

The Mystery of the Forgotten U.S. Flag Revealed.



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A little known odd fact about the history of Old Glory, is her sister, the forgotten Civil Flag of the United States.

The existence of the first U.S. civil flag came about in 1767 when members of the "Sons of Liberty" rebelled against the Stamp Act by turning [the flag of the British East India Company](#) on its side and then flew it on the "Liberty Tree". The "on it's side" vertical stripes were then declared to represent individual sovereignty over the King of England. This new flag, also known as the "Rebellious Flag" and the "Common Law" flag, quickly became the flag of the American Revolutionaries. Ten years later, in 1776, George Washington introduced his "[Grand Union](#)" flag to represent his military during the Revolutionary War.

The first authorization of a U.S. flag came about on June 14th, 1777, when Congress directed that a U.S. flag consist of 13 stripes, alternating red and white; that a union be 13 stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation. Through usage, horizontal stripes were adopted for use over military posts and vertical stripes adopted for use over civilian posts. Most flag purchase orders were for the military version by the Federal government. Outpaced by military purchases, civil flag orders were almost non-existent as the cost was far more than most Americans could afford. Sightings of the Civilian Flag were rarely seen until U.S. Customs adopted the Civil Flag in it's enforcement of tax collection and inspection in ports as opposed to acts of war against merchant ships.

In 1790, Alexander Hamilton proposed armed shipping vessels to enforce customs duties in the nations shipping ports. Congress agreed and appropriated \$10,000 to maintain 10 revenue cutters (ships) to be placed under the charge of customs collectors.

On March 2, 1799, Congress revised the duties of revenue cutters and added authority to fire upon other vessels if such vessels did not respond to a cutter's flag and a gun shot warning. On June 1, 1799, Oliver Wolcott, Hamilton's successor, submitted his flag design to President John Adams. His proposal defined the new Customs Flag with 16 stripes, one stripe for each State that had joined the Union by 1799 and turned the stripes vertical to show the civil nature of it's use as opposed to a military nature. For the Union, Wolcott proposed using the Arms of the United States, the American Bald Eagle, over a white field. The final version was approved on August 1st, 1799.

Although intended just for the Customs Office, the new civilian flag became adopted by customhouses and merchants to show their civilian nature as opposed to being under military control. The practice of using the Customs Flag as a Civil Flag became encoded in law in 1874 when Treasury Secretary William. A. Richardson required all customhouses to fly the Civil Flag.

In 1915, the U.S. Coast Guard became an independent bureau from the Treasury Department, absorbing the Revenue Cutter Service. The Civil Flag used by the cutter service was modified and adopted under Coast Guard authority, losing it's original significance of civilian authority, which by then, had been long forgotten as the Federal government acquired more control over the States and their citizens. By 1951, the original Customs Civil Flag had been phased out completely with another redesign.

It is believed by some historians that the Civil Flag was discontinued after the Civil War when the federal government imposed military governments in the States and disbanded civilian government. As a show of it's power over the States, Civil Flags were discontinued and Old Glory became the sole emblem representing the People of the United States of America, united under military (or admiralty) rule.

For over 100 years, the Civilian U.S. Flag was flown by a select citizenry that could afford to buy them. While most were of the design of the Customs Bureau and it's American Eagle, many continued to adorn the original look from 1777 with a constellation of stars on a blue field and with red and white vertical stripes. By 1900, the Civil Flag had all but disappeared except for the occasional use by the government's revenue cutters and more recently, the Coast Guard with a modified design. By 1980, nearly all documentation of the Civil Flag had been omitted in school text books and it's existence left as a mystery in a few old photographs and a rare mention in classic books.



Civilian Merchant Appraisers from 1919



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Which flag is it anyway?

1777

Betsy Ross, a very "close" friend of General George Washington, is asked to sew the first official U.S. Flag. Betsy's version uses stars with 6 points. Washington later has the stars changed to 5 points each.

Two versions of the U.S. flag are created. One with vertical stripes for peace time and one with horizontal stripes is designed for times of war.

On June 14, 1777, in order to establish an official flag for the new nation, the Continental Congress passed the first Flag Act: "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."

1777

June 14, 1777 - April 30, 1795

Configuration: 13 stars, 13 stripes; red stripe on first row

States added: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island

1780

Congressman Francis Hopkinson is given credit for designing the U.S. flag and Congress compensates him for his work. However, history writers continue to give credit to Betsy Ross.

Act of January 13, 1794 - provided for 15 stripes and 15 stars after May 1795.

1795

May 1, 1795 - July 3, 1818

Configuration: 15 stars, 15 stripes; white stripe on first row

States added: Vermont, Kentucky

Act of April 4, 1818 - provided for 13 stripes and one star for each state, to be added to the flag on the 4th of July following the admission of each new state, signed by President Monroe.

1818

July 4, 1818 - July 3, 1819

Configuration: 20 stars; flag returns to having only 13 stripes, starting with red on first row; this stripe configuration never changed again States added: Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana, Mississippi

1819
July 4, 1819 - July 3, 1820
Configuration: 21 stars
State added: Illinois

1822
July 4, 1822 - July 3, 1836
Configuration: 24 stars
State added: Missouri

1836
July 4, 1836 - July 3, 1837
Configuration: 25 stars
State added: Arkansas

1837
July 4, 1837 - July 3, 1845
Configuration: 26 stars
State added: Michigan

1845
July 4, 1845 - July 3, 1846
Configuration: 27 stars
State added: Florida

1846
July 4, 1846 - July 3, 1847
Configuration: 28 stars
State added: Texas

1847
July 4, 1847 - July 3, 1848
Configuration: 29 stars
State added: Iowa

Peace time U.S. flags with vertical stripes discontinued. The peace time U.S. flag is never restored as the U.S. government doesn't officially end the Civil War leaving the nation lingering under military control.

1863
July 4, 1863 - July 3, 1865
Configuration: 35 stars
State added: West Virginia

1865
July 4, 1865 - July 3, 1867
Configuration: 36 stars
State added: Nevada

1867
July 4, 1867 - July 3, 1877
Configuration: 37 stars
State added: Nebraska

1820
July 4, 1820 - July 3, 1822
Configuration: 23 stars
States added: Alabama, Maine

1848
July 4, 1848 - July 3, 1851
Configuration: 30 stars
State added: Wisconsin

1851
July 4, 1851 - July 3, 1858
Configuration: 31 stars
State added: California

1858
July 4, 1858 - July 3, 1859
Configuration: 32 stars
State added: Minnesota

1859
July 4, 1859 - July 3, 1861
Configuration: 33 stars
State added: Oregon

1861
July 4, 1861 - July 3, 1863
Configuration: 34 stars
State added: Kansas

1877
July 4, 1877 - July 3, 1890
Configuration: 38 stars
State added: Colorado

1890
July 4, 1890 - July 3, 1891
Configuration: 43 stars
States added: North Dakota,
South Dakota, Montana,
Washington, Idaho

1891
July 4, 1891 - July 3, 1896
Configuration: 44 stars
State added: Wyoming

1895

A gold fringe becomes a required addition when the U.S. flag is flown under military jurisdiction. Civilians are allowed but not required to use the gold fringe for honorable enrichment.

1896

July 4, 1896 - July 3, 1908

Configuration: 45 stars

State added: Utah

a1908

July 4, 1908 - July 3, 1912

Configuration: 46 stars

State added: Oklahoma

Executive Order of President Taft dated June 24, 1912 - established proportions of the flag and provided for arrangement of the stars in six horizontal rows of eight each, a single point of each star to be upward.

1912

July 4, 1912 - July 3, 1959

Configuration: 48 stars;

States added: New Mexico, Arizona

Executive Order of President Eisenhower dated January 3, 1959 - provided for the arrangement of the stars in seven rows of seven stars each, staggered horizontally and vertically.

Executive Order of President Eisenhower dated August 21, 1959 - provided for the arrangement of the stars in nine rows of stars staggered horizontally and eleven rows of stars staggered vertically.

1959

July 4, 1959 - July 3, 1960

Configuration: 49 stars

State added: Alaska

1960

July 4, 1960 - present

Configuration: 50 stars

State added: Hawaii

Today

An old protocol of flying an upside down flag as a signal of distress becomes a national symbol showing concern over the disturbing abuse of federal government control and power.

In the 1990's, Congress makes several attempts to Amend the U.S. Constitution to ban desecration of the U.S. Flag but the attempts die in Committee because such an Amendment would not have any legal force within the States unless all 50 States also Amend their Constitutions.

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