



## The Evolution of the American Flag

The Colors of the American Flag were first created in about 1775. The flag consisted of thirteen red and white alternating stripes with the British colors in the Canton. The colors are derived from the St. George Cross flag of England and the St. Andrew Cross Flag of Scotland. The flag was later changed with the creation of the “Betsy Ross” standard in 1777. The “Betsy Ross” flag contained thirteen red and white alternating stripes along with thirteen white stars, in a circle, in the canton. The stars arrangement has changed over time, along with the number of stars. The current flag was created in 1960, with the addition of Hawaii as the 50<sup>th</sup> state, and has been the flag of the United States since then.

### St. George Cross Flag

This flag became known as the Royal Standard of England in the 13<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Edward I, named after St. George, the patron saint of England. The colors arise from the legend of St. George: in response to a dragon that required an annual sacrifice of a boy/girl in return for not destroying a village with his fiery breath, St George crossed himself and stabbed the dragon, eventually making it the pet of the prospective girl victim. This was the first English flag planted on North American soil by explorer John Cabot in Newfoundland, Canada in 1497. The flag was also flown on the ships that brought over the inhabitants of both Jamestown and Plymouth.

### St. Andrew Cross Flag

The white diagonal X on a blue field traditionally represents the diagonal cross in which the martyr St. Andrew was crucified at Patras. This shape is also called a saltire, and is used in many other flags as well as in traffic signs. The flag forms one of three crosses that are layered together to form the Union flag. This flag served as inspiration for the confederate flag and the Navy Jack of the American Civil War. It has origins in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and served as a symbol of stalwart Protestantism in Scotland as England was trying to force their Church on Scotland. The book *The Story of Scotland's Flag and the Lion and Thistle* notes that the blue in the new American flag during the Revolution was taken from the St. Andrew Cross Flag.

### The King's Cross Flag

When England and Scotland united in 1707 under Queen Anne, this flag was created to symbolize the Union of the two countries: the St. George Cross of England (Red vertical cross on a white field) was superimposed onto the St. Andrew Cross of Scotland (white diagonal cross on a blue field). This was the official British flag during the colonization of America and flew, along with the St. George Cross Flag, on the ships bound for Jamestown and Plymouth. In 1801, it changed to accommodate the annexation of Ireland into the British Empire.

### British Red Ensign Flag

This flag was adopted by Queen Anne in 1707, and was used until 1801. It was the flag that flew over the 13 colonies during much of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century; the Americans fought under it during the French and Indian War and the Revolution (the patriotic Americans, though, adopted alternative flags as symbols of their new independence). Besides its use over the colonies, the red ensign was also used on British ships (both shipping and naval).

### **Continental/Union Flag**

Used from 1775-1777, this flag is considered the first unofficial American Flag because it was never sanctioned by Congress. The origin of its design and extent of its use is uncertain. Though this has never been confirmed, it seems likely that this flag shows the duality of American Independence and continued allegiance to the Crown.

### **“Liberty and Union” Flag**

This flag was raised at Taunton, MA in 1774, and is an example of the type of flag colonists made to illustrate their discontent with the British (more generically, flags with simply the inscription of “Liberty” became popular).

### **“Betsy Ross” Flag**

On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress created a resolution calling for the formation of a new flag. However, since it did not specify the arrangement of the stars, many different designs were made. This arrangement is particularly famous as it was mythically designed by Betsy Ross in Philadelphia. Many flags of the day differed not only in the arrangement of stars, but also in the number of points on the stars, and even sometimes on the colors of the stripes.

### **Bennington Flag**

This flag flew over the military stores in Bennington, VT on August 16, 1777. The American Militia, led by Gen. John Stark, defeated the British raiding force in order to protect military supplies at Bennington. However, this flag may just be legend as no official record of it exists from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **15 Star Union Flag**

When Vermont (1791) and Kentucky (1792) were admitted into the Union, Congress passed a resolution to change the flag in 1794. Though more states were admitted in subsequent years, this flag was kept until 1818, when a resolution was passed codifying the current rendition of the flag (13 alternating red and white stripes, plus rows of 5 pointed white stars, one for each state). Thus, it was this flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to pen the “Star Spangled Banner” in 1814.

## **Regimental Flags of the American Revolution**

During the American Revolution Regiments were identified by their colors on the battlefield. Each regiment created their own colors, which they carried into battle. There were certain symbols which pertained to many regiments, like the pine tree and snake, but each regimental flag was unique.

### **Rebel Stripes of 1770**

This flag is one that was flown by the Sons of Liberty. The nine horizontal stripes supposedly represent the nine colonies that sent delegates to the Stamp Act Congress in New York City in 1765. A similar flag is said to have been cut from a liberty pole in New York during the Golden Hill riot on January 19, 1770

### **Philadelphia Light Horse Troop Flag**

This regiment was formed by a group of Philadelphia Gentlemen on November 17, 1774. Many were businessmen and merchants who supplied their own uniforms, military equipment and horses. The flag was designed by John Folwell and painted by James Claypoole. The British Union was originally painted in the canton but the artist was instructed to paint thirteen stripes to represent the colonies instead. It was this regiment that escorted Gen. Washington from Philadelphia to take command of the Continental Army assembled at Cambridge, Massachusetts in June, 1775. The Light Horse Regiment later carried their flag into battles at Brandywine, Germantown, Princeton and Trenton.

### **Early North Carolina Flag**

The bee and honeycomb flag of North Carolina first appeared in June 1775. The date seen on the flag, May 20, 1775, marks the date that the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence was allegedly proclaimed by the Committee of citizens of Mecklenburg County in Charlotte, North Carolina. A bit later, the residents of Bladen and Brunswick Counties designed and carried a second flag featuring the rattlesnake and pine tree.

### **Bunker Hill Flag**

The pine tree was the symbol of the Northern states, particularly Massachusetts, just as the rattlesnake was the symbol of the South. While this flag has been associated with the American troops at the Battle of Bunker Hill, its actual use at the battle is doubtful. Eyewitness accounts suggest that the Americans did not fly a flag. The main evidence we have of this flag's usage at the battle is John Trumbull's painting; however, though he was an eyewitness, he painted the scene ten years later, so it cannot be considered indisputable evidence that the flag was indeed present.

### **Fort Johnson and Fort Sullivan Flag**

Without the “liberty” motto on it, this is said to have been the first American flag flown in South Carolina. It was designed by Colonel William Moultrie, who, in 1775, was asked by the local Carolina Committee of Safety to make a flag for Fort Johnson, an American fort on James Island (off the coast of Charleston). Moultrie used a crescent because the soldiers who staffed the fort wore crescent shapes on their caps. Seven months later, in January 1776, a fort was built on Sullivan’s Island, directly across from Fort Johnson, and apparently the same flag was flown over both forts, with the addition of the “Liberty” motto on the Fort Johnson Flag.

### **Battle of White Plains Flag**

The flag was captured on October 28, 1776 at the American defeat at the Battle of White Plains. Two different colors (white and red) are simply variations of the same flag, and the flag itself is just one variation of the popular “liberty” motto which adorned many flags of the day.

### **Standard of the 3<sup>rd</sup> New York Regiment**

The standard is said to have been created between the years of 1777-1779. The Regiment was lead by Colonel Peter Gansevoort until 1781, when it was folded into the 2<sup>nd</sup> New York Regiment. The regiment fought at the Siege of Fort Stanwix in 1777 and fought, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> New York Regiment, at Yorktown in 1781. Since the change from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> was so near to the battle it is very likely the men carried this flag during the Battle of Yorktown in 1781.

### **Rhode Island Regiment Flag of 1781**

In 1781, the First and Second Rhode Island regiments were combined, and fought under this flag, one made of white silk with a blue silk canton and 13 painted five-point stars. No example of this flag with the full motto around the anchor survives.

## ***Naval Flags of the American Revolution***

The United States Navy originated as the Continental Navy and was created by the Continental Congress by a resolution on October 13, 1775. The most popular design for a Naval Jack was one with a rattlesnake and the words “Don’t Tread on Me,” although many others were created and flown during the American Revolution.

**From left to right:**

### **Flag of the Continental Navy (Gadsden Flag)**

This rattlesnake flag was presented to the Continental Congress by Colonel Christopher Gadsden in 1775. The flag was created by Gadsden, but in 1776, it was flown on the *Alfred* captained by Navy Commander Ezek Hopkins. Because of its use by Hopkins, the flag became associated with the Navy. The rattlesnake was a common symbol of southern flags while pine trees commonly represented New England.

### **Brigantine Reprisal Ensign (privateer flag)**

Privateer ships were common in the American Revolution because the Continental Navy only had about 31 vessels. The ships were merchant vessels that were armed so they could attack British ships. Privateers were known to fly other colors besides the traditional red, white and blue and this is an example of one of them. Robert Morris is one of the more famous Privateers.

### **Washington’s Armed Vessels**

This flag was the official symbol of General George Washington’s fleet of armed vessels. The fleet consisted of about six schooners which he armed at his own expense in 1775. The tree is the symbol of the Revolution in the north. It is modeled after the tree in which the Sons of Liberty rallied under named “The Liberty Tree.” This flag was later adopted by the Massachusetts Navy in 1777.

All flags shown are in the collection of the Color Guard of the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York.

## **John Paul Jones**

Late in 1775, John Paul Jones (1747-1792) was commissioned as a lieutenant in the newly formed Continental Navy and was promoted to captain the following year. He became known for his daring, successful raids on British ships that caught the eye of England's enemy, France. He is considered by many as the father of the American Navy.

### ***Texel Flag or Serapis Flag***

#### **Gift of Bruce Baraclough**

#### **Collection of the Color Guard of the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York**

In 1779, Jones famously fought and captured the British ship the *Serapis*. When the British Captain asked if Jones had struck his colors, Jones replied "Struck, Sir? I have not yet begun to fight!" Jones' own ship, the *Bonhomme Richard*, was so badly damaged that it sank with its colors flying.

The design of this flag seems to have come from Benjamin Franklin. When Jones was in France, he was apparently given this flag by Franklin, to be used on his new ship the *Bonhomme Richard*, which replaced his old ship, the *USS Ranger*. How a second flag was prepared to fly above the *Serapis*, when the initial flag was lost upon the sinking of the *Bonhomme Richard*, remains a mystery.

### **Engravings (from top):**

#### ***John Paul Jones, Commodore au Service des Etats-Unis de l'Amerique***

Carl Gutenberg (after C.J. Notte)

Engraving with hand coloring, Late 18<sup>th</sup> C.

Gift of Stanley D. Scott, 1986

Collection of Fraunces Tavern Museum

#### ***Paul Jones shooting a Sailor, who had attempted to strike his Colours in an Engagement***

Unknown Artist after John Collett

Engraving, 1780

Gift of Stanley D. Scott, 1986

Collection of Fraunces Tavern Museum

# *French Regimental Flags*

France became America's ally in the Revolution in 1778, and the French troops fought under their own flags and banners. By the time of the Revolution, French regimental colors were of two principal types: colonel's colors, with a white field, white cross and gold symbols; and regulation colors, with a colored field divided into four cantons by a central white cross.

Hanging from the balcony, from left to right.

## **Belunze Dragoon Flag**

Motto inscribed presumably translates as "above all others." The Flag is from the seven years war.

## **Gatinois Regiment Flag**

*Donated by Bruce W. Barraclough*

The Gatinois Regiment took part in the combined French and American unsuccessful assault on the British garrison at Savannah in 1779, incurring heavy losses. The regiment was brought from the West Indies to Yorktown in 1781 with St. Simon's troops, where it took part in the capture of the British redoubt on the night of October 14. As a reward, the regiment was allowed to reassume its old title of the Royal Auvergne that it had lost in the reorganization in 1776.

## **Saintonge Regiment Flag**

The Saintonge Regiment was one of Rochambeau's four infantry regiments which landed in Newport in 1780 and marched and sailed to Yorktown in 1781. The regiment helped in the assault on the British redoubts at Yorktown in 1781.

## **Haynault Regiment Flag**

*Donated by Bruce W. Barraclough*

The Haynault (or Hainault) Regiment was stationed on St. Dominique and a detachment (or battalion) fought at Savannah in October 1779.

## **Dillon Regiment Flag**

Count Dillon, an Irishman who accompanied James II into French exile in the 1690's, formed the Dillon Regiment. His grandson Arthur led the regiment that fought at Savannah in 1779 and Yorktown in 1781. Both Arthur Dillon and his brother Robert were beheaded during the French Revolution.

## **Rochambeau Banner**

*Donated by the SRNY Color Guard*

Although popularly known as "Rochambeau Banner," no evidence links this banner with the Count de Rochambeau, who led the French army beginning in 1780. The banner's design, however, is typical of those used by French royalty and noblemen.

All of the flags on the balcony are in the collection of the Color Guard of the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York