

History of Our American Flag

The U.S. Flag on Independence Day, 1776: The flag used by the colonies to indicate their new national status was the Continental Colors or Grand Union (or Cambridge or Congress) flag. It flew from the Alfred on December 3, 1775, and near Washington's headquarters at Cambridge MA on January 2, 1776 [see Earl Williams, "What You Should Know about the American Flag", (Thomas Publ., Gettysburg PA, 1992)].



The First Official U.S. Flag: On 1777 June 14 Congress adopted a resolution from the Marine Committee that the flag have thirteen stripes alternating red and white, with thirteen white stars in a blue field. Francis Hopkinson is the only person who ever claimed to have designed (not made) the first "stars and stripes". There is historical evidence that he designed it using six-pointed stars in a staggered row configuration (shown below). The Flag Guys have posted the evidence for Hopkinson.



Betsy Ross's descendants claimed she made (not designed) the first U.S. flag, using a circular arrangement of five-pointed stars. Independence Hall Association has posted the evidence for Ross. The "Betsy Ross" flag is well-known and well-loved around the world. We salute both flags and both designers as proud symbols and staunch patriots of our young nation.

War of 1812 – The Star-Spangled Banner

The Star-Spangled Banner: After Vermont and Kentucky became states in 1795, two more stars were added. Two more stripes were also added. It became clear that adding stripes would make construction of a flag difficult, so the number of stripes for later flags was returned to the original thirteen. During the War of 1812 the base commander of Fort McHenry (in Baltimore MD) paid to have a huge flag made for the fort to show defiance to the British and to keep American spirits up during an expected British attack. This flag is generally known as the Star-Spangled Banner. It inspired Francis Scott Key to write a poem that was set to music and later became our national anthem. Here are the words and music for the anthem. John Phillip Sousa wrote The Stars and Stripes Forever March, which became our national march. Here are the words and music for the march.



Union Civil War - 34 Star Flag

As the flag of the United States during the first half of the Civil War, the 34-star version of the Stars and Stripes was flown by the armies of the North throughout the conflict. Like all versions of the flag made after 1818, it bore 13 red and white stripes representing each of the original Colonies, and a star for each state, even those that were attempting secession. It remained the official flag of the United States until 1863 when West Virginia separated itself to rejoin the Union.



Historic flags that have symbolized our nation since 1776 are displayed by the University of Oklahoma