



## The History of the American Flag:

Fact and Fiction

By

R.K. Dutcher, III, MA

---

Flag Day, authorized by federal resolution, is celebrated across the United States, but its origins remain shrouded in mystery. Many misconceptions surround the creation and design of the flag, as well as its first appearance in modern form.

One common myth is that the flag was designed on December 25, 1776, as depicted in the famous painting of Washington crossing the Delaware. However, the truth is that the Continental Congress and Marine Committee did not authorize this specific flag design until June 14, 1777. In reality, the early war flags would have featured the Union Jack in the upper left-hand corner, symbolizing the existing ties to England, along with alternating red and white stripes.

For centuries the name of Betsey Ross has been closely associated with the design and creation of the modern stars and stripes flag, featuring alternating red and white stripes and a circle of thirteen white stars on a blue field in the upper left-hand corner. However, despite her widespread recognition, there is no concrete evidence linking Ross to the flag's creation. This lack of documentation was first brought to light by her grandson in the 1870s, and subsequent claims by her family members have not been substantiated by primary source materials.

In contrast, historical consensus is clear: Francis Hopkinson, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence, New Jersey Congressman, and Chairman of the Continental Marine Committee, is widely credited with designing the current pattern of the United States flag. The assertion is supported by period primary source documents, referencing a letter written to the Continental Navy Department in 1780, in which he requests payment for “the design of the flag of the United States.”

Throughout its history, the United States flag has undergone 27 revisions, with the current design remaining unchanged since the addition of new stars to the blue field until July 4, 1960. However, this design was modified in 1958 when Robert G. Heft, an Ohio high school student, submitted a new design to the White House. His design featured a 50-star pattern, which would ultimately be completed with the admission of Alaska and Hawaii.

As we commemorate Flag Day, it serves as an important reminder of the values that the United States embodies and stands for. This day also serves as a constant reminder of our national identity, shaped by the diverse make-up of our population. By observing Flag Day, American citizens reaffirm and express their ongoing pride and commitment to the ideals that the flag represents.