (1) the flag’s origin was not documented, (2) relevant sources have not been discovered by researchers, and (3) documentation was suppressed both during and afterward.³⁹

Early Colonial Flags

Even though flags today serve primarily a symbolic function, their role in early America was more utilitarian.⁴⁰ Flags were common in colonial North America to (1) identify ships and (2) identify regiments of soldiers.⁴¹ The impending conflict required many types of flags for use on land and at sea.⁴² They included standards (military flags used by mounted troops), colors (military flags used by ground troops), ensigns (flag flown at the stern announcing the ship’s nation), jacks (smaller flags flown from the ship’s bow), pennants long narrow streamers flown from the masthead), vanes (short pennants flown at the masthead), signal flags and other markers.⁴³

James Wharton, a Philadelphia ship chandler, is reported to have obtained at least two ensigns, six flags, three jacks, and over a dozen pennants for one ship’s flag locker.⁴⁴ A ship chandler is a retailer specializing in supplies and equipment for ships.⁴⁵

The Continental Congress kept Philadelphia milliners busy during the Revolutionary War making flags for the army and navy.⁴⁶ Flags were improvised out of various materials that included dress silk, window curtains, and upholstery fabrics.⁴⁷ David Martucci reminds us that the sewing machine was not invented until 1841 and all flags made prior to that date were sewn by hand.⁴⁸

Continental Army

Congress created the Continental Army on June 14, 1775,⁴⁹ and elected George Washington as commander-in-chief the next day.⁵⁰ On June 17, Congress commissioned Washington as General and Commander in Chief⁵¹ and he formally took command of the troops gathered in Cambridge, Massachusetts on July 3.⁵² The new army was inaugurated on January 1, 1776, by raising a flag on Prospect Hill (now Pisgah), Massachusetts.⁵³ This author has not discovered any sources that explain why the army was inaugurated six months after General Washington took command.

General Washington wrote to his military secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, on January 4 saying, in part, "...we had hoisted the union flag in compliment to the United Colonies..."⁵⁴ Byron DeLear mentions that "union flag" was used to refer to the new striped flag and cites several

examples.⁵⁵ He reminds us "that *any* flag including the British Union in its design could have been called a "Union Flag."⁵⁶ Peter Ansoff concludes that the flag raised on Prospect Hill was the British Union Flag.⁵⁷



Washington's headquarters staff issued, in part, the following order on February 20, 1776:

"As it is necessary that every Regiment should be furnished with Colors, and that those Colors should, if it can be

done, bear some kind of similitude to the Uniform of the regiment to which they belong; the Colonels with their respective Brigadiers and the Qr Mr. Genl may fix upon such as are proper, and can be procured—There must be to each Regiment, the Standard (or Regimental Colors) and Colors for each Grand Division, the whole to be small and light—The Number of the Regiment is to be mark'd on the Colors, and such a Motto, as the Colonel may choose, in fixing upon which, the General advises a Consultation amongst them.

The Colonels are to waste no time, in getting this matter fix'd, that the Qr Mr. Genl may provide the Colors as soon as possible; they are also to consider what Camp - Equipage may be further necessary, that no time may be lost in providing it, as the season is fast approaching for taking the field."⁵⁸

This order does not give a specific description of a national and regimental flag, only that the regimental number and motto should be included. This implies that the design of regimental flags and a national flag was still undecided.

The North Carolina delegates in the Continental Congress wrote to their Council of Safety on February 10, 1776, saying, in part, they had sent by wagon the procurement of "Drums, Colors, Fifes, Pamphlets and a quantity of Powder...."⁵⁹

The itemized bill of Colors charged on February 8, 1776, reads “1 Union Flag 13 Stripes Broad Bunting and 33 feet fly, 143 yards Broad Bunting, 19 Do Narrow Do, making Oz nabrigs & thread”⁶⁰ Do would mean “ditto” and the last item would read 19 yards Narrow Bunting. Oz nabrig was named for its location of origin, Osnaburg or Oz nabrig (now Osnabruck) in Germany.⁶¹ It was a textile woven from strands of hemp or flax, often left unbleached with its coarse natural fibers providing a brown hue and often used to clothe slaves.⁶²

Union Flag would seem to indicate that a formal design for the U.S. Flag had not yet been determined by the Continental Congress.

Continental Navy Jack

The Continental Congress acquired a naval force on October 13, 1775.⁶³ Several days later, on October 20, 1775, Washington wrote to Colonel John Glover and Colonel Stephen Moylan,

“Please fix upon some particular flag and a signal by which our vessels may know one another. What do you think of a flag with a white background, a tree in the middle, the motto, ‘*Appeal to Heaven.*’ This is the flag of our floating batteries. We are fitting out two vessels at Plymouth, and when I next hear from you on this subject I will let them know the flag and the signal, that we may distinguish our friends from our foes.”⁶⁴

The Continental Congress ordered additional vessels on October 30, 1775⁶⁵ and December 13, 1775,⁶⁶ but never established specifics for a naval jack. On December 22, 1775, the Continental Congress appointed captains of the armed vessels, and again, did not mention a navy jack.⁶⁷ A floating battery is a heavily armed vessel or hulk used to defend harbors or attack a marine fortress.⁶⁸

The Continental Colors were described by several individuals. Henry Lee, a member of the Naval Committee,⁶⁹ described it in mid-December 1775 as “a Jack [sic] with the Union flag, and striped red and white in the field.”⁷⁰ The same incident was reported by British spy Gilbert Barkly in a letter to Grey Cooper, joint secretary to the Treasury of Great Britain (1765-1782),⁷¹ on January 10, 1776, saying “they have hoisted what they call the Ammerican [sic] Flag viz the British Union, with thirteen stripes red and white, for its field, Representing the thirteen United Colonies.”⁷²

Robert Morris, Vice President of the Marine Committee wrote Captain Nicholas Biddle on February 15, 1777, saying, in part, “As you command the first American frigate that has got out to

sea, it is expected that you contend warmly on All necessary occasions for the honor of the American flag.

⁷³ Marc Leepson writes that the Continental Colors remained the unofficial flag of the colonies until June

14, 1777, even though it was never officially adopted by the Continental Congress. ⁷⁴

Selected Thirteen-Star U.S. Flags

On June 14, 1777, ⁷⁵ the Continental Congress adopted the following resolution based on the recommendation of the Marine Committee.: ⁷⁶ Francis Hopkins chaired this committee that oversaw the Naval Board's Middle Department. ⁷⁷

Resolved, that the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white: that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation. ⁷⁸

The following information was not specified:

Position of stripes: vertical or horizontal
Location of blue field
Arrangement of stars
Number of points on each star ⁷⁹

There was no official explanation about the selection of red, white, and blue as the colors for the flag. The best explanation is provided by Charles Thomson, secretary of the Continental Congress, who was the primary designer of the Great Seal. On June 20, 1782, the day Congress approved the Great Seal, Thomson said, in part, "The colors of the pales are those used in the flag of the United States of America; White signifies purity and innocence Red, hardiness & valor, and Blue

the color of the Chief signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice." ⁸⁰

Henry Moeller provides more information on "constellation" noting that it was defined as "a cluster of fixed stars or an assemblage of splendors, or excellencies." The Continental Congress had three possible meanings: (1) it would represent the union of states: each star and each stripe would represent one state;

(2) the United States was a newly independent nation that was joining the older sovereign nations of the world; or (3) it referred to the position of stars at the time of the nation's birth and represented the future of the new nation based on astrology. ⁸¹

How soon was the June 14 flag resolution published in newspapers? John Luzader notes that the first public notice appeared in the Pennsylvania Evening Post on August 30, 1777. The New York Journal printed it on September 8; General Advertiser, September 8; New York Patent, September 11, The American Advertiser, September 11; The Boston Gazette, September 15; and Boston Spy, September 18. ⁸²

Marla Miller writes, "Stars of five, six and eight points arranged in lines, circles, and stars are all seen in early flags, and stripes were red, white, and blue, and sometimes green, in a range of combinations. ⁸³ Grace Rogers Cooper, curator of textiles in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and

Technology (now National Museum in American History), has an excellent table summarizing the arrangement of stars, number of points on the stars, colors of stripes, and their earliest usage in the publication, "Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology, No. 21. She writes that the two most common star arrangements are 4-5-4 and 3-2-3-2-3.⁸⁴

Grace Rogers Cooper writes that thirteen-star flags were very common. It was the official national banner from the Flag Act of 1777 until 1795. It was manufactured for many years and was used as the ensign of small boats of the United States Navy from 1795 until about 1916.

85

John Hulbert Flag

In July 1775, John Hulbert, a rope maker in Bridgehampton, New York, was ordered to march his 200-man militia to Fort Ticonderoga to assist in retaking it from the British. They carried a 13-star, 13-stripe flag of which there is no documented sketch or drawing. Even though the Fort was retaken by the Green Mountain Boys on May 10, they remained as reinforcements to hold the Fort. In 1929, a tattered American flag (shown in the illustration on the right) was found in a house where Hulbert lived. The stars are six-pointed and arranged in a nearly 1-3-5-3-1 pattern. Scientists examined it and dated it to around 1840. Some researchers believe it was made in Hulbert's workshop. There is

disagreement as to the origin of this flag. This flag is in the Suffolk County Historical Society Museum in Riverhead, Suffolk County on Long Island, New York.

86



Washington's Commander-in-Chief Flag

After assuming command of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775, General Washington had a flag made for himself based on European tradition. The flag would have accompanied General Washington on the march or a battlefield. The original flag is located at the American Revolution Center in Philadelphia (shown at right). It includes thirteen 6-pointed stars that point in different directions. It is not known why Washington preferred 6-pointed stars. While it may not be known when it was first flown, it appears in two paintings of the Battle of Princeton fought on January 3, 1777: "George Washington at Princeton" by Charles Willson Peale and "The Battle of Princeton" by William Mercer. However, the authenticity of the flag

traveling with General Washington is questionable.⁸⁷



Margaret Manny and ship *Alfred*

James Wharton records in his charge book or daybook several interesting items.⁸⁸ Entries relative to naval flags are listed from August 15, 1775, through January 2, 1776. Margaret Manny was a milliner who lived in Philadelphia.⁸⁹ She is recorded on December 1 as having made a pendant on July 6 and on December 2 as having made an ensign.⁹⁰

Esek Hopkins, Esq. was appointed as Commander in Chief of the Naval Fleet by the Second Continental Congress on December 22, 1775.⁹¹ Dudley Saltonstall was appointed Captain of the *Alfred* on the same date.⁹² One anonymous author says the Grand Union Flag was raised on the *Alfred* between November 14, 1775, and January 14, 1776, when the Commander-in-Chief boarded the ship.⁹³

I suggest that the date the flag was raised was between December 22, 1775, and January 14, 1776, after the appointment of Esek Hopkins as Commander in Chief of the Naval Fleet.

Correspondence between George Washington and Richard Peters

Richard Peters (1744-1828) served as secretary of the Continental Board of War from June 13, 1776, to June 8, 1781.⁹⁴ On May 10, 1779, he wrote a letter to George Washington that read in part:

As to Colors, we have refused them for another Reason. The Baron Steuben mentioned when he was here that he would settle with your Excellency some Plan as to the Colors. It was intended that every Regiment should have two Colors one the Standard of the United States which should be the same throughout the Army and the other a Regimental Color which should vary according to the facings of the Regiments. But it is not yet settled what the Standard of the U. States should be. If your Excellency will therefore favor us with your opinion on the Subject we will report to Congress and request them to establish a Standard and so soon as this is done we will endeavor to get Materials and order a Number made sufficient for the Army. Neither can we tell what should be the Regimental Colors as the Uniforms were by a late Resolution of Congress to be settled by your Excellency.⁹⁵

Peters followed up on September 3, 1779, with another letter to George Washington that read in part:

The enclosed Drafts of a Standard for the Army are enclosed for your Approbation, Rejection, or Alteration. The Officers will be by and by

pressing for Colors and if Materials can be procured they shall be made when you send us your Ideas of the Plan of the Standard. The one with the Union and Emblems in the middle is preferred by us as being a variant for the Marine Flag.⁹⁶

This author cannot find any sources for the illustrations of the draft standards.

George Washington's letter to Richard Peters on September 14, 1779, said, in part

I agree with you in the opinion that the Standard, with the Union and Emblems in the Centre, is to be preferred; with this addition the number of the Regt. and the State to which it belongs inserted within the curve of the serpent, in such place, as the painter or

designer shall judge most proper.⁹⁷

The correspondence between Richard Peters and General Washington in 1779 indicates "that people were still unsure what the official flag was, even though the Flag Resolution was passed two years before."⁹⁸ Marc Leepson writes that General Washington and his commanders never flew the Stars and Stripes at any of the major post-June 14, 1777, Revolutionary War battles.⁹⁹

The Continental Congress approved and signed the U.S. Constitution on September 17, 1787.¹⁰⁰ The same day, it was sent to the state legislatures for ratification.¹⁰¹ From December 7, 1787, to May 1, 1795, the thirteen states ratified the U.S. Constitution.

State	Date Ratified
Delaware	December 7, 1787
Pennsylvania	December 12, 1787
New Jersey	December 18, 1787
Georgia	January 2, 1788
Connecticut	January 9, 1788
Massachusetts	February 6, 1788
Maryland	April 28, 1788
South Carolina	May 23, 1788
New Hampshire	June 21, 1788
Virginia	June 25, 1788
New York	July 26, 1788)
North Carolina	November 21, 1789
Rhode Island	May 29, 1790

On July 2, the Continental Congress received word that the State of New Hampshire was the ninth state to ratify the constitution.¹⁰²

Designer of First United States Flag

The two names mentioned as designing the first United States flag are Betsy Ross and Francis Hopkinson.

Betsy Ross

Betsy Ross lived in Philadelphia's Old City within the historic district ¹⁰³ on 239 (formerly 89) Arch Street.

¹⁰⁴ Mrs. Clarissa S. Wilson, the eldest daughter of Betsy Ross succeeded and continued her mother's business of flag and color making. ¹⁰⁵ In 1857, grandson William Canby had a conversation with Mrs. Wilson who related, in part, the following information.

George Washington, Robert Morris, and George Ross visited her shop and told her they were a committee of congress appointed to prepare a flag. She took the gentlemen to her back parlor, looked at the stars, and commented that they should be five-pointed instead of six-pointed. After Betsy completed the first sample of the flag, Colonel Ross informed her that her work was approved, the flag was adopted, and he gave her an order to make more flags. Details of the conversation were read by Canby to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in March 1870. ¹⁰⁶

George Washington was a member of the Continental Congress in 1775, ¹⁰⁷ a friend of Betsy Ross, had a pew next to John and Betsy Ross at Christ Church in Philadelphia, and socialized with Betsy at her home.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Morris was a delegate to the Continental Congress from Pennsylvania. ¹⁰⁹ George Ross was an uncle of John Ross and a member of the Continental Congress. ¹¹⁰

Can we estimate a date? Betsy is referred to as Mrs. Ross, so this narrows the date from the date of marriage to her first husband until the date of marriage to her second husband. John Ross and Elizabeth Griscomb were married on November 4, 1773, in New Jersey. ¹¹¹ She married her second husband, Joseph Ashburn, on June 15, 1777. ¹¹² The Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia from May 10, 1775, to December 12, 1776, ¹¹³ and March 5, 1777, to September 18, 1777. ¹¹⁴

If this anecdote is true, I suggest that this meeting occurred between May 10, 1775, and June 16, 1775. However, a review of the Journals of Congress for this time does not indicate such a committee was formed. ¹¹⁵

One could argue that this committee was not mentioned due to its sensitive nature. However, information such as the pay and uniform of officers, number of ships for the continental navy, names of sea captains, the appointment of George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, and other details are included in the formal record.

If the meeting with Colonel George Washington, Colonel George Ross, and Robert Morris with Betsy Ross in 1775 was to make a U.S. Flag, why is the design in question four years later? More specifically, if Washington was a part of this meeting, why does he not claim to know the flag design? My concern is also affirmed by the USA Flag Company. They write it "is illogical to assume that Washington

was present at the alleged meeting with Betsy Ross on the design of the flag when it is known that he wanted a national standard made for the use of the army in 1779.”¹¹⁶

The original Betsy Ross Flag no longer exists¹¹⁷ and scholars are not convinced the story is authentic.

¹¹⁸ Mr. Canby had affidavits prepared for three relatives of Elizabeth Claypoole (Betsy Ross): a daughter, Rachel Fletcher;¹¹⁹ a granddaughter, Sophia Hildebrandt;¹²⁰ and a niece, Margaret Boggs.¹²¹ However, the affidavits are based on hearsay and are of limited value. Marc Leepson writes that Betsy Ross kept detailed records of her business transactions; however, no invoice or other documents have been found linking her flag making to George Washington and the Continental Congress.¹²²

Betsy Ross submitted an invoice for payment for a flag she fabricated in May 1777 that included red, white, and blue stripes. Even though she may not have made the first flag, she was a flag maker for the Pennsylvania revolutionary government by spring 1777.¹²³

Francis Hopkinson

Francis Hopkinson (1737-1791) was a writer, artist, musician, judge, and signer of the Declaration of Independence. The 2nd Continental Congress established a “Board of Admiralty” on October 28, 1779, to control all naval affairs.¹²⁴ Hopkinson was appointed to the Board in November 1776 and held that position until July 1778 when he became

Treasurer of the Continental Loan Office.¹²⁵ He served as Treasurer from 1778 to 1781¹²⁶ issuing bills of exchange to businessmen and for interest due on money borrowed by the United States and making payments to foreign countries.¹²⁷

On March 25, 1780, Hopkinson submitted a letter to Congress asking for payment of a “Quarter Cask of the Public Wine” for “Labors of Fancy” in designing the American flag, continental currency, Great Seal of the United States, and other items.¹²⁸ The letter was circulated among several agencies, and eventually, the Treasury Board reported to Congress on October 27, 1780, that civil servants already received adequate salaries and should not expect further compensation from Congress. Unhappy at not being paid for his work, Hopkinson resigned his position as Treasurer of Loans on July 23, 1781.¹²⁹

The Board of Admiralty did not dispute that Hopkinson made designs for the American flag. Even though no design of the Stars and Stripes has been found, the overwhelming evidence is that Hopkinson designed the flag by himself and many individuals now credit Francis Hopkinson as the designer of the first United States flag.¹³⁰ Whitney Smith, the nation’s foremost expert on flags,¹³¹ says, “Francis Hopkinson designed the flag.” Marc Leepson says that this “statement reflects the consensus of opinion of nearly all historians and flag experts who have studied and weighed the scant evidence that exists dealing directly with the Stars and Stripes’ design.”¹³²

State	Date Admitted
Vermont	March 4, 1791
Kentucky	June 1, 1792

Fifteen-Star U.S. Flag

Congress recognized that adding more stripes to the flag as the country expanded westward would be impractical. It passed the Flag Act of 1818 to restore the

thirteen-stripe design.¹³³ Adding two stars and two stripes was a compromise to ensure the new states did not feel left out. However, merchant ships were the biggest users of flags and were unhappy because they believed the purpose of using the flag for identification would be diminished as new states joined the Union.¹³⁴ The 15-star flag would last for 23 years under five presidents.¹³⁵

Years Flown

May 1, 1795-July 3, 1818

Presidents

George Washington (1789-1797)
 John Adams (1797-1801)
 Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809)
 James Madison (1809-1817)
 James Monroe (1817-1825)



Samuel Chester Reid Flags

New York Representative Peter H. Wendover contacted Naval hero Captain Samuel Chester Reid in 1817 to design a new flag. Reid was asked to design a pattern that would allow for increasing the number of stars while maintaining the thirteen horizontal red and white stripes.¹³⁶

Captain Reid designed three flags; a “People’s Flag” with stars forming a larger star and thirteen stripes for general use;



a “Government Flag” for federal use with stripes and an eagle in the canton;

and a “Standard of the Union” for celebrations.¹³⁷



The committee chose the People’s Flag, reported their suggestion to the House

Flag Act of 1818. President James Monroe signed it into law on April 4,¹³⁸ on March 24, and after the minimal debate, approved the

State	Date Admitted
Tennessee	June 1, 1796
Ohio	March 1, 1803
Louisiana	April 30, 1812
Indiana	December 11, 1816
Mississippi	December 10, 1817

Twenty-Star U.S. Flag

The 20-star flag became the official flag on April 13, 1818, and it was the first of the flags to only last about a year.¹³⁹

Years Flown
July 4, 1818-July 3, 1819

President
James Monroe (1817-1825)



State	Date Admitted
Illinois	December 3, 1818

Twenty-One-Star U.S. Flag

Years Flown
July 4, 1819-July 3, 1820

President
James Monroe (1817-1825)



State	Date Admitted
Alabama	December 14, 1819
Maine	March 15, 1820

Twenty-Three-Star U.S. Flag

Years Flown
July 4, 1820-July 3, 1822

President
James Monroe (1817-1825)



State	Date Admitted
Missouri	August 10, 1821

Twenty-Four-Star U.S. Flag

Missouri, a slave state, was admitted as part of the Missouri Compromise, which sought to achieve a balance of free and slave states during the antebellum period.¹⁴⁰

Years Flown July 4, 1822-July 3, 1836	Presidents James Monroe (1817-1825) John Quincy Adams (1825-1829) Andrew Jackson (1829-1837)
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State	Date Admitted
Arkansas	June 15, 1836

Twenty-Five-Star U.S. Flag

Arkansas joined the Union as a slave state.¹⁴¹

Years Flown July 4, 1836-July 3, 1837	Presidents Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) Martin Van Buren (1837-1841)
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State	Date Admitted
Michigan	January 26, 1837

Twenty-Six-Star U.S. Flag

Michigan was admitted as a free state to help maintain the balance between slave and free states.¹⁴²

Years Flown July 4, 1837 – July 3, 1845	Presidents Martin Van Buren (1837-1841)
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William Henry Harrison (1841)
John Tyler (1841-1845)
James Polk (1845-1849)

Most of the country saw the standard depiction of the national banner:¹⁴³



The Gildersleeve Comet Flag has the name "S. Gildersleeve" written on its hoist. It

may have been used on ships owned by the shipping company of Sylvester Gildersleeve in Portland, Connecticut. The most

popular theory about
the star

pattern is that it represents a comet rushing
across the sky. However, the actual design
symbolism has been lost. ¹⁴⁴

Great Star Flags

The “Great Star” or “Grand Luminary” pattern was designed by Captain Samuel Chester Reid in 1818.

Production of Great Star flags increased with Michigan statehood and continued through the Civil War. ¹⁴⁵

Great Star patterns diminished after the Civil War as the larger star counts made the Great Star unwieldy.

Even though some beautiful patterns were designed, none were adopted by Congress. ¹⁴⁶

This 20-star flag flew over the Capitol Dome in 1818. ¹⁴⁷



This parade flag with 26 stars was sewn in 1836. ¹⁴⁸

This Great Star design has 33 stars.



This 34-star flag was in near Rochester, New York, and dates to 1861-1863. This rare pattern has hand-sewn double-applique stars arranged in an unusual pattern inside an outer star.

¹⁴⁹

This 34-star “Great Flower” flag depicts stars as five asymmetrical



petals that extend from the center. This flag is also called “The Candy Stripe” flag because of the red and white “candy stripe” on the left side. ¹⁵⁰

State	Date Admitted
Florida	March 3, 1845

Twenty-Seven-Star U.S. Flag

Florida, a former possession of Spain, was admitted. ¹⁵¹

Years Flown

July 4, 1845-July 3, 1846

President

James Polk (1845-1849)



State	Date Admitted
Texas	December 29, 1845

Twenty-Eight-Star U.S. Flag

Texas separated from Mexico in 1836 and was an independent republic before joining the Union. ¹⁵²

Years Flown	President
July 4, 1846-July 3, 1847	James Polk (1845-1849)



State	Date Admitted
Iowa	December 28, 1846

Diamond Pattern Flags

After the Mexican American War, the U.S. Army began using an unofficial “diamond pattern” on their garrison flags that continued to 1867. ¹⁵³

Many of the garrison flags were made by the US Bunting Company located in Lowell, Massachusetts, partly owned by General Benjamin Butler. After the Civil War, the company developed a method for resist-dyeing wool to make flags, and as a Massachusetts congressman, got Congress to pass a law giving preference to the US-made bunting when purchasing flags for the government. This was a benefit to the company as it was the only one making

wool bunting in the United States. ¹⁵⁴

Three garrison flags are shown below:

27-Star US Truncated Diamond Pattern Flag ¹⁵⁵



29-Star US Diamond Pattern Flag ¹⁵⁶

The Fort Sumter Flag is a 33-star garrison flag that is sometimes called “the flag that started a war.” Fort commander Major Anderson surrendered to southern forces after three days. ¹⁵⁷



Twenty-Nine-Star U.S. Flag

Iowa, originally part of the Louisiana Purchase, was admitted as a free state to maintain the balance between free and slave states. ¹⁵⁸

Years Flown

July 4, 1847-July 3, 1848

President

James Polk (1845-1849)



State	Date Admitted
Wisconsin	May 29, 1848

Thirty-Star U.S. Flag

Years Flown

July 4, 1848-July 3, 1851

PresidentsJames Polk (1845-1849)
Zachary Taylor (1849-1850))
Millard Fillmore (1850-1853)

State	Date Admitted
California	September 9, 1850

Thirty-One-Star U.S. Flag

The Gold Rush that began in 1848 helped California to achieve statehood. ¹⁵⁹

Years Flown

July 4, 1851-July 3, 1858

PresidentsMillard Fillmore (1850-1853)
Franklin Pierce (1853-1857)
James Buchanan (1857-1861)

State	Date Admitted
Minnesota	May 11, 1858

Thirty-Two-Star U.S. Flag

Minnesota was admitted to the Union as a free state.¹⁶⁰

Years Flown

July 4, 1858-July 3, 1859

President

James Buchanan (1857-1861)



State	Date Admitted
Oregon	February 14, 1859

Thirty-Three-Star U.S. Flag

Oregon was admitted as a free state.¹⁶¹

Years Flown

July 4, 1859-July 3, 1861

Presidents

James Buchanan (1857-1861)

Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865)



State	Date Admitted
Kansas	January 29, 1861

Thirty-Four-Star U.S. Flag

Kansas was admitted as a free state.

Years Flown

July 4, 1861-July 3, 1863

President

Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865)

Unusual flag designs were marketed in 1861. Some examples are shown below:



This flag honors the original states by enlarging thirteen stars among the remaining twenty-one stars.

This flag had five clusters of six stars each and four stars centered on the top, sides, and bottom of the canton. The five-star clusters form a Saint Andrews Cross and the four single stars form a Saint George's Cross. This design was known as the "Great Cross" Flag. ¹⁶²



The extended length of the stripes on this flag indicates it was probably used on naval vessels. The five-by-six arrangement of stars forms a phalanx with two "leaders" at the left and two "stragglers" at the right. ¹⁶³

When Abraham Lincoln stopped in Philadelphia on his way to Washington, D.C on 22 February 1861, this flag was hoisted at Independence Hall. ¹⁶⁴



State	Date Admitted
West Virginia	June 20, 1863

Thirty-Five-Star U.S. Flag

The western part of Virginia was pro-Union, contained many abolitionists, and split from the rest of the state, which had seceded. ¹⁶⁵

Years Flown

July 4, 1863-July 3, 1865

Presidents

Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865)

Andrew Johnson (1865-1869)



State	Date Admitted
Nevada	October 31, 1864

Thirty-Six-Star U.S. Flag

Nevada sent its entire 175-page state constitution to Washington, D.C. by telegram to accelerate statehood. ¹⁶⁶

Years Flown

July 4, 1865-July 3, 1867

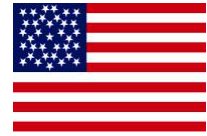
President

Andrew Johnson



Wagon Wheel. This design includes three rings of 5, 10, and 20 stars surrounding a single center star. The inner ring of five stars appears as a five-point star. ¹⁶⁷

Windblown. The canton's gives the illusion that the flag is in motion, even when at rest. ¹⁶⁸



This flag included three rows of 8 stars and two rows of 6 stars. ¹⁶⁹

The bomb design was confirmed as used in a few places as a garrison flag. ¹⁷⁰



State	Date Admitted
Nebraska	March 1, 1867

Thirty-Seven-Star U.S. Flag

After the Civil War, railroads accelerated economic development in Nebraska. ¹⁷¹

Years Flown

July 4, 1867-July 3, 1877

President

Andrew Johnson (1865-1869),
Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877)
Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-1881)

Medallion Centennial. This flag included an inner circle of 13 stars to represent the original 13 colonies and an outer circle of 24 stars to represent the states that joined the union later. ¹⁷²



This flag includes two rows of 8 stars and three rows of 7 stars. ¹⁷³

State	Date Admitted
Colorado	August 1, 1876

Thirty-Eight-Star U.S. Flag

President Grant approved statehood for Colorado after it was initially vetoed by President Andrew Johnson. ¹⁷⁴

Years Flown

July 4, 1877-July 3, 1890

Presidents

Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-1881)
 James A. Garfield (1881)
 Chester A. Arthur (1881-1885)
 Grover Cleveland (1885-1889)
 Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893)



Triple Wreath Medallion. Stars were arranged with three circles of 6, 11, and 16 stars surrounding a single star and with a single star in each corner. ¹⁷⁵

Perfect Circles. This flag includes a larger star surrounded by two circles of 13 and 20 stars and one star in each of the four corners. ¹⁷⁶



Double Oval with Radiating Corner Stars. This flag has a large center star surrounded by two ovals of 12 and 17 stars and two stars radiating out from the center in each of the four corners. ¹⁷⁷

Full Canton. The stars are enlarged to fill as much of the canton as possible. ¹⁷⁸



Hourglass. When the canton is shown in the horizontal position, a St. Andrew's Cross appears. When the canton is turned one hundred eighty degrees, an hourglass is shown. ¹⁷⁹

The canton has three rows of 8 stars and two rows of 7 stars aligned to the left. ¹⁸⁰



State	Date Admitted
North Dakota	November 2, 1889
South Dakota	November 2, 1889
Montana	November 8, 1889
Washington	November 11, 1889
Idaho	July 3, 1890

Forty-Three-Star U.S. Flag

Years Flown

July 4, 1890-July 3, 1891

President

Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893)



The canton included one row of 8 stars and five rows of 7 stars each. ¹⁸¹

State	Date Admitted
Wyoming	July 10, 1890

Forty-Four-Star U.S. Flag

Wyoming was admitted ¹⁸² even though it may have been short of the 60,000-person requirement to become a state. ¹⁸³

Years Flown

July 4, 1891-July 3, 1896

Presidents

Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893)
Grover Cleveland (1893-1897)



Four rows of 7 stars each were surrounded by the top and bottom rows of 8 stars each. ¹⁸⁴

State	Date Admitted
Utah	January 4, 1896

Forty-Five-Star U.S. Flag

Utah became a state after Mormons renounced polygamy in the state constitution. ¹⁸⁵

Years Flown

July 4, 1896-July 3, 1908

Presidents

Grover Cleveland (1893-1897)
William McKinley (1897-1901)
Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909)

The 45-star flag includes six alternating rows of 8 and 7 stars and thirteen stripes. ¹⁸⁶



State	Date Admitted

Oklahoma | November 16, 1907

Forty-Six-Star U.S. Flag

The Oklahoma Territory was initially used to resettle Native Americans. By the late 19th century, Texas ranchers began moving northward and settled in the territory.¹⁸⁷

Years Flown

July 4, 1908-July 3, 1912

Presidents

Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909)

William H. Taft (1909-1913)



This flag had four rows of 8 stars with two rows of 7 stars for the third and fifth rows. Two rows of stars at the top were apparently common.¹⁸⁸

This flag had four rows of 8 stars with two rows of 7 stars for the second and fifth rows and 13 stripes.¹⁸⁹



State	Date Admitted
New Mexico	January 6, 1912
Arizona	February 14, 1912

Forty-Eight-Star U.S. Flag

The southwestern territories of New Mexico and Arizona were the last to join the 48 contiguous states. The 48-star flag flew 47 years, and eight presidents served under it.¹⁹⁰

Years Flown

July 4, 1912-July 3, 1959

Presidents

William H. Taft (1909-1913)

Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921)

Warren Harding (1921-1923)

Calvin Coolidge (1923-1929)

Herbert Hoover (1929-1933)

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945)

Harry S. Truman (1945-1953)

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961)



Stars were arranged in 6 rows of 8 stars each.¹⁹¹

State	Date Admitted
Alaska	January 3, 1959

Forty-Nine-Star U.S. Flag

Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867 and became the first non-contiguous territory to become a state. ¹⁹²

Years Flown

July 4, 1959-July 3, 1960

President

Dwight D Eisenhower (1953-1961)



Stars were arranged in 7 staggered rows of 7 stars each. ¹⁹³

State	Date Admitted
Hawaii	August 21, 1959

Fifty-Star U.S. Flag

Hawaii joined the Union as the 50th state. The 50-star flag has flown the longest of any U.S. flag. ¹⁹⁴

Years Flown

July 4, 1960 - present

Presidents

Dwight D Eisenhower (1953-1961)
 John F. Kennedy (1961-1963)
 Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969)
 Richard M. Nixon (1969-1974)
 Gerald R. Ford (1974-1977)
 Jimmy Carter (1977-1981)
 Ronald Reagan (1981-1989)
 George H.W. Bush (1989-1993)
 William Clinton (1993-2001)
 George W. Bush (2001-2009)
 Barack Obama (2009-2017)
 Donald Trump (2017-2021)
 Joseph R. Biden (2021-present)



Stars are arranged in nine alternating rows of 6 and 5 stars. ¹⁹⁵

Flag Acts and Executive Orders

There have only been six flag acts and executive orders. They are described below:

The Continental Congress adopted the first flag act on June 14, 1777, that specified the flag has thirteen stripes alternating red and white and thirteen white stars in a blue field. 196

The Flag Act of January 13, 1794, changed the flag design to fifteen stripes alternating red and white and a Union of fifteen white stars in a blue field. 197

The Flag Act of April 4, 1818, established thirteen horizontal stripes alternating red and white, a union of twenty stars in a blue field; when a new state is admitted into the Union, one star would be added to the union of the flag; and that this addition would take effect on the next fourth day of July. 198

Executive Order 1556, 199 on June 24, 1912, by President William H. Taft 200 established proportions of the flag and provided for the arrangement of stars to be six horizontal rows of eight each with the points of each star to point downward. 201

Executive Order 10798 on January 3, 1959, by President Eisenhower 202 provided for the arrangement of seven rows of seven stars each, staggered horizontally and vertically: 203 and revoked Executive Order No. 2390 of May 29, 1916. 204

Executive Order 10834 on August 21, 1959, by President Eisenhower 205 provided for the arrangement of nine rows of stars staggered horizontally and eleven

rows of stars staggered vertically; 206 and revoked Executive Order No. 10798 of January 3, 1959. 207

Flag Nicknames

“Star-Spangled Banner”

The most famous 15-star 15-stripe flag is the Star-Spangled Banner that flew over Fort McHenry. In 1813, Major George Armistead commissioned Mary Pickersgill to make a huge American flag to fly above Fort McHenry. Mary was assisted by the thirteen-year-old daughter, Caroline, and three nieces. Each of the fifteen stars was two feet wide point to point. The stripes were also two feet wide. It took six weeks to make the flag in July and August 1813. ²⁰⁸ The original size of the flag was 30 feet by 42 feet. ²⁰⁹ Mrs. Pickersgill gave the flag to Armistead on August 19, and he paid her \$405.90. The British began bombarding Fort McHenry on September 13, 1814, at 7:00 am. The next morning,

Francis Scott Key wrote The Star-Spangled Banner when it was certain Fort McHenry had withstood the attack. ²¹⁰



“Old Glory”

Ship captain William Driver (1803-1886), a Salem, Massachusetts native, is credited with naming the American flag, “Old Glory.” In 1831, his mother and others made him an American flag for his ship, the brig “Charles Doggett.” ²¹¹ Before leaving the Salem

harbor, he hoisted the flag to the masthead of his ship and the Driver said, "There goes Old Glory!"²¹² Returning home, he wrote, "It has been my staunch companion and protection. Savages and heathens, lowly and oppressed, hailed and welcomed it at the far end of the wide world. Then, why should it not be called Old Glory?"²¹³

Patriotism

Flag Day

Bernard J. Cigrand is considered the Father of Flag Day. A schoolteacher in Waubeka, Wisconsin, he arranged for his students to celebrate the 108th birthday on June 14, 1885. After moving to Chicago to attend dental school, Cigrand continued to promote a national observance of the day the Continental Congress authorized the United States Flag.²¹⁴

President Woodrow Wilson issued proclamation 1335 on May 30, 1916, in which he requested "that throughout the nation and if possible in every community the fourteenth day of June be observed as FLAG DAY with special patriotic exercises."²¹⁵

President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a proclamation on May 3, 1944, asking "that on Flag Day, June 14, 1944, the people of our Nation honor especially the members of the armed forces—men and women equally—whose unfaltering devotion to our national

ideals has given the Nation's flag a new and hopeful meaning for those struggling against oppression in lands still held by our enemies."

Roosevelt continued, "I direct the officials of the Federal government and I request the officials of the State and local governments to have our colors displayed on all public buildings on Flag Day, and I urge the people of the United States on that day to fly the American flag from their homes, and to arrange, where feasible, for joint displays of the emblems of the freedom-loving United Nations without whose staunch collaboration we could not have hoped for victory."²¹⁶

Congress approved a joint resolution on August 3, 1949, designating June 14 of each year as Flag Day (H. J. Res. 170).²¹⁷

President and Most Worshipful Brother Harry S. Truman issued a proclamation on May 27, 1950, calling "upon the appropriate officials of the Federal Government, and of the State and Local Governments, to arrange for the display of the flag of our Republic on all public buildings on Flag Day, June 14, 1950; and I urge the people of our Nation to observe that day as the anniversary of the adoption on June 14, 1777, by the Continental Congress, of the Stars and Stripes as the official flag of the United States of America, by flying the flag at their homes or other suitable places and by participating in ceremonies especially designed to honor our national emblem."²¹⁸

Pledge of Allegiance

Socialist minister Francis Bellamy wrote the Pledge of Allegiance in August 1892 in hopes that the pledge would be used by citizens in any country. It was originally published in *The Youth's Companion* on September 8, 1892. The original form read

"I pledge allegiance to
my Flag and the
Republic for which it
stands, one nation,
indivisible, with liberty
and justice for all."

In 1923, the words, "the Flag of the United States of America" were added, and in 1954, the words "under God" were added.

219

Conclusion

Even though early flags were made to identify ships and battalions, the origin of the stars and stripes on the United States Flag is a mystery.

Early in our history, it was decided to keep the thirteen stripes to honor the original thirteen colonies and add a star for each new state. However, new flags were designed as new states were admitted to the Union. Eventually, in 1912, the design of the flag was formalized by an executive order. Today, the Flag of the United States of America is honored and revered by all United States citizens and respected by citizens of other countries.

As Freemasons, we say the Pledge of Allegiance at our meetings. Some members of National Sojourners participate in patriotic programs that include Building the Flag and Historic Flags. In Building the Flag, the Flag is described as each star and stripe is added. In Historic Flags, members explain how some historical flags played a role in our country's heritage. May we always remember those who gave their lives so that we can live in freedom.

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