

# FLAGS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



## Taunton

The flag was first adopted on 21 October 1774 after the Sons of Liberty had forced out American Loyalists from Taunton, MA. Reverend Caleb Barnum proposed a plan for a symbol of defiance against British rule. In commemoration, the Patriots erected a liberty pole, 112 feet high, outside of the Taunton Courthouse and

the house of Tory Loyalist lawyer Daniel Leonard. On it, they raised a red ensign with the words "Liberty and Union" sewn onto it.

The Taunton flag was one of the first rebel flags used within British North America to express dissension against the British government and The Crown. It also initially symbolized underlying loyalty to the Crown as the Union Jack was viewed as the King's Colors. The popularity of the flag grew due to the Boston Evening Post publishing it in a story. Priscilla, the wife of Dr. William McKinstry, the only Loyalist permitted to remain, expressed her disdain for the Taunton flag and in response female Patriots dragged her from her house and forced her to march around the liberty pole where it was flying. A later version of the Taunton Flag was created including the "Liberty and Union" slogan on a Union Jack



## First Navy Jack

The current naval jack of the United States, authorized by the U.S. Navy and is flown from the jackstaff of commissioned vessels of the U.S. Navy while moored pier side or at anchor. The design is traditionally regarded as that of the first U.S. naval jack flown in the earliest years of the republic.

In late 1775, as the first ships of the Continental Navy readied in the Delaware River, Commodore Esek Hopkins issued, in a set of fleet signals, an instruction directing his vessels to fly a "striped" jack and ensign. The exact design of these flags is unknown. The ensign was likely to have been the Grand Union Flag, and the jack a simplified version of the ensign: a field of 13 horizontal red and white stripes. It is likely that the colonial ships did not use the canton of the Grand Union Flag as their jack given its use as by Royal Navy warships.

Despite the probability that the original jack may have been a simple striped flag, since about 1880, this jack has traditionally been depicted as consisting of thirteen red and white stripes charged with an uncoiled rattlesnake and the motto "Dont Tread on Me"; this tradition dates at least back to 1880.

Recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated that this inferred design never actually existed but "was a 19th-century mistake based on an erroneous 1776 engraving".

The rattlesnake had long been a symbol of resistance to the British in Colonial America. The phrase "Don't tread on me" may have been coined during the American Revolutionary War, a variant perhaps of the snake severed in segments labelled with the names of the colonies and the legend "Join, or Die" which had appeared first in Benjamin Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette in 1754, as a political cartoon reflecting on the Albany Congress.

The rattlesnake (specifically, the Timber Rattlesnake) is especially significant and symbolic to the American Revolution. The rattle has thirteen layers, signifying the original Thirteen Colonies. Additionally, the snake does not strike until provoked, a quality echoed by the phrase "Don't tread on me."

# FLAGS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



## Liberty Tree

The Tree Flag was one of the flags used during the American Revolution. It featured a pine tree with the motto "An Appeal to God" or, more usually, "An Appeal to Heaven" and was used originally by a squadron of six cruisers commissioned under Washington's authority as commander in chief of the Continental Army in October 1775. It was also used by Massachusetts state navy vessels in addition to privateers sailing from Massachusetts.

The design of the flag came from General Washington's secretary, Colonel Joseph Reed. In a letter dated October 20, 1775, Colonel Reed suggested a "flag with a white ground and a tree in the middle, the motto AN APPEAL TO HEAVEN" be used for the ships Washington commissioned.

This phrase is an expression of the right of revolution used by British philosopher John Locke in his *"Second Treatise on Civil Government"* which was published in 1690 as part of *"Two Treatises of Government"* refuting the theory of the divine right of kings.

Locke's works were well-known and frequently quoted by colonial leaders, being the most quoted authority on government in the 1760-1776 period prior to American independence. Thomas Jefferson was actually accused of plagiarizing Locke in certain sections of the Declaration of Independence by fellow Virginian delegate Richard Henry Lee.



## Gadsden

In the Fall of 1775, the Continental Navy was established by General George Washington in his role as Commander in Chief of all Continental Forces. The Navy began with seven ships, often called "Washington Cruisers", that flew the "Liberty Tree Flag."

Those first ships were used to intercept incoming British ships carrying war supplies to the British troops in the colonies both to deprive the British of the supplies and to supply to the Continental Army. One ship captured by Captain John Manley had 30,000

pairs of shoes on it. However, the admiralty agent demanded his 2 1/2 per cent commission before he would release the cargo for Washington's army, so many soldiers marched barefoot in the snow.

To aid in this, the Second Continental Congress authorized the mustering of five companies of Marines to accompany the Navy on their first mission. The first Marines enlisted in the city of Philadelphia, and they carried drums painted yellow, depicting a coiled rattlesnake with thirteen rattles, and the motto "Don't Tread on Me." This is the first recorded mention of the future Gadsden flag's symbolism.

At the Congress, Colonel Christopher Gadsden represented his home state of South Carolina. He was one of seven members of the Marine Committee who were outfitting the first naval mission.

Before the departure of that first mission in December 1775, the newly appointed commander-in-chief of the Navy, Commodore Esek Hopkins, received the yellow rattlesnake flag from Gadsden to serve as the distinctive personal standard of his flagship. It was displayed at the mainmast.

# FLAGS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



## Fort Moultrie aka Liberty

The Liberty flag was designed, by commission, in 1775 by Colonel William Moultrie, to prepare for war with Great Britain.

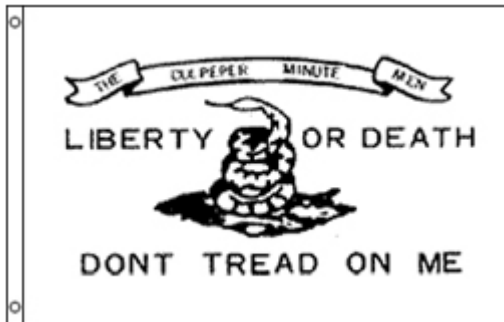
It was flown by his troops in the successful defense of Sullivan's Island against the British fleet in June 1776.

Fighting back stridently during a ten-hour bombardment and siege, Moultrie's forces (primarily the 2nd South Carolina Regiment) eventually led the British to withdraw entirely, saving Charleston.

During the battle, the flag was actually shot away, but Sergeant William Jasper ran out in the open and hoisted it again, rallying the troops until a new stand could be provided. The story of this dramatic event, along with the pivotal role of the battle itself, earned the flag a place in the hearts of the people of South Carolina,[1] as well as cementing it as a symbol of liberty in the South, and the new nation in general.

It therefore became the standard of the South Carolina militia, and when the war officially ended with the liberation of Charleston, on December 14, 1782, it was presented by General Nathanael Greene's "Southern Continental & Militia Army", as the first American flag to be displayed in the South.[2]

The symbol in the top left corner of the flag is a gorget, which is armor worn around the neck designed to protect the throat.



## Culpeper

The Culpeper Minutemen were organized on July 17, 1775 in the district created by the Third Virginia Convention consisting of the counties of Orange, Fauquier and Culpeper. Recruitment began in September 1775 with four companies of 50 men from Fauquier and Culpeper counties each and two companies of 50 men from Orange county. The District Committee of Safety determined that the militia was to meet under a large oak tree in "Clayton's old field" on the Catalpa estate near today's Yowell Meadow Park in Culpeper, Virginia.

The Culpeper minutemen fought for the patriot side in the first year of the American Revolution, and are remembered for their company flag: a white banner depicting a rattlesnake, featuring the phrases "Liberty or Death" and "Don't Tread on Me". At the time, Culpeper was considered frontier territory. In October 1775, the minutemen were sent to Hampton in response to British ships attempting to land. The riflemen were able to effectively shoot the men manning the ships cannons, and the fleet eventually sailed away.

The Culpeper militia next participated in the Battle of Great Bridge in December 1775. The battle was a complete American victory. There were accounts of the battle that suggested the British were unnerved by the reputation of the frontiersmen.

The Culpeper Minutemen disbanded in January 1776 under orders from the Committee of Safety. Many of the minutemen continued to serve. Some joined the continental line, and others fought under Daniel Morgan

# FLAGS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



## **Grand Union aka "Continental Colors", "Congress Flag", "Cambridge Flag", and "First Navy Ensign"**

Considered to be the first national flag of the United States of America. This flag consisted of 13 alternating red and white stripes (like the current U.S. flag), but with the upper inner corner or canton resembling the British Union Flag of the time.

By the end of 1775, during the first year of the American Revolutionary War, the Second Continental Congress operated as a de facto war government

authorizing the creation of an Army, a Navy and even a small Marine Corps.

A new flag was needed to represent the Congress and fledgling nation, initially the United Colonies, with a banner distinct from the British Red Ensign flown from civilian and merchant vessels, the White Ensign of the British Royal Navy, and the British Union flags carried by the British Army on land. Individual states had been using their own independent flags with Massachusetts using the Taunton Flag and New York using the George Rex Flag prior to the adoption of the Grand Union Flag.

The Continental Color was first hoisted on the colonial warship Alfred, in the harbor on the western shore of the Delaware River at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on December 3, 1775, by newly-appointed Lieutenant John Paul Jones of the Continental Navy. The event was documented in letters to Congress and eyewitness accounts. The flag was used by the U.S. Continental Army forces as both a naval ensign and garrison flag throughout 1776 and early 1777.



## **Bunker Hill**

Most New England flags were based on the red or blue naval ensign of the Royal Navy which featured St George's Cross in the canton, and these were used at both Jamestown, Virginia and the Plymouth colony. Puritans in New England led by Roger Williams objected to the use of a Christian cross on their flag, and they flew a red flag with a plain white canton for a time. The new flag first appeared in 1634 in Salem, Massachusetts, but some considered it to be an act of rebellion against England and the cross was retained on crown property such as Castle Island, MA. The cross-less flags became popular in New England, and militia companies designed unique patterns on their flags. In 1665, the Royal Commissioners recommended that all ships and militia companies be ordered to fly "the true colours of England, by which they may be knowne to be his majesties legittimate subjects."

In 1707, a proclamation was issued that all merchant vessels fly the red ensign with the British Union Flag in the canton, and a woodcut was published in the Boston News-Letter on 26 January 1707 to ensure compliance, which was also the first illustration ever printed in an American newspaper.

Some controversy exists concerning which flag flew at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775 at the onset of the American Revolutionary War. An officer of the Royal Marines reported that no flags were used by the Americans, but John Trumbull placed a red flag with a pine tree in his 1786 painting *"The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775"*. However, he later painted another version of this painting for the family of the fallen general which depicts a blue flag.

The blue field may have been due to an error in a wood engraving which caused confusion among painters. The printing error might have been caused by incorrect "hatching", whereby parallel lines represent colors; horizontal lines represent blue and vertical ones represent red. However, Benson John Lossing writes in *Field Book of the Revolution* that he interviewed the daughter of a Bunker Hill veteran who told her that he hoisted a blue flag on Breed's Hill prior to the battle. Regardless of its authenticity, the blue variation has become a symbol of the Battle of Bunker Hill and also of Charlestown, Boston, the neighborhood encompassing Bunker and Breed's hills.

# FLAGS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



## **Bennington**

The Bennington flag is a version of the American flag associated with the American Revolution Battle of Bennington, VT, from which it derives its name. That battle occurred on August 16, 1777 in Walloomsac, NY about 10 miles from Bennington. A rebel force of 2,000 men, primarily New Hampshire and Massachusetts militiamen, led by General John Stark, and reinforced by Vermont militiamen led by Colonel Seth Warner and members of the Green Mountain Boys, decisively defeated a detachment of General John Burgoyne's army led by Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Baum.

One legend claims that the original Bennington flag was carried off the field by Nathaniel Fillmore and passed down through the Fillmore family, and was, at one time, in the possession of President Millard Fillmore, Nathaniel's grandson. Philetus P. Fillmore flew a Bennington flag in 1877, to commemorate the Battle of Bennington. Because of the family association, the flag is also referred to as the "Fillmore flag".

Many doubt the actual use of the Fillmore flag at the Battle of Bennington. A Green Mountain Boys flag belonging to John Stark is generally accepted to have been there, but the Bennington flag has become more strongly associated with the event. Both Stark's flag and the Fillmore flag are held in a collection at the Bennington Museum, but the Stark flag is accepted as an 18th-century regimental banner, while the museum has dated the Bennington flag from the 19th century based on the nature of the machine-woven fabric it is made from. The flag may have been made to evoke revolutionary sentiment during the War of 1812 or to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1826.



## **Betsy Ross**

An early design of the flag of the United States, popularly – but very likely incorrectly – attributed to Betsy Ross, using the common motifs of alternating red-and-white striped field with five-pointed stars in a blue canton. Grace Rogers Cooper noted that the first documented usage of this flag was in 1792. The flag features 13 stars to represent the original 13 colonies with the stars arranged in a circle.

According to the traditional account, the original flag was made in June 1776, when a small committee – including George Washington, Robert Morris and relative George Ross – visited Betsy and discussed the need for a new American flag.

Betsy accepted the job to manufacture the flag, altering the committee's design by replacing the six-pointed stars with five-pointed stars.

However...

- No records show that the Continental Congress had a committee to design the national flag in the spring of 1776.
- Although George Washington had been a member of the Continental Congress, he had assumed the position of commander-in-chief of the Continental Army in 1775, so it would be unlikely that he would have headed a congressional committee in 1776.
- There is no evidence to show that Betsy Ross and George Washington knew each other, or that George Washington was ever in her shop.
- In letters and diaries that have surfaced, neither George Washington, Col. Ross, Robert Morris, nor any other member of Congress mentioned anything about a national flag in 1776.

# FLAGS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



## Continental

On the nights of June 16-17, 1775, the Americans fortified Breed and Bunker Hills which overlooked Boston Harbor.

Although they had not officially declared their independence, a fight for control of the hills became necessary. When the British advanced up the slope the next day, according to legend they saw a red flag, but we have no real knowledge of which American Flag was actually flown in this battle. But John Trumbull, whose paintings of Revolutionary War scenes are quite famous, talked to eye-witnesses and his subsequent painting depicting the battle displayed the Continental flag as shown here. Many historians think the flag more likely to have been at the battle, if any, was the more common First New England Naval Ensign.

Information in this document was assembled from web research (with heavy leaning on Wikipedia) by Mitchell Hamm (HammBone) in August 2018.