

The Betsy Ross Flag



The Betsy Ross flag is an early design of the flag of the United States, popularly - but possibly incorrectly - attributed to Betsy Ross. It uses the common motifs of alternating red-and-white stripes with five-pointed

stars in a blue canton. The flag was designed during the American Revolution and features 13 stars to represent the original 13 colonies. The distinctive feature of the Ross flag is the arrangement of the stars in a circle.

History: Late 18th and early 19th century battlefield paintings by artist John Trumbull depict a slightly different flag, with the stars arranged in a rectangle.

The flag is, nevertheless, one of the oldest versions of U.S. flags known to exist. While it is not the oldest surviving flag artifact in cloth form, its likeness appears on older physical relics, namely, the works of Charles Willson Peale. They depict the circular star arrangement being flown from ship masts and many other places, and thus provide the first known historical documentation of the flag's appearance.

Although she purportedly sewed the first flag in 1776, Ross wasn't credited with this work during her lifetime. Her story was first publicly relayed to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania nearly a century later, in 1870, by her grandson, William Canby. According to Canby, Ross had often recounted a visit she had received in late May or early June of 1776 from three men: General George Washington, Robert Morris and George Ross. During this meeting, she was allegedly presented with a sketch of a flag that featured 13 red and white stripes and 13 six-pointed stars, and was asked if she could create a flag to match the proposed design. Ross agreed, but suggested a couple of changes, including arranging the stars in a circle and reducing the points on each star to five instead of six. Canby's claim (which was supported by affidavits from Ross's daughter, niece and granddaughter) was published in "Harper's New

Monthly Magazine" in 1873 and soon became part of the United States history curriculum taught to millions of elementary-aged school children every year.

No official documentation has been found to confirm that Betsy Ross was responsible for creating the very first flag, but it is conceivable that Colonel George Ross - the uncle of Betsy's recently deceased husband, John - recommended her for the job as a favor to his relative. Betsy may also have been acquainted with both Washington and Morris, who were reported to have worshipped at the same church she attended. It has also been established that Ross did indeed make flags, as evidenced by a receipt for the sum of more than 14 pounds paid to her on May 29, 1777, by the Pennsylvania State Navy Board for making "ships colours." On June 14, 1777, less than a month later, Congress officially adopted the Stars and Stripes as the national flag.

Canby's account has been the source of some debate. It is generally regarded as being neither proven nor disproven, and any evidence that may have once existed has been lost. It is worth pointing out that while modern lore may enhance the details of her story, Betsy Ross never claimed any contribution to the flag design except for the five-pointed star, which was simply easier for her to make.

Some historians attribute the design of the first flag to Francis Hopkinson, a New Jersey delegate to the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Ross Biographer Marla Miller asserts that the question of Betsy Ross' involvement in the flag should not be one of design, but of production. Even so, history researchers must accept that the United States flag evolved, and did not have one designer. "The flag, like the Revolution it represents, was the work of many hands."