

The Flag of the United States of America

1776 Jan. 2

The first unofficial national flag, called the Grand Union or Continental Colours, was raised at the behest of Gen. George Washington near his headquarters outside Boston, Mass. The flag had 13 alternating red and white horizontal stripes and the British Union Flag (a predecessor of the Union Jack) in the upper left corner.

Then in May - According to a popular story, George Washington and two other representatives from the Continental Congress called upon a Philadelphia seamstress, Betsy Ross, to ask her to make a new American flag. This version of events cannot be confirmed by historians, however. Although nobody knows for sure who designed the flag, it may have been Continental Congress member Francis Hopkinson.

1777 June 14

The first official flag, also known as the Stars and Stripes or Old Glory, was approved by the Continental Congress: "Resolved, that the Flag of the United States be 13 stripes, alternate red and white; that the Union be 13 stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation." The resolution did not specify how the stars should be arranged, and so the layout varied.

1794 Jan. 13

Congress authorized the addition of two more stars and two more stripes to mark the admission of Vermont and Kentucky to the Union in 1791 and 1792, respectively. This 15-star, 15-stripe flag, which came into use after May 1795, was the "star-spangled banner" that inspired lawyer and poet Francis Scott Key.

1814 Sept. 14

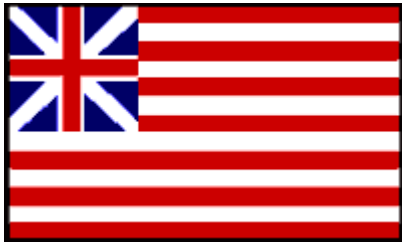
As daylight broke, Francis Scott Key saw the American flag still flying over Fort McHenry, after it had been bombarded all night by the British. Inspired, he wrote a poem entitled "The Defense of Fort M'Henry," which was later set to music and renamed the "Star-Spangled Banner." Congress made it the official national anthem in 1931.



American ships in New England waters flew a "Liberty Tree" flag in 1775. It shows a green pine tree on a white background, with the words, "An Appeal to Heaven."



Until 1776 colonies and militias used many different flags. Some are famous, such as the "Rattlesnake Flag" used by the Continental Navy, with its venomous challenge, "Don't Tread on Me."



The "Grand Union" shown here is also called The "Cambridge Flag." It was flown over Prospect Hill, overlooking Boston, January 1, 1776. In the canton (the square in the corner) are the crosses of Saint Andrew and Saint George, borrowed from the British flag.



The "Betsy Ross" flag. The Flag resolution did not specify the arrangement of the stars or the specific proportions of the flag. So many 13 star flags were used. Appearance upon the battlefield on 6th July, 1777, at Oriskany of a national flag seemed an augury of success and led to the adoption here by Congress of that same flag as the army's emblem. Thus the stars and stripes began its impressive career.

In June 1776, brave Betsy Ross was a widow struggling to run her own upholstery business. Upholsterers in colonial America not only worked on furniture but did all manner of sewing work, which for some included making flags. Betsy would often tell her children, grandchildren, relatives, and friends of the fateful day when three members of a secret committee from the Continental Congress came to call upon her. Those representatives, George Washington, Robert Morris, and George Ross, asked her to sew the first flag. According to Betsy, General Washington showed her a rough design of the flag that included a six-pointed star

This meeting occurred in her home sometime late in May 1776. George Washington was then the head of the Continental Army. Robert Morris, an owner of vast amounts of land, was perhaps the wealthiest citizen in the Colonies. Colonel George Ross was a respected Philadelphian and also the uncle of her late husband, John Ross.

Naturally, Betsy Ross already knew George Ross as she had married his nephew. Furthermore, Betsy was also acquainted with the great General Washington. Not only did they both worship at Christ Church in Philadelphia, but Betsy's pew was next to George and Martha Washington's pew. Her daughter recalled, "That she was previously well acquainted with Washington, and that he had often been in her house in friendly visits, as well as on business. That she had embroidered ruffles for his shirt bosoms and cuffs, and that it was partly owing to his friendship for her that she was chosen to make the flag."



Chesapeake Bay is between Delaware and Yorktown on the map.