

First American Flag is officially adopted, June 14, 1777

On this day in history, June 14, 1777, the first American flag is officially adopted by Congress. The Flag Act of 1777 specified that the new American flag would have "thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation."

There is much controversy about who actually designed the flag. The two main candidates are Francis Hopkinson, a New Jersey signer of the Declaration of Independence, who was on the Naval Board at the time, and Betsy Ross. Both stories are unconfirmed though and have points that speak for their truth and against them.

Hopkinson submitted a bill to Congress for "creating the new US flag." The bill, however, was denied by Congress. Later Hopkinson changed the bill and asked for payment for creating the new US Navy flag. Were there two separate flags, one for the Navy and one for the Army? Some evidence suggests this. Hopkinson was also an artist and an expert in heraldry (flag design). In spite of this, there is no evidence of any drawings Hopkinson submitted to Congress.

The Betsy Ross flag story is more well-known. Again, though, there is no contemporary evidence for the story. The story comes entirely from Betsy's grandson William Canby, and a few other relatives, all of whom stated many years after her death that they heard Betsy tell the story from her own mouth.

This legend goes that George Washington, George Ross (Betsy's late husband's uncle) and Robert Morris approached her secretly in May or June of 1776 and asked her to make the flag. Circumstantial evidence supports the story. Betsy and George Washington sat in pews next to each other at church and Washington was known to visit Betsy socially and professionally, using her tailoring services. George Ross was a

First American Flag is officially adopted, June 14, 1777

family member who had been in Congress. Due to lack of concrete evidence, however, we will never know for sure who designed the first American flag.

The Flag Act of 1777 did not specify the pattern for the stars, the number of points on the stars, the width of the stripes or the canton (the blue field) or whether a white or red stripe should be first. This caused a proliferation of flag designs with the stars especially being in many different patterns.

The Flag Act of 1794 added two stars and stripes for the new states of Vermont and Kentucky. This was the only official United States flag to ever have 15 stripes. The Star Spangled Banner Flag of Francis Scott Key fame was made in this design, but again, the 1794 act did not specify the pattern of the stars.

The Flag Act of 1818 finally determined that the stripes would remain at 13 for the original colonies. It also added five stars, bringing them to 20, for recently inducted states. This act also set the rule that a new star would be added for each new state to be added. The new star would be added on the July 4th after the state was added to the Union. The last time the US Flag was changed was with the addition of Alaska, the 50th state, in 1960. June 14 is celebrated across America as Flag Day in honor of the adoption of the first official US Flag.