

The American Flag

History – Pre 1776 and Other Historical Flags

Prior to the American Revolution (1775 - 1783) and the Nations' birth, several flags were flown by the colonists to represent their struggle with the wilderness and the impending conflicts with Great Britain. There wasn't an official American Flag until 1777.



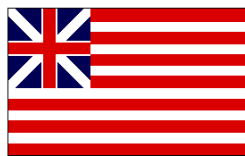
In December of 1775, an anonymous Philadelphia correspondent wrote to Bradford's Pennsylvania journal concerning the symbolic use of the snake. He began the letter by saying:

*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.

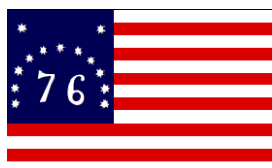
It was probably the deadly bite of the rattler, however, which was foremost in the minds of its designers, and the threatening slogan "Don't Tread on Me" added further significance to the design.

[*http://www.foundingfathers.info/American-flag/Revolution.html](http://www.foundingfathers.info/American-flag/Revolution.html)

The Grand Union Flag or Continental Flag is considered the first true American flag. To show Colonial unity, it incorporates 13 stripes representing the colonies along with the British Union Jack. George Washington ordered this flag to be flown on New Years Day, in 1776 to celebrate the formation of the first Continental Army.



The Bennington Flag was the first flag to lead American forces on land during the Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777.



Post Revolutionary War

On June 14, 1777 Congress passed the first Flag Act in order to establish an official flag for the new nation: "Resolved, That the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation." Each star and stripe represented the thirteen colonies that made up the United State during that time, they were: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island.



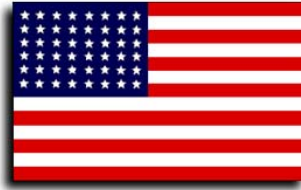
When Vermont and Kentucky were added to the Union, two more stars were added. This new 15 star flag is better known as the Star Spangled Banner, because it was made famous by a man know as Francis Scott Key. The *Star Spangled Banner*, which later became our National Anthem, was written by Key in 1814. During the war of 1812 the British attacked Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland on September 12. The steady bombardment continued throughout the night. In the early morning of September 13th the bombing paused suddenly. As Key watched from a distance he could not tell if the fort had been defeated. As the smoke began to clear, he caught a glimpse of the massive 42 foot long flag with its eight red stripes, seven white stripes and fifteen stars. The flag had survived the night. Key was so moved by this image in the distance that he pulled out an envelope from his pocket and began to describe this miraculous vision. He called his poem *Defense of Fort McHenry*.

The original star spangled banner has been restored and preserved at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C.

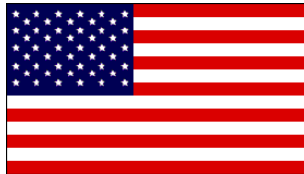


As the nation began to grow, so did the number of stars on the flag. This was by order of President James Monroe, who on April 14, 1818 signed an Act that stated the number of stripes should remain the same, but one star should be added to the flag for each new state each year on the fourth of July. The Flag of the United States has 13 stripes to represent the thirteen original colonies. The colors of the flag also bear a significant meaning. Red represents hardiness and valor, white represents purity and innocence, and blue represents justice, vigilance, and perseverance.

Another well know flag is the 48 star flag, which was introduced on July 4, 1912. This official flag survived two World Wars, eight presidents, and was in use longer than any other flag (until July 4, 2008).



The 49 star flag was introduced on January 3, 1959 when Alaska was admitted into the Union. It was only in use for one year until Hawaii became on state in 1960 and the 50 star or current flag was introduced on July 4 1960. The current flag is the 27th official flag of the United Sates.



Quiz

1. Which animal was often used on flags during the Revolutionary War?
 - a) snake
 - b) bear
 - c) eagle
2. Why were there only 13 stars on the original flag?
 - a) They represent the 13 members of the Continental Congress.
 - b) The flag was made official on July 13th.
 - c) They represent the thirteen original colonies.
3. How many stars did the Star Spangled Banner have?
 - a) 13
 - b) 15
 - c) 17
4. Why is the Star Spangled Banner so significant?
 - a) It was the largest flag ever made.
 - b) It was the basis for our National Anthem.
 - c) It is the oldest surviving American flag.
5. What was the last state admitted into the Union?
 - a) Alaska
 - b) Delaware
 - c) Hawaii