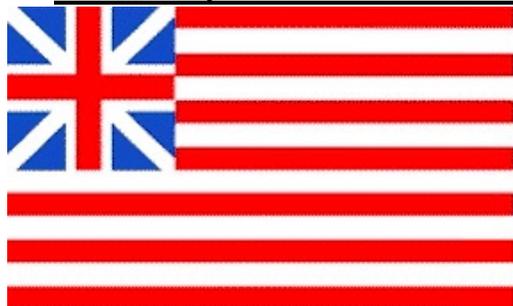


UNOFFICIAL : The Grand Union flag.

Sometimes called the “First Navy Ensign” and the “Cambridge Flag,” among other designations, was the **immediate predecessor of the Stars and Stripes.**



This type of flag was carried on the flagship “Alfred” on December 3, 1775, as the new Ensign of the Thirteen Colonies, after Commodore Esek Hopkins assumed command of the Navy built in Congress.

It was hoisted by General Washington in January 1776, at Cambridge Camp, Prospect Hill, as the standard of the Continental Army, and it was also carried ashore by the Marines who made an expedition to the Bahamas in March of 1776.

The canton, with its crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, indicated our relation with the “mother country” until the severance of those ties brought about its replacement with the white stars in the blue field. Washington later wrote that it was flown at Cambridge “out of compliment to the United Colonies.”

Additional Info: This is the first flag or ensign to represent the colonies at sea, and was raised by John Paul Jones from the deck of the ship Alfred on December 3, 1775. A month later, on January 2, 1776, George Washington displayed this same design and named it the Grand Union Flag. Also called the Cambridge Flag, was flown over Prospect Hill outside Boston in January 1776. This caused problems because it was very similar to the flag flown by the British East India Company; it had been mistaken for a sign of surrender by loyalists. George Washington wanted a flag that could not be misinterpreted as anything but the American flag.

FIRST OFFICIAL UNITED STATES FLAG



JUNE 14, 1777 - Stars and Stripes

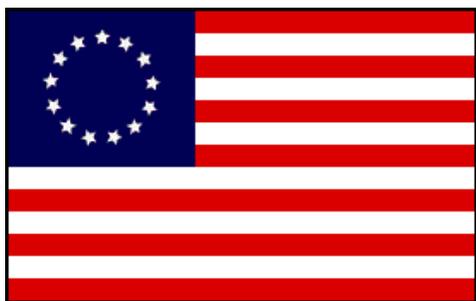
This is the ***First Official United States Flag*** by Congressional action, resolved: “That the Flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation,” designed by Charles Thompson (Secretary of the Continental Congress, who also designed the Great Seal for the United States). The only President to serve under this

Flag was George Washington (1789-1797). This Flag lasted for a period of 18 years. Each star *and* stripe represented a Colony.

There was a distinct lack of uniformity in the early Stars and Stripes. The red and white stripes remained unchanged but the Congressional Resolution mentioned earlier did not specify what star arrangement should be followed in the canton.

***Historical Note:** Francis Hopkinson's Flag – Historians credit Francis Hopkinson with designing the first American flag. A lawyer, delegate to the Continental Congress from New Jersey, a member of the Marine Committee, and signer of the Declaration of Independence, Hopkinson submitted a bill to the Board of Admiralty asking to be compensated for the design of the flag and seals for several governmental organizations. What he asked for was a “Quarter Cask of the public wine.” Over the course of the next year, he grappled with the Treasury – and finally gave up trying to collect his payment.*

The following are some of the better known variations:



Betsy Ross Flag

This flag is without question the most well known, and is often confused with the first official U.S. flag. Occasionally, the 13th star occupied a position in the center.

Additional Info: Elizabeth Griscom Ross, a seamstress from Philadelphia.

Legend: She was visited at her home in May 1776 by a special committee of the Continental Congress, made up of George

Washington, the wealthy land owner Robert Morris, and George Ross, the uncle of her recently deceased husband. They described a flag and asked if she could make one for them. She agreed to accept the job and they commissioned her to make a new flag for the Continental Army. Betsy Ross had made flags for ships in the upholstery business that she and her husband had started before he was fatally injured in an ammunition dump explosion. Washington preferred six-pointed stars but Ross recommended to the committee that five-pointed stars were more easily made. The circular motif in the blue canton was meant to show that not one of the new states was more important than another. Betsy Ross had a grandson, William J. Canby, who wrote in 1857 that he was told the story as a boy of eleven by his eighty-four-year-old grandmother, Betsy Ross. *There are no written records to verify this story. It is based entirely on anecdotes handed down by word of mouth from direct descendants of Mrs. Ross. Whether true or a legend, it will continue to be part of the American tradition.*

Fact: Betsy Ross was known as a flag-maker and there is in the archives of the Navy an order to Elizabeth Ross “for making Ships Colors” for 14 pounds, 12 shillings and 2 pence, paid to her exactly two weeks before the Marine Committee’s resolution of June 14, 1777 which adapted the theme of the red and white striped Union Flag of Holland to the flag of the 13 United States of America.

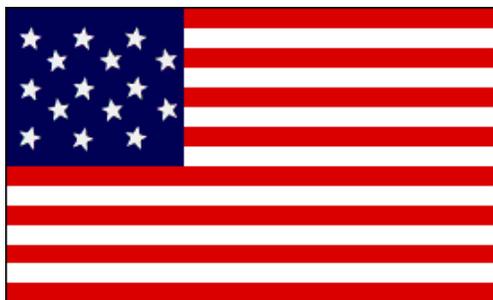
Home at 239 Arch Street, Philadelphia is a National Shrine and the flag flies on a staff from her third floor window. Thousands of people of all nations visit this house which is known as the Birthplace of Old Glory.



The Bennington Flag

Perhaps the first using the Stars and Stripes in battle, and was carried by the Continental forces in the battle of Bennington, Vermont, on August 16, 1777. This was the flag that General Stark, commander of the Continental forces, is quoted as saying “This flag flies from yonder hill by nightfall or Molly Starks sleeps a widow tonight.”

SECOND OFFICIAL UNITED STATES FLAG – (Sewn by Mary Pickersgill):



The Star Spangled Banner:

The 15-star 15-stripe Flag was authorized by the Flag Act of January 13, 1794, adding **2 stripes and 2 Stars** for the admission of Vermont (the 14th State on March 4, 1791) and Kentucky (the 15th State on June 1, 1792). This Flag became the Official U. S. Flag on May 1, 1795 and was to last for 23 years.

This flag was the only U.S. Flag to have more than 13 stripes.

* The image (left) is representative of the actual Flag that flew over Fort McHenry

during the bombardment September 13, 1814, immortalized by Francis Scott Key, and which is now preserved in the Smithsonian Museum. You can notice the "tilt" in some of the stars just as in the [original Star Spangled Banner](#).

It inspired Francis Scott Key to write the "Star-Spangled Banner," it was the first Flag to be hoisted over a fortress of the Old World, when Lieutenant Presley N. O'Bannon, of the Marine Corps, and Midshipman Mann, of the Navy, raised it above the Tripolitan stronghold in Derne, Tripoli, on April 27, 1805; it was our ensign in the Battle of Lake Erie; and was flown by General Jackson at New Orleans.

Additional Info: This flag was adopted in May 1, 1795 after the states of Vermont and Kentucky had been admitted to the Union. This flag flew over Fort McHenry in Baltimore when Francis Scott Key wrote "The Star Spangled Banner." Mary Pickersgill, a Baltimore widow, was commissioned by Major George Armistead to make a 30-foot by 42-foot flag to fly over Fort McHenry at the entrance to Baltimore Harbor. Along with her 13-year-old daughter Caroline, she spent several weeks cutting and preparing the material for the flag. It was too big to sew together in her house, so she arranged with a nearby brewery to let her assemble it on the floor in the evenings. She was paid \$405.90.

Her house is now a museum in Baltimore called the Star Spangled Banner Flag House.

APRIL 4, 1818 THROUGH TODAY: **THIRD OFFICIAL UNITED STATES FLAG (AND SO ON)**

Fearing that too many stripes would spoil the true design of the Flag, Congress passed a law on April 4, 1818, returning the Flag to its original design of thirteen stripes and providing for a new star to be added to the blue field as additional states came into the Union. Thus, for nearly a quarter of a century, this Flag with its fifteen stars and stripes was the banner of our growing Nation.

Additional Info: Congress enacted the following law which is still in effect: "That the Flag of the United States be 13 horizontal stripes, alternate red and white, and that on the admission of every State into the Union, one star to be added on the Fourth of July next succeeding admission."

Sources:

- [1] [Honor Our Flag](#), David Singleton, 2002, ISBN 0-7627-2368-8
- [2] [Our Flag – The Story of Old Glory](#), Mabel Ruth Bennett, 2001, 16th printing.
- [3] [How America's Flag Evolved](#), Lt. Col. Thomas N. Pyke, Volume CIV, Number 7, July, 1996, The Scottish Rite Journal, Special Edition