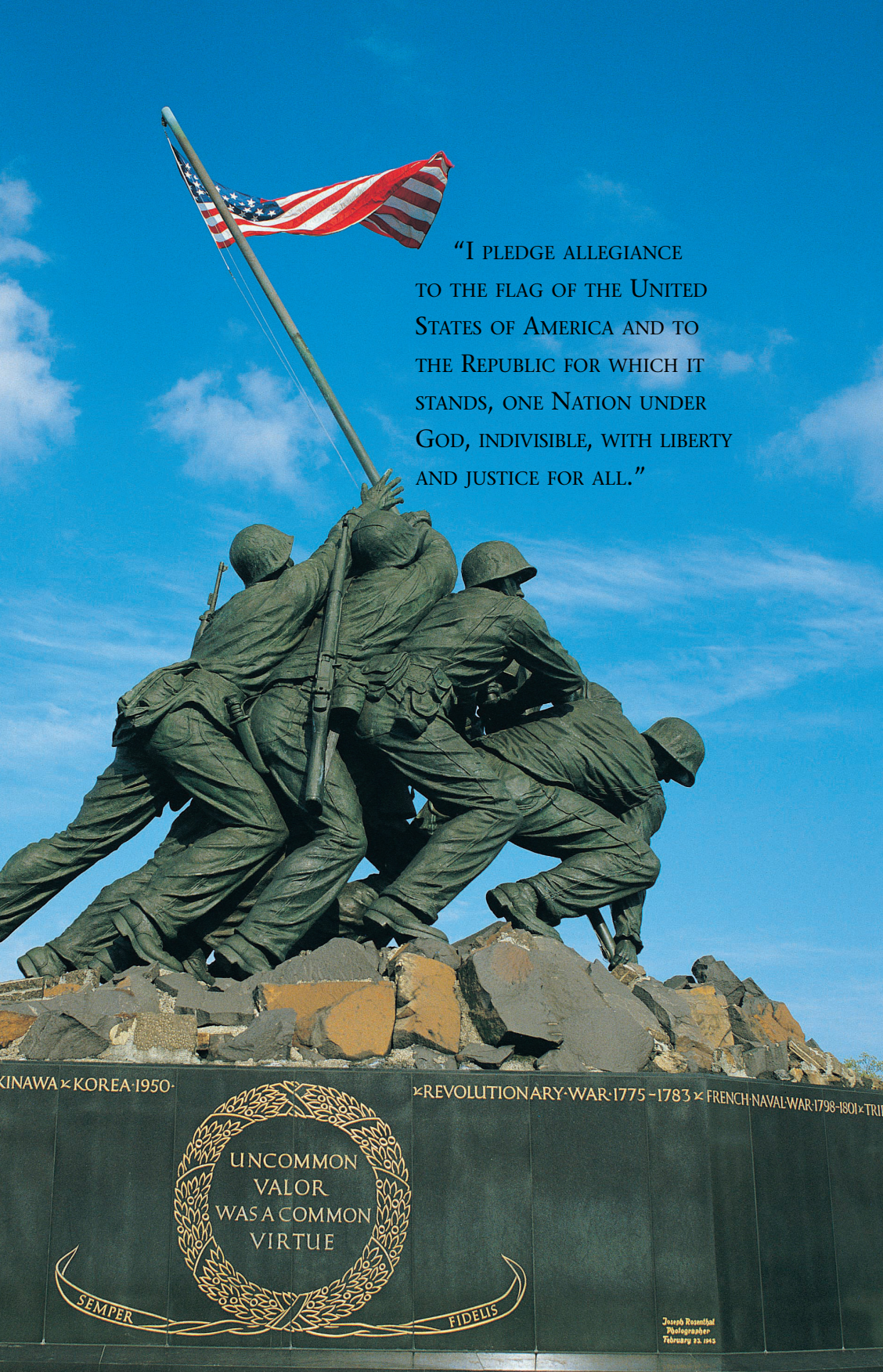
OUR FLAG


"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."
KINAWA ✕ KOREA·1950·
✕REVOLUTIONARY·WAR·1775–1783 ✕ FRENCH·NAVAL·WAR·1798–1801 ✕ TRI
UNCOMMON VALOR WAS A COMMON VIRTUE
SEMPER
FIDELIS
Joseph Rosenthal
Photographer
February 23, 1945

109th Congress, 2nd Session S.Doc. 109-18

OUR FLAG

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PRINTING
UNITED STATES CONGRESS

Printed by authority of Senate Concurrent Resolution 108, 109th Congress

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 2007

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001

ISBN 978-0-16-076598-8

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OF THE
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SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 108

(Submitted by Senator Lott)

UNITED STATES SENATE
109th Congress, 2nd Session

July 18, 2006

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring),

SEC. 2. OUR FLAG

(a) IN GENERAL—The 2006 revised edition of the publication entitled "Our Flag" shall be printed as a Senate document under the direction of the Joint Committee on Printing.

(b) ADDITIONAL COPIES—In addition to the usual number, there shall be printed the lesser of—

(1) 550,000 copies of the document, of which 440,000 copies shall be for the use of the House of Representatives, 100,000 copies shall be for the use of the Senate, and 10,000 copies shall be for the use of the Joint Committee on Printing; or

(2) such number of copies of the document as does not exceed a total production and printing cost of $215,000 with distribution to be allocated in the same proportion as described in paragraph (1), except that in no case shall the number of copies be less than 1 for each Member of Congress.

Introduction

During the night of September 13, 1814, the British fleet bombarded Fort McHenry in the harbor at Baltimore, Maryland. Francis Scott Key, a 34-year-old lawyer-poet, watched the attack from the deck of a British prisoner-exchange ship. He had gone to seek the release of a friend, but they were refused permission to go ashore until after the attack had been made. As the battle ceased on the following morning, Key turned his telescope to the fort and saw that the American flag was still waving. The sight so inspired him that he pulled a letter from his pocket and began to write the poem, which eventually was adopted as the national anthem of the United States—"The Star-Spangled Banner." Key was returned to Baltimore and later that day took a room at a Baltimore tavern where he completed the poem.

Years later, Key told a hometown audience in Frederick, Maryland:

> *"I saw the flag of my country waving over a city—the strength and pride of my native State—a city devoted to plunder and desolation by its assailants. I witnessed the preparation for its assaults. I saw the array of its enemies as they advanced to the attack. I heard the sound of battle; the noise of the conflict fell upon my listening ear, and told me that 'the brave and the free' had met the invaders."*

The Joint Committee on Printing is pleased to present the latest edition of Our Flag. This Congressional publication briefly describes the history of the flag, and sets forth the practices and observances appropriate to its display. The Committee hopes that this document will be both useful and informative to its audience.

Acknowledgement

The Joint Committee on Printing extends thanks and appreciation to the individuals and organizations that contributed their knowledge to this booklet.

> **"Let the praise, then, if any be due, be given, not to me, who only did what I could not help doing, not to the writer, but to the inspirers of the song!"**
>
> —*Francis Scott Key*

The History of the Stars and Stripes

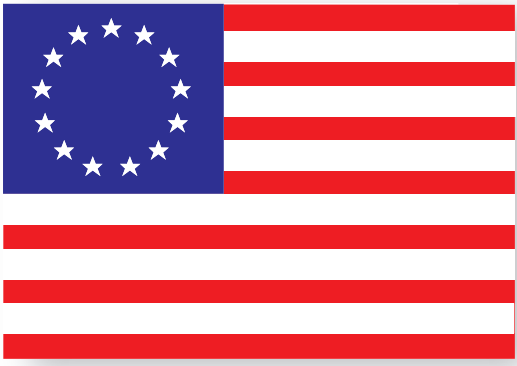
The Stars and Stripes originated as a result of a resolution adopted by the Marine Committee of the Second Continental Congress at Philadelphia on June 14, 1777. The resolution read:

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

The resolution gave no instruction as to how many points the stars should have, nor how the stars should be arranged on the blue union. Consequently, some flags had stars scattered on the blue field without any specific design, some arranged the stars in rows, and some in a circle. The first Navy Stars and Stripes had the stars arranged in staggered formation in alternate rows of threes and twos on a blue field. Other Stars and Stripes flags had stars arranged in alternate rows of four, five and four. Some stars had six points while others had eight.

Strong evidence indicates that Francis Hopkinson of New Jersey, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was responsible for the stars in the U.S. flag. At the time that the flag resolution was adopted, Hopkinson was the Chairman of the Continental Navy Board's Middle Department. Hopkinson also helped design other devices for the Government including the Great Seal of the United States. For his services, Hopkinson submitted a letter to the Continental Admiralty Board asking "whether a Quarter Cask of the public Wine will not be a proper & reasonable Reward for these Labours of Fancy and a suitable Encouragement to future Exertions of a like Nature." His request was turned down since the Congress regarded him as a public servant.

An Early Stars and Stripes

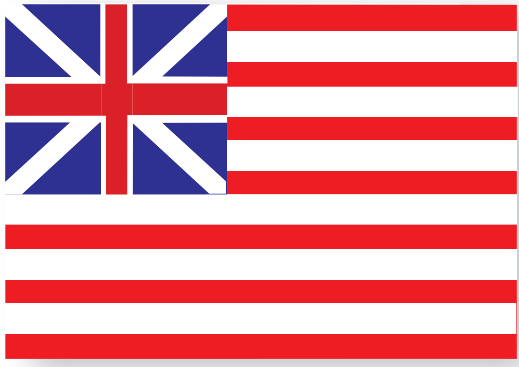


During the Revolutionary War, several patriots made flags for our new Nation. Among them were Cornelia Bridges, Elizabeth (Betsy) Ross, and Rebecca Young, all of Pennsylvania, and John Shaw of Annapolis, Maryland. Although Betsy Ross, the best known of these persons, made flags for 50 years, there is no proof that she made the first Stars and Stripes. It is known that she made flags for the Pennsylvania State Navy in 1777. The flag popularly known as the "Betsy Ross flag," which arranged the stars in a circle, did not appear until the early 1790's.

The claims of Betsy Ross were first brought to the attention of the public in 1870 by one of her grandsons, William J. Canby. In a paper he read before the meeting of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Canby stated:

"It is not *tradition*, it is *report* from the lips of the principal participator in the transaction, directly told not to one or two, but a dozen or more living witnesses, of which I myself am one, though but a little boy when I heard it.... Colonel Ross with Robert Morris and General Washington, called on Mrs. Ross and told her they were a committee of Congress, and wanted her to make a flag from the drawing, a rough one, which, upon her suggestions, was redrawn by General Washington in pencil in her back parlor. This was prior to the Declaration of Independence. I fix the date to be during Washington's visit to Congress from New York in June, 1776 when he came to confer upon the affairs of the Army, the flag being, no doubt, one of these affairs."

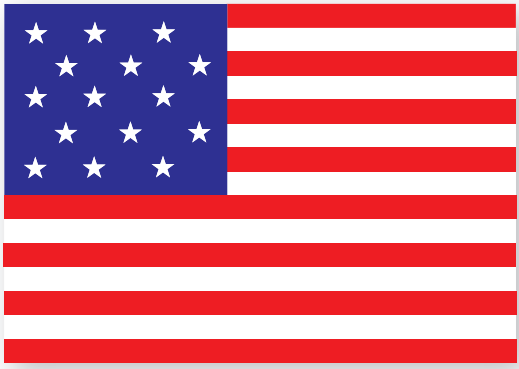
The Grand Union Flag



The first flag of the colonists to have any resemblance to the present Stars and Stripes was the Grand Union Flag, sometimes referred to as the Congress Colors, the First Navy Ensign, and the Cambridge Flag. Its design consisted of 13 stripes, alternately red and white, representing the Thirteen Colonies, with a blue field in the upper left-hand corner bearing the red cross of St. George of England with the white cross of St. Andrew of Scotland. As the flag of the revolution it was used on many occasions. It was first flown by the ships of the Colonial Fleet on the Delaware River. On December 3, 1775, it was raised aboard Captain Esek Hopkin's flag-ship Alfred by John Paul Jones, then a Navy lieutenant. Later the flag was raised on the liberty pole at Prospect Hill, which was near George Washington's headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was our unofficial national flag on July 4, 1776, Independence Day; and it remained the unofficial national flag and ensign of the Navy until June 14, 1777, when the Continental Congress authorized the Stars and Stripes.

Interestingly, the Grand Union Flag also was the standard of the British East India Company. It was only by degrees that the Union Flag of Great Britain was discarded. The final breach between the Colonies and Great Britain brought about the removal of the British Union from the canton of our striped flag and the substitution of stars on a blue field.

Fifteen Stars and Stripes



When two new States were admitted to the Union (Kentucky and Vermont), a resolution was adopted in January of 1794, expanding the flag to 15 stars and 15 stripes. This flag was the official flag of our country from 1795 to 1818, and was prominent in many historic events. It inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner" during the bombardment of Fort McHenry; it was the first flag to be flown over a fortress of the Old World when American Marine and Naval forces raised it above the pirate stronghold in Tripoli on April 27, 1805; it was the ensign of American forces in the Battle of Lake Erie in September of 1813; and it was flown by General Jackson in New Orleans in January of 1815.

However, realizing that the flag would become unwieldy with a stripe for each new State, Capt. Samuel C. Reid, USN, suggested to Congress that the stripes remain 13 in number to represent the Thirteen Colonies and that a star be added to the blue field for each new State coming into the Union. Accordingly, on April 4, 1818, President Monroe accepted a bill requiring that the flag of the United States have a union of 20 stars, white on a blue field, and that upon admission of each new State into the Union one star be added to the union of the flag on the fourth of July following its date of admission. The 13 alternating red and white stripes would remain unchanged. This act succeeded in prescribing the basic design of the flag, while assuring that the growth of the Nation would be properly symbolized.

Eventually, the growth of the country resulted in a flag with 48 stars upon the admission of Arizona and New Mexico in 1912. Alaska added a 49th in 1959, and Hawaii a 50th star in 1960. With the 50-star flag

came a new design and arrangement of the stars in the union, a requirement met by President Eisenhower in Executive Order No. 10834, issued August 21, 1959. To conform with this, a national banner with 50 stars became the official flag of the United States. The flag was raised for the first time at 12:01 a.m. on July 4, 1960, at the Fort McHenry National Monument in Baltimore, Maryland.

Traditionally a symbol of liberty, the American flag has carried the message of freedom to many parts of the world. Sometimes the same flag that was flying at a crucial moment in our history has been flown again in another place to symbolize continuity in our struggles for the cause of liberty.

One of the most memorable is the flag that flew over the Capitol in Washington on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked. This same flag was raised again on December 8 when war was declared on Japan, and three days later at the time of the declaration of war against Germany and Italy. President Roosevelt called it the "flag of liberation" and carried it with him to the Casablanca Conference and on other historic occasions. It flew from the mast of the U.S.S. Missouri during the formal Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945.

Another historic flag is the one that flew over Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. It also was present at the United Nations Charter meeting in San Francisco, California, and was used at the Big Three Conference at Potsdam, Germany. This same flag flew over the White House on August 14, 1945, when the Japanese accepted surrender terms.

"Old Ironsides" in the War of 1812. Courtesy U.S. Naval Academy Museum

Following the War of 1812, a great wave of nationalistic spirit spread throughout the country; the infant Republic had successfully defied the might of an empire. As this spirit spread, the Stars and Stripes became a symbol of sovereignty. The homage paid that banner is best expressed by what the gifted men of later generations wrote concerning it.

The writer Henry Ward Beecher said:

> *"A thoughtful mind when it sees a nation's flag, sees not the flag, but the nation itself. And whatever may be its symbols, its insignia, he reads chiefly in the flag, the government, the principles, the truths, the history that belongs to the nation that sets it forth. The American flag has been a symbol of Liberty and men rejoiced in it.*
>
> *"The stars upon it were like the bright morning stars of God, and the stripes upon it were beams of morning light. As at early dawn the stars shine forth even while it grows light, and then as the sun advances that light breaks into banks and streaming lines of color, the glowing red and intense white striving together, and ribbing the horizon with bars effulgent, so, on the American flag, stars and beams of many-colored light shine out together ...."*

In a 1917 Flag Day message, President Wilson said:

> *"This flag, which we honor and under which we serve, is the emblem of our unity, our power, our thought and purpose as a nation. It has no other character than that which we give it from generation to generation. The choices are ours. It floats in majestic silence above the hosts that execute those choices, whether in peace or in war. And yet, though silent, it speaks to us—speaks to us of the past, of the men and women who went before us, and of the records they wrote upon it.*
>
> *"We celebrate the day of its birth; and from its birth until now it has witnessed a great history, has floated on high the symbol of great events, of a great plan of life worked out by a great people....*
>
> *"Woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way in this day of high resolution when every principle we hold dearest is to be vindicated and made secure for the salvation of the nation. We are ready to plead at the bar of history, and our flag shall wear a new luster. Once more we shall make good with our lives and fortunes the great faith to which we were born, and a new glory shall shine in the face of our people."*

Early American Flags

Archeological digs in northern India, dating around 3,500 B.C., have uncovered a seal, used to sign documents. The seal shows a procession of seven men carrying square standards, held aloft on poles like modern flags. While these ancient flags were rigid, like boards, and not made of cloth as modern flags are, they provided ample testimony that heraldry and the displaying of banners dated to the earliest civilizations.

In American history, the Vikings carried a flag which bore a black raven on a field of white. In 1492 Columbus sailed to our shores with his three small ships displaying the Spanish flag bearing two red lions on two white fields and two yellow castles on two red fields. The Dutch brought their own striped flags when they settled in New Amsterdam, which we now call New York, and pioneers from other nations also brought along the standards of their countries when they settled on our shores.

It is only natural, therefore, that America should create colonial flags as soon as the first colonists settled. Given the disparate array of settlers, it is not surprising that a wide variety of flags was created.

The first flags adopted by our colonial forebears were symbolic of their struggles with the wilderness of the new land. Beavers, pine trees, rattlesnakes, anchors and various other insignia were affixed to different banners with mottoes such as "Hope," "Liberty," "Appeal to Heaven," or "Don't Tread on Me."

In the early days of the Revolution, there were colonial and regimental flags by the score. The Boston Liberty flag, consisting of nine alternate red and white horizontal stripes, flew over the Liberty Tree, a fine old elm in Hanover Square in Boston, where the Sons of Liberty met. Still another was a white flag with a green pine tree and the inscription, "An Appeal to Heaven." This particular flag became familiar on the seas as the ensign of the cruisers commissioned by General Washington, and was noted by many English newspapers of the time.

Flags with a rattlesnake theme also gained increasing prestige with colonists. The slogan "Don't Tread on Me" almost invariably appeared on rattlesnake flags. A flag of this type was the standard of the South Carolina Navy. Another, the Gadsden flag, consisted of a yellow field with a rattlesnake in a spiral coil, poised to strike, in the center. Below the snake was the motto, "Don't Tread on Me." Similar was the Culpepper flag, banner of the Minutemen of Culpepper (now spelled Culpeper) County, Virginia. It consisted of a white field with a rattlesnake in a spiral coil in the center. Above the rattlesnake was the legend "The Culpepper Minute Men" and below, the motto, "Liberty or Death" as well as "Don't Tread on Me."

In December of 1775, an anonymous Philadelphia correspondent wrote to Bradford's Pennsylvania Journal concerning the symbolic use of the snake. He began the letter by saying:

> *"I recollected that her eye excelled in brightness that of any other animal, and that she has no eye-lids. She may, therefore, be esteemed an emblem of vigilance. She never begins an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrenders. She is, therefore, an emblem of magnanimity and true courage."*

It was probably the deadly bite of the rattler, however, which was foremost in the minds of its designers, and the threatening slogan "Don't Tread on Me" added further significance to the design.

The Moultrie flag was the first distinctive American flag displayed in the South. It flew over the ramparts of the fort on Sullivan's Island, which lies in the channel leading to Charleston, South Carolina, when the British fleet attacked on June 28, 1776. The British ships bombarded the fort for 10 hours. But the garrison, consisting of some 375 regulars and a few militia, under the command of Col. William Moultrie, put up such a gallant defense that the British were forced to withdraw under cover of darkness. This victory saved the southern Colonies from invasion for another two years. The flag was blue, as were the uniforms of the men of the garrison, and it bore a white crescent in the upper corner next to the staff, like the silver crescents the men wore on their caps, in-scribed with the words "Liberty or Death."

The Maritime Colony of Rhode Island had its own flag, which was carried at Brandywine, Trenton, and Yorktown. It bore an anchor, 13 stars, and the word "Hope." Its white stars in a blue field are believed by many to have influenced the design of our national flag.

The Army preferred its regimental flags on the battlefield instead of the Stars and Stripes. A popular form of the U.S. flag that was used in battle had the obverse (front) of the Great Seal in the canton. The Army also used the Stars and Stripes with 13 stars in a circle. The Stars and Stripes was officially used in Army artillery units in 1834, and in infantry units in 1842.

Historical Flags

FORT MOULTRIE

South Carolinians defending Fort Moultrie in Charleston Harbor in 1776 raised one of the earliest flags of American liberty. The blue corresponded to their uniform, the silver crescent appeared as a badge worn on their caps. The cause for which they fought—liberty—was emblazoned on the crescent.

GREEN MOUNTAIN BOYS

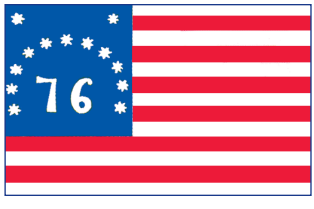
General John Stark of New Hampshire commanded a militia brigade known as the "Green Mountain Boys." Tradition relates that its green flag was flown at the Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777. As in many American flags, the stars here were arranged in an arbitrary fashion. Nevertheless they signified the unity of the Thirteen Colonies in their struggle for independence.

RHODE ISLAND REGIMENT

The State flags of America found their earliest forms during the Revolutionary War. The starry canton in the flag of the Rhode Island Regiment symbolized national unity, but the white field corresponded to the uniform of the State troops. The anchor symbol and motto which completed the design had been used for more than a century. The original flag may be found in the State House in Providence.

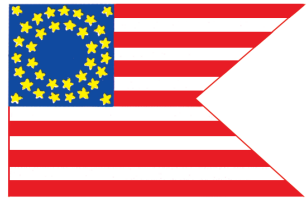
COMMODORE PERRY'S FLAG

During the War of 1812 Captain James Lawrence of the Chesapeake encouraged his men, as he lay dying, by exhorting "Don't Give Up the Ship." Three months later at the Battle of Lake Erie, Commodore Perry emblazoned these words on a flag which carried him to victory. Similar flags and mottoes have inspired Americans throughout our two centuries of existence.



BENNINGTON FLAG

Originally believed to have been carried during the Revolution, this flag is now seen as having probably been made for the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1826. Its design is typical of the exuberant artistic expressions found in flags of the 19th century.



CAVALRY GUIDON

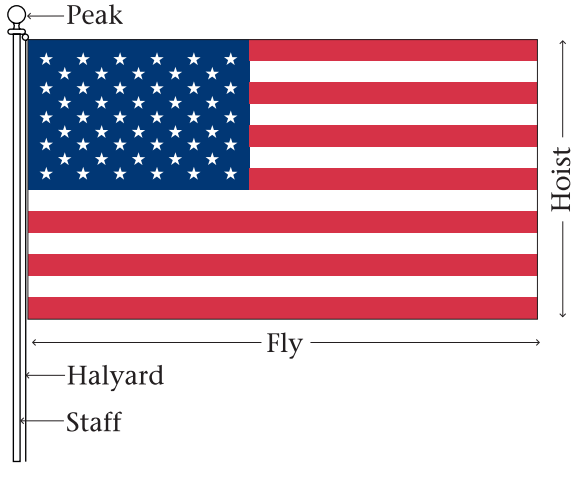
During the Civil War a special version of the United States flag-with swallowtail and stars of gold instead of white—was carried by the cavalry. General Custer and others used the flag in succeeding decades in the West.

The Flag Today

The flag of the United States of America has 13 horizontal stripes—7 red and 6 white—the red and white stripes alternating, and a union which consists of white stars of 5 points on a blue field placed in the upper quarter next to the staff and extending to the lower edge of the fourth red stripe from the top. The number of stars equals the number of States in the Union. The proportions of the flag as prescribed by Executive Order of President Eisenhower on August 21, 1959, are as follows:

Hoist (width) of flag	1.0
Fly (length) of flag	1.9
Hoist (width) of union	0.5385
Fly (length) of union	0.76
Width of each stripe	0.769
Diameter of each star	0.0616

Flag Anatomy



Flag Laws and Regulations

The laws relating to the flag of the United States of America are found in detail in the United States Code. Title 4, Chapter 1 pertains to the flag and seal, seat of Government, and official territorial papers; Section 700, Title 18, Chapter 33 pertains to desecration of the flag and penalties; Title 36, Chapter 1 pertains to patriotic and national observances. These laws were supplemented by Executive Orders and Presidential Proclamations.

Title 36, Chapter 1—PATRIOTIC CUSTOMS

§301. National anthem; Star-Spangled Banner, conduct during playing

During rendition of the national anthem when the flag is displayed, all present except those in uniform should stand at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. Men not in uniform should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Persons in uniform should render the military salute at the first note of the anthem and retain this position until the last note. When the flag is not displayed, those present should face toward the music and act in the same manner they would if the flag were displayed there.

Title 4, Chapter 1—THE FLAG

§4. Pledge of Allegiance to the flag; manner of delivery

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.", should be rendered by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. When not in uniform men should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Persons in uniform should remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute.

§5. Display and use of flag by civilians; codification of rules and customs; definition

The following codification of existing rules and customs pertaining to the display and use of the flag of the United States of America is established for the use of such civilians or civilian groups or organizations as may not be required to conform with regulations promulgated by one or more executive departments of the Government of the United States. The flag of the United States for the purpose of this chapter shall be defined according to Title 4, United States Code, Chapter 1, Section 1 and Section 2 and Executive Order 10834 issued pursuant thereto.

§6. Time and occasions for display

(a) It is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flagstaffs in the open. However, when a patriotic effect is desired, the flag may be displayed twenty-four hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness.

(b) The flag should be hoisted briskly and lowered ceremoniously.

(c) The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all weather flag is displayed.

(d) The flag should be displayed on all days, especially on New Year's Day, January 1; Inauguration Day, January 20; Lincoln's Birthday, February 12; Washington's Birthday, third Monday in February; Easter Sunday (variable), Mother's Day, second Sunday in May; Armed Forces Day, third Saturday in May: Memorial Day (half-staff until noon), the last Monday in May; Flag Day, June 14; Independence Day, July 4; Labor Day, first Monday in September; Constitution Day, September 17; Columbus Day, second Monday in October; Navy Day, October 27; Veterans Day, November 11; Thanksgiving Day, fourth Thursday in November; Christmas Day, December 25; and such other days as may be proclaimed by the President of the United States; the birthdays of States (date of admission); and on State holidays.

(e) The flag should be displayed daily on or near the main administration building of every public institution.

(f) The flag should be displayed in or near every polling place on election days.

(g) The flag should be displayed during school days in or near every schoolhouse.

§7. Position and manner of display

The flag, when carried in a procession with another flag or flags, should be either on the marching right; that is, the flag's own right, or, if there is a line of other flags, in front of the center of that line.

(a) The flag should not be displayed on a float in a parade except from a staff, or as provided in subsection (i) of this section.

Over the middle of a street
<<< north or east <<<

With another flag on crossed staffs

A.M. P.M.
Memorial Day

On the same halyard with flags of
states, cities and organizations

Suspended over a sidewalk

Flag Illustrations

At an angle from a building

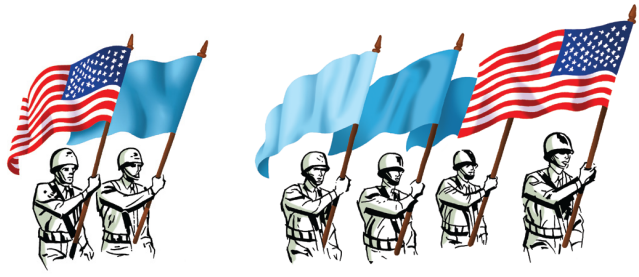
On a speaker's platform

When unveiling a statue
or monument

On a wall

Draped over a casket

Flag Illustrations



In a procession

Grouped with flags of other States, cities and organizations

With flags of two or more nations

Saluting the flag

Proper display of bunting

(b) The flag should not be draped over the hood, top, sides, or back of a vehicle or of a railroad train or a boat. When the flag is displayed on a motorcar, the staff shall be fixed firmly to the chassis or clamped to the right fender.

(c) No other flag or pennant should be placed above or, if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America, except during church services conducted by naval chaplains at sea, when the church pennant may be flown above the flag during church services for the personnel of the Navy. No person shall display the flag of the United Nations or any other national or international flag equal, above, or in a position of superior prominence or honor to, or in place of, the flag of the United States at any place within the United States or any Territory or possession thereof: Provided, that nothing in this section shall make unlawful the continuance of the practice heretofore followed of displaying the flag of the United Nations in a position of superior prominence or honor, and other national flags in positions of equal prominence or honor, with that of the flag of the United States at the headquarters of the United Nations.

(d) The flag of the United States of America, when it is displayed with another flag against a wall from crossed staffs, should be on the right, the flag's own right, and its staff should be in front of the staff of the other flag.

(e) The flag of the United States of America should be at the center and at the highest point of the group when a number of flags of States or localities or pennants of societies are grouped and displayed from staffs.

(f) When flags of States, cities, or localities, or pennants of societies are flown on the same halyard with the flag of the United States, the latter should always be at the peak. When the flags are flown from adjacent staffs, the flag of the United States should be hoisted first and lowered last. No such flag or pennant may be placed above the flag of the United States or to the United States flag's right.

(g) When flags of two or more nations are displayed, they are to be flown from separate staffs of the same height. The flags should be of approximately equal size. International usage forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in time of peace.

(h) When the flag of the United States is displayed from a staff projecting horizontally or at an angle from the window sill, balcony, or front of a building, the union of the flag should be placed at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half staff. When the flag is suspended over a sidewalk from a rope extending from a house to a pole at the

edge of the sidewalk, the flag should be hoisted out, union first, from the building.

(i) When displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union should be uppermost and to the flag's own right, that is, to the observer's left. When displayed in a window, the flag should be displayed in the same way, with the union or blue field to the left of the observer in the street.

(j) When the flag is displayed over the middle of the street, it should be suspended vertically with the union to the north in an east and west street or to the east in a north and south street.

(k) When used on a speaker's platform, the flag, if displayed flat, should be displayed above and behind the speaker. When displayed from a staff in a church or public auditorium, the flag of the United States of America should hold the position of superior prominence, in advance of the audience, and in the position of honor at the clergyman's or speaker's right as he faces the audience. Any other flag so displayed should be placed on the left of the clergyman or speaker or to the right of the audience.

(l) The flag should form a distinctive feature of the ceremony of unveiling a statue or monument, but it should never be used as the covering for the statue or monument.

(m) The flag, when flown at half-staff, should be first hoisted to the peak for an instant and then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag should be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day. On Memorial Day the flag should be displayed at half-staff until noon only, then raised to the top of the staff. By order of the President, the flag shall be flown at half-staff upon the death of principal figures of the United States Government and the Governor of a State, territory, or possession, as a mark of respect to their memory. In the event of the death of other officials or foreign dignitaries, the flag is to be displayed at half-staff according to Presidential instructions or orders, or in accordance with recognized customs or practices not inconsistent with law. In the event of the death of a present or former official of the government of any State, territory, or possession of the United States, the Governor of that State, territory, or possession may proclaim that the National flag shall be flown at half-staff. The flag shall be flown at half-staff thirty days from the death of the President or a former President; ten days from the day of death of the Vice President, the Chief Justice or a retired Chief Justice of the United States, or the Speaker of the House of Representatives; from the day of death until interment of an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, a Secretary of an executive or military department, a former Vice President, or the Governor of a State, territory, or possession; and on the day of death and the following

day for a Member of Congress. As used in this subsection—

(1) the term "half-staff" means the position of the flag when it is one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff;

(2) the term "executive or military department" means any agency listed under Sections 101 and 102 of Title 5, United States Code; and

(3) the term "Member of Congress" means a Senator, a Representative, a Delegate, or the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico.

(n) When the flag is used to cover a casket, it should be so placed that the union is at the head and over the left shoulder. The flag should not be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.

(o) When the flag is suspended across a corridor or lobby in a building with only one main entrance, it should be suspended vertically with the union of the flag to the observer's left upon entering. If the building has more than one main entrance, the flag should be suspended vertically near the center of the corridor or lobby with the union to the north, when entrances are to the east and west or to the east when entrances are to the north and south. If there are entrances in more than two directions, the union should be to the east.

§8. Respect for the Flag

No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States of America; the flag should not be dipped to any person or thing. Regimental colors, State flags, and organization or institutional flags are to be dipped as a mark of honor.

(a) The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.

(b) The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise.

(c) The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally, but always aloft and free.

(d) The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery. It should never be festooned, drawn back, nor up, in folds, but always allowed to fall free. Bunting of blue, white, and red, always arranged with the blue above, the white in the middle, and the red below, should be used for covering a speaker's desk, draping the front of the platform, and for decoration in general.

(e) The flag should never be fastened, displayed, used, or stored in such a manner as to permit it to be easily torn, soiled, or damaged in any way.

(f) The flag should never be used as a covering for a ceiling.

(g) The flag should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature.

(h) The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.

(i) The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should not be embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs and the like, printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard. Advertising signs should not be fastened to a staff or halyard from which the flag is flown.

(j) No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform. However, a flag patch may be affixed to the uniform of military personnel, firemen, policemen, and members of patriotic organizations. The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Therefore, the lapel flag pin being a replica, should be worn on the left lapel near the heart.

(k) The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

§9. Conduct during hoisting, lowering or passing of flag

During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag or when the flag is passing in a parade or in review, all persons present except those in uniform should face the flag and stand at attention with the right hand over the heart. Those present in uniform should render the military salute. When not in uniform, men should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Aliens should stand at attention. The salute to the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes.

§10. Modification of rules and customs by President

Any rule or custom pertaining to the display of the flag of the United States of America, set forth herein, may be altered, modified, or repealed, or additional rules with respect thereto may be prescribed, by the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, whenever he deems it to be appropriate or desirable; and any such alteration or additional rule shall be set forth in a proclamation.

Flag Presentation

Presentation of the flag during a ceremony should be preceded by a brief talk emphasizing the importance of the occasion. Following the presentation all present should salute the flag, recite the pledge of allegiance, and sing the national anthem.

Folding the Flag

1. Two persons, facing each other, hold the flag waist high and horizontally between them.

2. The lower striped section is folded, lengthwise, over the blue field. Hold bottom to top and edges together securely.

3. Fold the flag again, lengthwise, folded edge to open edge.

4. A triangular fold is started along the length of the flag, from the end to the heading by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to meet the open edge.

5. The outer point is turned inward parallel with the open edge, forming a second triangle.

6. Repeat the triangular folding until the entire length of the flag is folded.

7. When the flag is completely folded only the triangular blue field should be visible.

Care of Your Flag

The life of your flag depends on your care. Dirt can cut fabrics, dull colors, and cause wear. Most outdoor flags can be washed in mild detergent and thoroughly rinsed. Indoor and parade flags should be dry-cleaned. Many dry cleaners offer free cleaning of U.S. flags during the months of June and July. Damaged flags can be repaired and utilized as long as the overall dimensions are not noticeably altered. The American Legion, the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts of America, all other major veterans' organizations and some local governments conduct proper flag retirement ceremonies. Store your flags in a well ventilated area away from any harsh chemicals or cleaning compounds. If your flag gets wet, never store it until it is completely dry. Wet folds cause permanent creases. Dampness ruins fabric and causes mildew. Pole care is also related to flag care. Rust and scale cause permanent stains and some metallic oxides actually eat holes in fabric.

Sizes of Flags

The size of the flag is determined by the exposed height of the flagpole from which it is flying. The only consideration is for the flag to be in proper proportion to its pole. Flags which fly from angled poles on homes and those which are displayed on standing poles in offices and other indoor displays are usually either 3′ x 5′ or 4′ x 6′. Color guards usually carry flags measuring 4′ x 6′. Other recommended sizes are shown in the following table:

Flagpole Height (ft.)	Flag Size (ft.)
20	4 x 6
25	5 x 8
40	6 x 10
50	8 x 12
60	10 x 15
70	12 x 18
90	15 x 25
125	20 x 30
200	30 x 40
250	40 x 50

Flags at the United States Capitol

No record has been found for the earliest date the flag was flown over the east and west fronts of the Capitol. Early engravings and lithographs in the office of the Architect of the Capitol show flags flying on either side of the original low dome above the corridors connecting the areas now known as Statuary Hall and the Old Senate Chamber.

After the addition of the new House and Senate wings in the 1850s, even before the great dome was completed in 1863, photographs of the period show flags flying over each new wing and the central east and west fronts.

The custom of flying the flags 24 hours a day over the east and west fronts was begun during World War I. This was done in response to requests received from all over the country urging that the flag of the United States be flown continuously over the public buildings in Washington, DC.

The east and west front flags, which are 8 x 12 feet, are replaced by new ones when they become worn and unfit for further use. Prior to machine-made flags, individuals were hired by the Congress to hand sew these flags.

Presidential proclamations and laws authorize the display of the flag 24 hours a day at the following places:

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Baltimore, Maryland (Presidential Proclamation No. 2795, July 2, 1948).

Flag House Square, Albemarle and Pratt Streets, Baltimore Maryland (Public Law 83-319, approved March 26, 1954).

United States Marine Corp Memorial (Iwo Jima), Arlington, Virginia (Presidential Proclamation No. 3418, June 12, 1961).

On the Green of the Town of Lexington, Massachusetts (Public Law 89-335, approved November 8, 1965).

The White House, Washington, DC (Presidential Proclamation No. 4000, September 4, 1970).

Washington Monument, Washington, DC (Presidential Proclamation No. 4064, July 6, 1971, effective July 4, 1971). Fifty flags of the United States are displayed at the Washington Monument continuously.

United States Customs Ports of Entry which are continually open (Presidential Proclamation No. 4131, May 5, 1972).

Grounds of the National Memorial Arch in Valley Forge State Park, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania (Public Law 94-53, approved July 4, 1975).

Many other places fly the flag at night as a patriotic gesture by custom.

How to Obtain a Flag Flown Over the Capitol

Constituents may arrange to purchase flags that have been flown over the Capitol by getting in touch with their Senators or Representatives. A certificate signed by the Architect of the Capitol accompanies each flag. Flags are available for purchase in sizes of 3′ x 5′ or 5′ x 8′ in fabrics of cotton and nylon.

American War Mothers Flag

The American War Mothers is a national organization chartered by Congress with its headquarters in Washington, DC. Its members are mothers whose sons and daughters have served or who are serving in the Armed Forces. Its objective is to aid the serviceman or veteran and his family, including those who are hospitalized.

According to records in the Office of the Architect of the U.S. Capitol, the American War Mothers flag was purchased by them and first flown over the U.S. Capitol, always below the American flag, on Armistice Day, November 11, 1926.

The authority for flying that flag over the U.S. Capitol on this occasion and in subsequent years has been granted annually by written permission of the Vice President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Provision for the ceremony was further recognized when the flagpole on the east front, after the extension of 1960, was installed with two halyards.

Traditionally the flag has been raised at 11 minutes after 11 a.m. by a detail from the Capitol Police. The flag flies until sundown, although originally it flew only for three hours. A bugler selected from one of the armed services plays taps. Brief memorial services are held in connection with the ceremony. These services have been accommodated on the east and west front steps or in Statuary Hall, and permission to hold them is generally granted in the same letter that permits the flag to be flown.

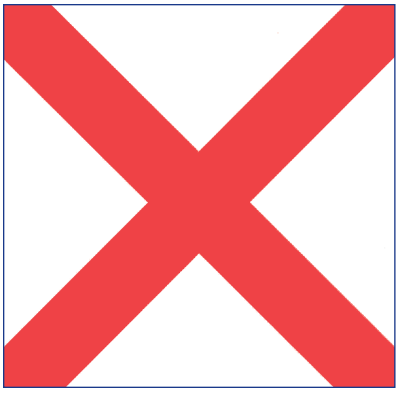
The act of July 1, 1882, regulating the use of the Capitol Grounds, vests the Vice President and the Speaker with the authority to grant this privilege.

The American War Mothers flag is kept in a safe at the U.S. Capitol. The present flag, first used in 1970, replaced the original woolen flag of 1926. It is of a synthetic fabric, 47 x 72 inches in size, consisting of a white field with a red border 11 inches wide. At the top is an 11-inch blue star for the 4,695,039 who served in World War I. These figures are 2 ½ inches in blue. Across the center in 4-inch letters are the words “United States Service Flag.” Below is an 11-inch gold star for the 60,672 who gave their lives. These figures are 2 ½ inches high in gold.

How to Obtain a Burial Flag for a Veteran

Any honorably discharged veteran is entitled to a burial flag. The funeral director, as part of the services, will make the necessary arrangements for the family on behalf of the veteran. The flag may be used to cover the casket and it is presented to the family as a keepsake. The local office of the Department of Veterans' Affairs can also provide information on the procedure for obtaining a flag for a deceased veteran.

Flags of States and Territories



ALABAMA

Entered the Union in 1819 as the 22nd State; flag adopted in 1895. The diagonal cross and the square shape of the flag recall the Battle Flag of the Confederacy, organized in February of 1861 in Montgomery, Alabama's capital.

ALASKA

Entered the Union in 1959 as the 49th State; flag adopted in 1927. Benny Benson, a 13-year-old student, chose the North Star and the Big Dipper when he designed Alaska's flag in a territorial school contest. Its colors recall the Alaskan sky and its gold.

ARIZONA

Entered the Union in 1912 as the 48th state; flag adopted in 1917. Red and yellow are the colors of Spain, while blue is for the United States and the copper star symbolizes mineral resources. The rays suggest the setting sun over the desert.

ARKANSAS

Entered the Union in 1836 as the 25th State; flag adopted in 1913, modified in 1923 and 1924. Arkansas' rank in the Union is indicated by the stars which border the diamond, recalling that it is the only State where minerals are mined. The four stars in the diamond refer to important aspects of Arkansas history.

CALIFORNIA

Entered the Union in 1850 as the 31st State; flag adopted in 1911, modified in 1953. Americans, in what was then Mexican territory, proclaimed the independence of California on June 14, 1846. The banner of their "Bear Flag Republic" was later adopted by the State.

COLORADO

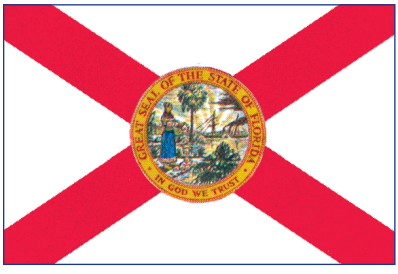
Entered the Union in 1876 as the 38th State; flag adopted in 1911, modified in 1964. Yellow and white refer to the mining of gold and silver, while these colors plus blue are found in the Rocky Mountain columbine, the State flower. Red is also for the Spanish word for that color—*colorado*.

CONNECTICUT

Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the fifth State; flag adopted in 1897. The grapevines in the coat of arms refer to the three original colonies—Connecticut, New Haven, and Saybrook. The motto "He Who Brought Us Over Will Sustain Us," is based on the 80th Psalm.

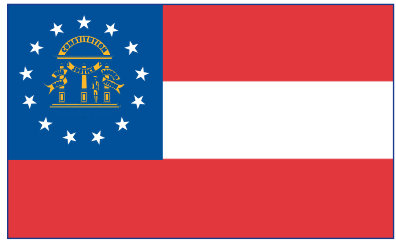
DELAWARE

Ratified the Constitution on December 1, 1787, as the first State; flag adopted in 1913. Revolutionary War uniforms are honored in the blue and buff colors while commerce (the ship), and agriculture (wheat, corn, ox, farmer) are featured in the coat of arms.



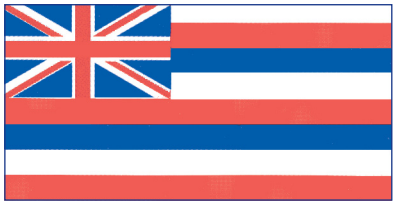
FLORIDA

Entered the Union in 1845 as the 27th State; flag adopted in 1900, modified in 1985. The cross derives from the Confederate Battle Flag. The State seal shows a Seminole woman, a steamboat, and the State tree—a sabal palmetto palm.



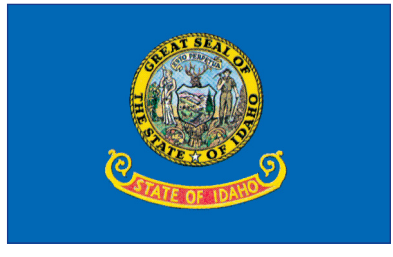
GEORGIA

Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the fourth State; redesign adopted in 2003 based on the first national flag of the Confederacy. In the center of the blue canton is a circle of 13 white stars, symbolizing Georgia and the other 12 original states. Within the circle of stars is Georgia's coat of arms immediately above the words "In God We Trust".



HAWAII

Entered the Union in 1959 as the 50th State; flag adopted in 1816, modified in 1845. The British Union Jack recalls the one presented to King Kamehameha I in 1793 by Captain George Vancouver. The eight stripes are for the principal islands of Hawaii.



IDAHO

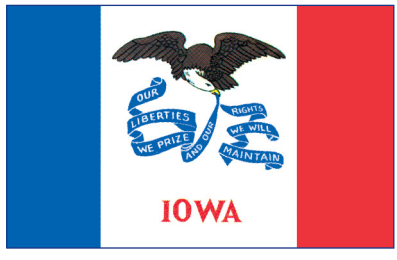
Entered the Union in 1890 as the 43rd State; flag adopted in 1927. The seal incorporates symbols of agriculture, mining, forestry, wildlife, and women's rights. The Latin motto means "May She Last Forever."

ILLINOIS

Entered the Union in 1818 as the 21st State; flag adopted in 1915, modified in 1970. The central design is from the State seal and shows national symbols plus dates of Statehood (1818) and the seal itself (1868).

INDIANA

Entered the Union in 1816 as the 19th state; flag adopted in 1917. The outer ring of stars is for the original States, the inner ring for those up to and including Indiana. Enlightenment and liberty spreading throughout the land are represented by the torch and rays.

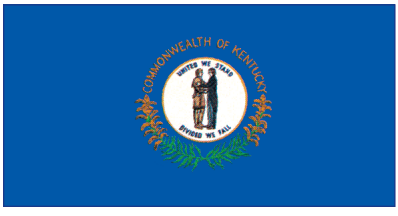


IOWA

Entered the Union in 1846 as the 29th State; flag adopted in 1921. The eagle and motto ribbon are found in the State seal. The stripes recall the French Tricolor since Iowa was acquired from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase.

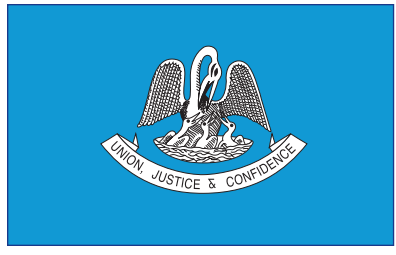
KANSAS

Entered the Union in 1861 as the 34th State; flag adopted in 1925, modified in 1927 and 1963. A sunflower, the State floral emblem, appears above the State seal with figures representing pioneer life. The motto means "To the Stars Through Difficulties."



KENTUCKY

Entered the Union in 1792 as the 15th State; flag adopted in 1918, modified in 1962. The frontiersman and hunter, representing Kentucky and the original States, express the meaning of the motto in the seal. The State flower (goldenrod) frames the design at the bottom.



LOUISIANA

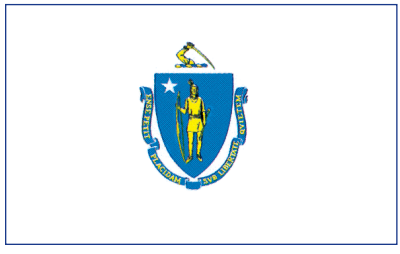
Entered the Union in 1812 as the 18th State; flag adopted in 1912. In heraldry a pelican tearing at her breast to feed her young is a symbol of self sacrifice. Louisiana used this symbol as a territory prior to Statehood.

MAINE

Entered the Union in 1820 as the 23rd State; flag adopted in 1909. The motto "I Direct" refers to the North Star, Maine having once been the northernmost State. Agriculture, shipping and forestry are symbolized by other elements in the coat of arms.

MARYLAND

Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the seventh State; flag adopted in 1904. The coat of arms of the Lords Baltimore unites symbols of the Calvert and Crossland families. Maryland has used similar flags since at least 1638.



MASSACHUSETTS

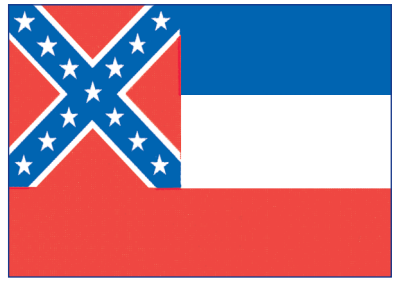
Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the sixth State; flag adopted in 1908, modified in 1971. The State motto translates "This Hand Opposed to Tyrants Searches, with the Sword, for Peaceful Conditions Under Liberty." The star indicates Statehood while the Native American was a Massachusetts symbol as early as 1629.

MICHIGAN

Entered the Union in 1837 as the 26th State; flag adopted in 1911. The national motto is accompanied in the Michigan arms by the slogans "I Shall Defend" and "If You Seek a Pleasant Peninsula, Look Around You." An elk, moose, and scenes from nature are included in the design.

MINNESOTA

Entered the Union in 1858 as the 32nd State; flag adopted in 1957. A scene from pioneer life appears in the State seal together with the motto "The North Star." The nineteen stars indicate Minnesota's rank in Statehood, following the original thirteen States.



MISSISSIPPI

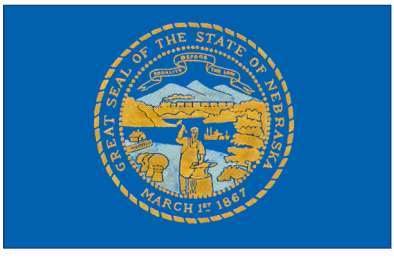
Entered the Union in 1817 as the 20th State; flag adopted in 1894. The State flag is a combination of two Confederate flags—the Stars and Bars and the Battle Flag, both including the national colors.

MISSOURI

Entered the Union in 1821 as the 24th State; flag adopted in 1913. On a background of the national colors appear the Missouri arms framed by stars indicating its order of Statehood. The Latin motto means "Let the Welfare of the People Be the Supreme Law."

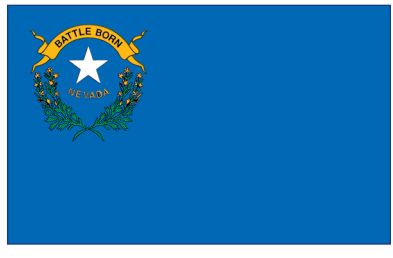
MONTANA

Entered the Union in 1889 as the 41st State; flag adopted in 1905, modified 1981. The State seal shows the Great Falls of the Missouri River and tools indicating mining and agriculture. The motto "Gold and Silver" appears on a ribbon below.



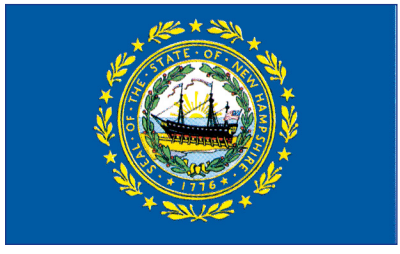
NEBRASKA

Entered the Union in 1867 as the 37th State; flag adopted in 1925. Included in the State seal are the Rocky Mountains, the Missouri River, wheat and corn, a steamboat, a train, and a blacksmith with his hammer and anvil.



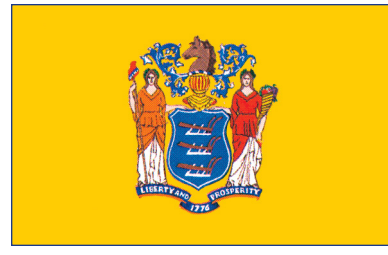
NEVADA

Entered the Union in 1864 as the 36th state; flag adopted in 1991. Sprigs of sagebrush the state flower, form a wreath on Nevada's flag. The silver star symbolizes Nevada's mineral wealth, and the words "Battle Born" indicate that Nevada became a state during the Civil War.



NEW HAMPSHIRE

Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the ninth State; flag adopted in 1909, modified in 1932. The importance in New Hampshire of shipbuilding during the Revolutionary War is suggested by the State seal. The nine stars correspond to New Hampshire's rank among the States.



NEW JERSEY

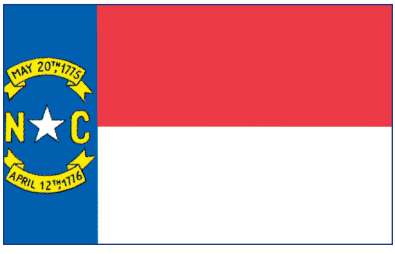
Ratified the Constitution in 1787 as the third State; flag adopted in 1896. The buff background is for the uniforms worn by Revolutionary War soldiers from New Jersey. The coat of arms has the goddesses of liberty and agriculture, as well as three plows and a horse's head.

NEW MEXICO

Entered the Union in 1912 as the 47th State; flag adopted in 1925. The red and gold colors of Spain, which once ruled the area, are combined with an ancient sun symbol of the Zia tribe of Native Americans in this flag.

NEW YORK

Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the 11th State; flag adopted in 1901. The coat of arms shows a scene along the Hudson River, framed by goddesses of liberty and justice. The American eagle surmounts the world at the top; the motto "Excelsior" appears below.

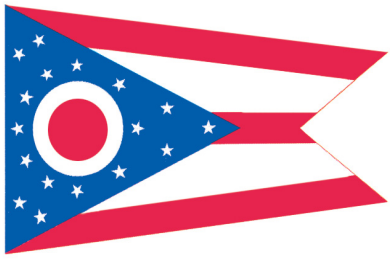


NORTH CAROLINA

Ratified the Constitution in 1789 as the 12th State; flag adopted in 1885. The national colors, a star for Statehood, and the initials of the State are included. The dates are for the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence (May 20, 1775) and the Halifax Resolves (April 12, 1776).

NORTH DAKOTA

Entered the Union in 1889 as the 39th State; flag adopted in 1911. A military flag with a modified version of the United States coat of arms was carried by the Dakota Territorial Guard and later the North Dakota National Guard. The State flag is a modified version of those banners.



OHIO

Entered the Union in 1803 as the 17th State; flag adopted in 1902. The only non-rectangular State flag has stars indicating Ohio's order of Statehood. The red disk and white rim are for the State tree (the buckeye) and first letter of the State name.

OKLAHOMA

Entered the Union in 1907 as the 46th State; flag adopted in 1925, modified 1941 and 1988. An Osage shield stands for defense, its small crosses for lofty ideals. The blue background symbolizes loyalty, while the olive branch and calumet are for peace.

OREGON

Entered the Union in 1859 as the 33rd State; flag adopted in 1925. The ox wagon of pioneers combines with scenes of nature and symbols of agriculture and shipping. The reverse of the flag is blue with a gold beaver.

PENNSYLVANIA

Ratified the Constitution in 1787 as the second State; flag adopted in 1907. The coat of arms incorporates a ship for commerce and a plow and wheat sheaves for agriculture. Draft horses, the American eagle, and the State motto complete the design.

RHODE ISLAND

Ratified the Constitution in 1790 as the 13th State; flag adopted in 1897. An anchor traditional symbol of hope, was first adopted by Rhode Island as a symbol in 1647. Rhode Island troops in the Revolutionary War carried flags of white with an anchor and thirteen stars.

SOUTH CAROLINA

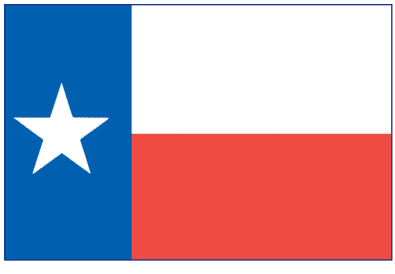
Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the eighth State; flag adopted in 1861. Troops defending harbor forts during the Revolutionary War displayed a blue flag with a white crescent. The State tree, a palmetto, was added to the flag when South Carolina proclaimed its independence in 1861.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Entered the Union in 1889 as the 40th State; flag adopted in 1963 and redesigned in 1992. The flag features the state seal surrounded by a golden blazing sun in a field of sky blue. Letters reading "South Dakota, The Mount Rushmore State"—the official state nickname—are arranged in a circle around the sun.

TENNESSEE

Entered the Union in 1796 as the 16th State; flag adopted in 1905. The three stars refer to the act that Tennessee was the third State to join after the Original Thirteen and is composed of three geographic regions. The colors are found in the flags of the United States and of the Confederacy.



TEXAS

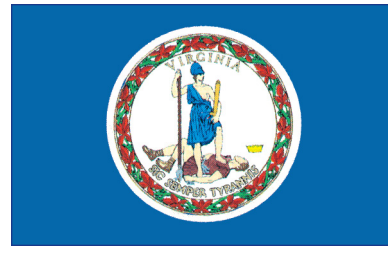
Entered the Union in 1845 as the 28th State; flag adopted in 1839. The American origin of the settlers who revolted against Mexican rule and established the independent Republic of Texas was reflected in the flags they carried, including the one which eventually became the State flag of the "Lone Star State."

UTAH

Entered the Union in 1896 as the 45th State; flag adopted in 1911, modified in 1913. The beehive symbolizes industry, while the American eagle and flags stand for loyalty to the Nation. The early settlers were saved from starvation by eating the sego lily, now recognized as the State flower.

VERMONT

Entered the Union in 1791 as the 14th State; flag adopted in 1923. The coat of arms, based on the State seal, shows a scene from nature with pine tree and mountains. Branches of pine below commemorate the 1814 Battle of Plattsburgh.



VIRGINIA

Ratified the Constitution in 1788 as the 10th State, flag adopted in 1861. The Latin motto "Thus Ever to Tyrants" is reflected in the design of the seal, which shows a woman subduing a king. Around the edges are vines of ivy known as Virginia creeper.

WASHINGTON

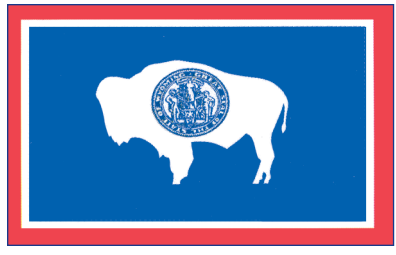
Entered the Union in 1889 as the 42nd State; flag adopted in 1923, modified in 1967. The "Evergreen State" shows the color green for the background of its flag, which bears the State seal. The president for whom the State was named was made part of the seal in 1889.

WEST VIRGINIA

Entered the Union in 1863 as the 35th State; flag adopted in 1905, modified in 1907 and 1929. The big laurel, the State flower, frames the shield of the State seal. The hunter and miner stand over a motto meaning "Mountaineers Are Always Free."

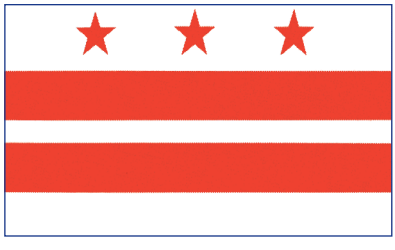
WISCONSIN

Entered the Union in 1848 as the 30th State; flag adopted in 1913, modified in 1981. Various symbols of agriculture, mining, shipping, and industry are found in the coat of arms of Wisconsin. The badger over the shield is a reference to the State nickname.



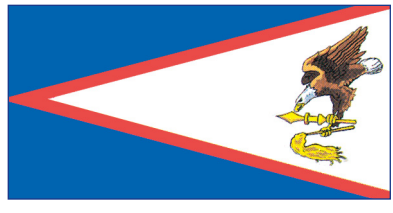
WYOMING

Entered the Union in 1890 as the 44th State; flag adopted in 1917. The State seal appears on a silhouette of a bison, familiar to 19th century settlers. The red is for Native Americans, white for purity, and blue for the sky, justice, and loyalty.



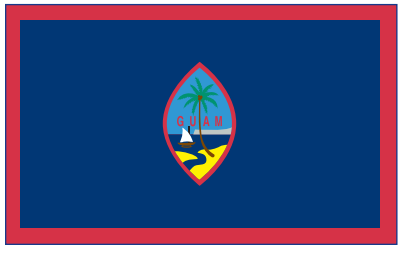
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Established in 1791; flag adopted in 1938. The design was based on the shield from George Washington's family coat of arms. It has no historical relationship to the Stars and Stripes, despite the similarity of design.



AMERICAN SAMOA

Unincorporated American territory since 1900; flag adopted in 1960. Red, white, and blue are the colors of Samoa and the United States. The American bald eagle holds traditional Samoan symbols, a staff and war club.

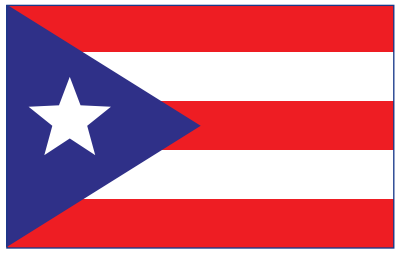


GUAM

Established as a territory of the United States in 1898; flag adopted in 1917, modified in 1948. The traditional Chamorro canoe, a palm tree, and the mouth of the Agaña River appear in the seal. The shape of the seal recalls the ancient Guamanian sling stone.

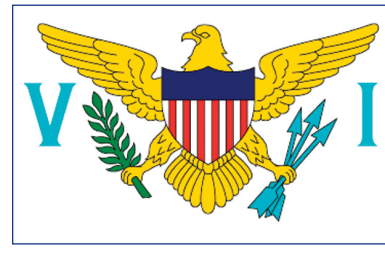
NORTHERN MARIANAS

Commonwealth established in 1986; flag adopted in 1972. Blue is for the Pacific Ocean, the star for the commonwealth. The gray latte stone is for Taga, a legendary Chamorro. The Stone and star are surrounded by the traditional Carolinian mwaar.



PUERTO RICO

Commonwealth established in 1952; flag adopted in 1952. Based on the Cuban flag and, ultimately, the Stars and Stripes, the flag of Puerto Rico was created in 1895 when the island was seeking independence from Spain.



VIRGIN ISLANDS

Established as a territory of the United States in 1917; flag adopted in 1921. The coat of arms of the United States has been simplified and stylized for use in the territorial flag together with the initials of the islands. Many believe the arrows stand for St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix.

Text by Dr. Whitney Smith, Flag Research Center, Winchester, Massachusetts.

Flag Day

Each year on June 14, we celebrate the birthday of the Stars and Stripes, which came into being on June 14, 1777. At that time, the Second Continental Congress authorized a new flag to symbolize the new Nation, the United States of America.

The Stars and Stripes first flew in a Flag Day celebration in Hartford, Connecticut in 1861, during the first summer of the Civil War. The first national observance of Flag Day occurred June 14, 1877, the centennial of the original flag resolution.

By the mid 1890s the observance of Flag Day on June 14 was a popular event. Mayors and governors began to issue proclamations in their jurisdictions to celebrate this event.

In the years to follow, public sentiment for a national Flag Day observance greatly intensified. Numerous patriotic societies and veterans groups became identified with the Flag Day movement. Since their main objective was to stimulate patriotism among the young, schools were the first to become involved in flag activities.

In 1916 President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation calling for a nationwide observance of Flag Day on June 14. It was not until 1949 that Congress made this day a permanent observance by resolving "That the 14th day of June of each year is hereby designated as Flag Day . . ." The measure was signed into law by President Harry Truman.

Although Flag Day is not celebrated as a Federal holiday, Americans everywhere continue to honor the history and heritage it represents.

The Great Seal of the United States

On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress passed a resolution authorizing a committee to devise a seal for the United States of America. This mission, designed to reflect the Founding Fathers' beliefs, values, and sovereignty of the new Nation, did not become a reality until June 20, 1782.

In heraldic devices, such as seals, each element has a specific meaning. Even colors have specific meanings. The colors red, white, and blue did not have meanings for the Stars and Stripes when it was adopted in 1777. However, the colors in the Great Seal did have specific meanings. Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Continental Congress, reporting to Congress on the Seal, stated:

> *"The colors of the pales (the vertical stripes) are those used in the flag of the United States of America; White signifies purity and innocence, Red, hardiness & valour, and Blue, the color of the Chief (the broad band above the stripes) signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice."*

The obverse front of the Great Seal—which is used 2,000 to 3,000 times a year—authenticates the President's signature on numerous official documents such as treaty ratifications, international agreements, appointments of Ambassadors and civil officers, and communications from the President to heads of foreign governments. The design of the obverse of the Seal, which is the U.S. coat of arms, can be shown on coins, postage stamps, passports, monuments and flags, and in many other ways. The American public sees both the obverse and less familiar reverse, which is never used as a seal, every day when exchanging the $1 dollar bill.

The Great Seal die, counter die, press, and cabinet in which they are housed, are located in the Exhibit Hall of the Department of State inside a locked glass enclosure. An officer from the Department's Presidential Appointments Staff does the actual sealing of documents after the Secretary of State has countersigned the President's signature.

Obverse

The American bald eagle is prominently featured supporting a shield composed of 13 red and white stripes (pales) representing the Thirteen Original States with a blue bar (chief) uniting the shield and representing Congress. The motto of the United States, *E Pluribus Unum* (meaning out of many, one), refers to this union. The olive branch and 13 arrows grasped by the eagle allude to peace and war, powers solely vested in the Congress, and the constellation of stars symbolizes the new Nation taking its place among the sovereign powers.

Reverse

The pyramid signifies strength and duration: The eye over it and the motto, *Annuit Coeptis* (meaning He, [God] has favored our undertakings), allude to the many interventions of Providence in favor of the American cause. The Roman numerals below are the date of the Declaration of Independence. The words under it, *Novus Ordo Seclorum* (meaning a new order of the ages), signify the beginning of the new American era in 1776.

Fort McHenry

Fort McHenry is located in Baltimore, Maryland. This low citadel overlooks the entrance to Baltimore harbor, and it is where the Americans defended the city against British land and naval attack on September 13-14 in 1814. It was during this battle that Francis Scott Key began the draft to "The Star-Spangled Banner" after seeing the flag still flying after a day and night of bombardment.

The fort continued in active military service for nearly a century after the battle, but changing technology eventually made it obsolete as a coastal defense system. Today the 43-acre fort is preserved as a national monument and historic shrine. The property is managed by the National Park Service, and the flag is flown over the fort 24 hours a day.

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historical Shrine © Paul A. Souders/CORBIS

The Flag House

The Flag House is located on the northwest corner of Albermarle and Pratt Streets in Baltimore, Maryland. It was the home of Mary Pickersgill from 1807 to 1857, and it was where she made the original "Star-Spangled Banner," which measured 30 by 42 feet. The stripes were two feet wide and the stars were two feet from point to point. Mrs. Pickersgill was paid $405.90 for her services. The flag was delivered to Fort McHenry on August 19, 1813, a full year before the Battle of Baltimore.

In 1876, Caroline Pickersgill Purdy wrote a letter to Georgiana Armistead Appleton, daughter of the Fort McHenry Commandant, in which she recounted the details of the making of the flag. Caroline wrote:

> *"It was made by my mother, Mrs. Mary Pickersgill, and I assisted her. My grandmother, Rebecca Young, made the first flag of the Revolution under General Washington's directions, and for this reason my mother was selected by Commodore Barney and General Stricker to make this star-spangled banner, being an exceedingly patriotic woman. This flag, I think, contained four hundred yards of bunting, and my mother worked many nights until twelve o'clock to complete it in a given time."*

The flag bears the autograph of Lt. Col. George Armistead as well as the date of the British bombardment. The flag remained in the Armistead family for many years until it was loaned to the Smithsonian for an official display in 1907. On December 19, 1912, it was donated to the Smithsonian where it is now on permanent exhibit. In 1914, much-needed preservative work was done on the flag by Mrs. Amelia Fowler and several other restoration experts. Although the flag was reduced in size in order to repair it, the reinforcement technique used has preserved its existence.

The Flag House is a National Historic Landmark, and is operated by an independent non-profit association. The flag is flown over the house 24 hours a day.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

"I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND TO THE REPUBLIC FOR WHICH IT STANDS, ONE NATION UNDER GOD, INDIVISIBLE, WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL."

The Pledge of Allegiance received official recognition by Congress in an Act approved on June 22, 1942. However, the pledge was first published in 1892 in the Youth's Companion magazine in Boston, Massachusetts to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America, and was first used in public schools to celebrate Columbus Day on October 12,1892.

In its original version, the pledge read "my flag" instead of the "flag of the United States." The change in the wording was adopted by the National Flag Conference in 1923. The rationale for the change was that it prevented ambiguity among foreign-born children and adults who might have the flag of their native land in mind when reciting the pledge.

The phrase "under God" was added to the pledge by a Congressional act approved on June 14, 1954. At that time, President Eisenhower said:

"in this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons, which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."

The American's Creed

I BELIEVE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AS A GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE; WHOSE JUST POWERS ARE DERIVED FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED; A DEMOCRACY IN A REPUBLIC, A SOVEREIGN NATION OF MANY SOVEREIGN STATES; A PERFECT UNION, ONE AND INSEPARABLE; ESTABLISHED UPON THOSE PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM, EQUALITY, JUSTICE, AND HUMANITY FOR WHICH AMERICAN PATRIOTS SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES AND FORTUNES.

I THEREFORE BELIEVE IT IS MY DUTY TO MY COUNTRY TO LOVE IT; TO SUPPORT ITS CONSTITUTION; TO OBEY ITS LAWS; TO RESPECT ITS FLAG; AND TO DEFEND IT AGAINST ALL ENEMIES.

The Creed was written in 1918 by William Tyler Page of Friendship Heights, Maryland in the course of a nationwide contest on the subject. Page was a descendent of President Tyler, and Representative John Page, who served in the Congress from 1789-97.

William Tyler Page began his government career as a Congressional page in December of 1881. In 1919, he was elected Clerk of the House of Representatives, and held that position until December of 1931. A new post, Emeritus Minority Clerk, was then created for him which he occupied until his death on October 20, 1942.

School Projects

The study of the history and symbolism of flags is known as VEXILLOLOGY from the Latin word, VEXILLUM, which means a square flag or banner.

Numerous books have been written about the flag. Local and school libraries should have a catalog reference for these books. Also, military and veterans organizations as well as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Legion provide useful information on the flag and flag code.

You also can find the complete flag code, including laws and proclamations in the depository library in your Congressional district. Your local librarian can assist you in obtaining information from your nearest depository library.

FURTHER READING

The Library of Congress prepared this list for use by students interested in learning more about the flag of the United States. These publications may be found in school and public libraries.

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"The Star-Spangled Banner"

by Francis Scott Key, September 1814
(Sung to the tune "To Anacreon in Heaven")

"O say! can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O say! does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

"On the shore, dimly seen thro' the mist of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream.
'Tis the Star-Spangled Banner. O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

"And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footstep's pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

"O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand
Between their lov'd home and war's desolation,
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n-rescued land
Praise the pow'r that hath made and preserv'd us a nation.
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto, 'In God is Our Trust.'
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

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