

Michigan: January 26, 1837
Florida: March 3, 1845
Texas: December 29, 1845
Iowa: December 28, 1846
Wisconsin: May 29, 1848
California: September 9, 1850
Minnesota: May 11, 1858
Oregon: February 14, 1859
Kansas: January 29, 1861
West Virginia: June 20, 1863
Nevada: October 31, 1864
Nebraska: March 1, 1867
Colorado: August 1, 1876
North Dakota: November 2, 1889
South Dakota: November 2, 1889
Montana: November 8, 1889
Washington: November 11, 1889
Idaho: July 3, 1890
Wyoming: July 10, 1890
Utah: January 4, 1896
Oklahoma: November 16, 1907
Arizona: February 14, 1912
New Mexico: January 6, 1912
Alaska: January 3, 1959
Hawaii: August 21, 1959

Important Historical Dates

July 4, 1776	Declaration of Independence
June 14, 1777	First flag resolution
September 3, 1783	Treaty of Paris (end of the Revolutionary War)
1783 to 1789	Articles of Confederation 1783 to 1789
March 4, 1789	The Constitution is ratified
April 30, 1789	George Washington sworn in as our 1st President
April 17, 1789	Benjamin Franklin died
December 14, 1799	George Washington died
April 30, 1803	The Louisiana Purchase
1804-1806	Lewis & Clark Expedition
1812-1814	War of 1812
July 4, 1826	Both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died
1846-1848	Mexican War
1861-1865	Civil War
April 15, 1865	Abraham Lincoln died
1898	Spanish-American War
December 17, 1903	Wright Brothers fly at Kitty Hawk
1914-1918	World War I
1939-1945	World War II
1950-1953	Korean War
1959-1975	Vietnam

the History *and* Evolution *of* Our Flag



Statehood Dates

The Grand Union Flag: early 1770's

Delaware: December 7, 1787
Pennsylvania: December 12, 1787
New Jersey: December 18, 1787
Georgia: January 2, 1788
Connecticut: January 9, 1788
Massachusetts: February 6, 1788
Maryland: April 28, 1788
South Carolina: May 23, 1788
New Hampshire: June 21, 1788
Virginia: June 25, 1788
New York: July 26, 1788
North Carolina: November 21, 1789
Rhode Island: May 29, 1789
Vermont: March 4, 1791
Kentucky: June 1, 1792
Tennessee: June 1, 1796
Ohio: March 1, 1803
Louisiana: April 30, 1812
Indiana: December 11, 1816
Mississippi: December 10, 1817
Illinois: December 3, 1818
Alabama: December 14, 1819
Maine: March 1, 1820
Missouri: August 10, 1821
Arkansas: June 15, 1836

OVER TWO HUNDRED YEARS IN THE MAKING



The History of Our Flag



The signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776 announced to the world our intentions for independence from Great Britain. However, it also brought upon our Founding Fathers all of the challenges of creating and establishing a new nation, together with an entirely new form of government that had never been seen or tried before. But before any of that could happen, actually winning the war of independence and securing our freedom from Great Britain had to be accomplished first.

As unprepared as these Founding Fathers were at creating a new form of government, they were even less prepared to conduct a war against, arguably, the most powerful military force in the world.

One can only guess how busy the Continental Congress was at that time, and it was not surprising that a few important items were overlooked. One such "overlooked" item was the creation of a flag to represent our new nation, and we needed a flag right away. Now throughout history, flags have always been an effective way of publicly displaying heritage, beliefs, or loyalties, as well as serving as a rallying point for a cause. So, almost a full year after the Declaration of Independence was signed and the Revolutionary War was in full swing, the Continental Congress on June 14, 1777, acting with haste and with little to no discussion amongst themselves, declared:

"Resolved that the flag of the 13 united States be 13 stripes alternated red and white, that the union be 13 stars, white in a blue field representing a new constellation."

With this simple brief statement, the Flag of the United States of America was born.

Now we can all visualize our flag today, but that decree was very confusing for it did not clearly describe things like the pattern of the stars, the number of points on the stars, where the blue field was to be, or even the flags dimensions. And there were no accompanying drawings or artist renderings to help guide the flag-makers. We don't even know if the stars on the famous Betsy Ross flag were in a circle, or perhaps in rows.

After that humble beginning, the Continental Congress did not address anything else about the flag for another fifteen years when Vermont entered the Union as our 14th State in 1791, followed by Kentucky in 1792 as the 15th. Since all of the states were to be considered equal, and without any real flag guidelines, both of those states felt they deserved equal flag status, so flags were thus created with both 14 stars AND 14 stripes, and then later 15 stars AND 15 stripes! Actually the famous "Star Spangled Banner" of Ft. McHenry fame, which was recently restored at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, has 15 stars AND 15 stripes.

With more territories waiting in the wings to enter the Union, it quickly became apparent that our national banner would soon become sadly out of proportion if both stars AND stripes kept being added. One solution put forward was to keep the same basic size of the flag but make the stripes narrower as more were added, but it was thought that this would be more difficult to make and would ultimately impair the flag's distinctiveness when seen from a distance. As a result, in 1818, Congress finally decreed that we should return to just 13 stripes to honor the original 13 colonies, but to continue to add a star in the blue canton space for each new state.

After the first flag resolution in 1777 and the brief clarification in 1818, there were no other official guidelines about the flag for another 94 years. So until 1912, things like star patterns, shapes, sizes, points, and orientation, or even the overall flag's dimensions, were basically left to the discretion and artistry of the flag maker. Because of this earlier lack of mandated standardization, the flag's with 46 or fewer stars are as varied as the imagination of those who created them.

There could have been so many different star configurations produced during any given flags era that the varieties would have been almost endless. For example, there are flags with indented rows, circular, flower, great star, or medallion shaped patterns, just to name some of the more common variations.

The 38 star flag was the longest running in the 1800's, lasting 14 years. The shortest running flag life was the flag with 39 stars, created when North Dakota became a state and it lasted for the grand total of only four hours until South Dakota was admitted to the Union later that very day!

In addition to variations in the display of the stars, liberties were also taken with the blue canton, which typically has a white stripe underneath it. Often during a time of war, the blue canton sits on a red stripe, which is called the "War Stripe" or "Blood Stripe" design, to recognize the blood being shed by our soldiers and sailors. In the mid to late 1800's, it was also not uncommon, nor unlawful, to use the flag as an advertisement piece. For example, a company would boldly note its product or message on the flag, or a political candidate would just put his likeness right across the flag.

If "artwork" is determined by the design of the subject matter, or by the originality of the materials used, or by the skill of its construction, then our flag is an excellent example of American art. While many of the flags were made-to-order, most were made just out of patriotic pride and by the hands of artists.

In the history of all the world's nations, there has never been another national flag that has undergone so many varied alterations during its evolution, and yet one that retains the same basic original design. It took over 200 years of sacrifice, bloodshed, dedication, and creativity for our flag to evolve into the revered banner it represents to most people today. May it long endure as a symbol of our Nation that..

"...So proudly we hail!"



Grand Union



Betsy Ross



Thirteen Star



Cowpens Flag



Twenty Star

This exhibition of Antique American flags is on loan from the collections of Jeffrey Kenneth Kohn, M.D., Thomas S. Connelly, and J. Brian O'Neill. For further information please contact:

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