

Address,  
to a ladies society.

No.25 Volume 9.

Subject:  
THE FLAG.



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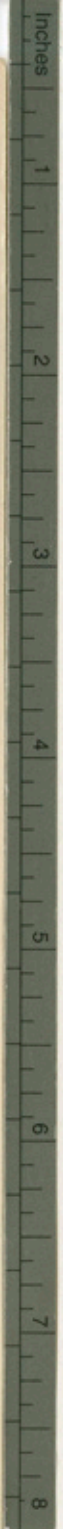
Subject:  
The Year.

ADDRESS ON THE FLAG.

General O. O. Howard.

ferme  
je ne veux pas  
à prendre





ADDRESS ON THE FLAG.

General G. O. Howard.

Received  
of the  
General

Ladies:

When asked to speak to you concerning the origin and history of our American ensign I thought it would be an easy subject for a discourse, but as soon as one begins to study what has been said and written concerning the flag, he finds it hard to discriminate at this time, after more than a century has elapsed since its origin, between the different claims and the true story.

It was the 14th of June, 1777, the last day of the week when congress was assembled in Philadelphia, that the subject of a standard for Columbia was brought to a conclusion. The resolution passed reads as follows:

"Resolved: That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white on a blue field, representing a new constellation."

Whatever had preceded this Act of Congress in colors used on the land or the sea, this legislation is the real foundation. That resolution was confirmed and promulgated



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by one who was called the Secretary of Congress, but not until the 3rd day of September, 1777.

I can find very little authentic account as to the man or the woman or both who were instrumental in getting up the original design and color of our flag. It is, however, often attributed to General Washington that he had in mind a general design which he communicated to several close and intimate friends.

In the little book entitled "Betsy Ross", in the parlor of a small shop on *Arch* street, Philadelphia, an interview is claimed between His Excellency, George Washington, and two ladies, one of whom was Betsy Ross. The story represents that a committee of congress came with Washington to this interview and that one of the committee was the Hon. John Ross, the uncle of Mrs. Ross' husband, and that it was through him that the conference took place.

It appears that Mrs. Betsy Ross, the young widow, had before this constructed what was regarded as "the most marvelously wrought flag in the army, but too ornate for a national standard." Washington asked Mrs. Ross if she



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thought she could fashion a flag from the design that the committee brought. As Betsy answered that she could try, Washington laid a paper upon the table before her and said, "See, here is the rough draft I have made. You will perceive there are thirteen stripes alternatins red and white; the canton will be blue with thirteen stars."

After some words between them, Betsy said, "I see your stripes are white at top and bottom. Do you not think red better to begin and end with?"

"Possibly", said Washington.

"And your stars are six pointed", she continued, "would not a five pointed star be better?"

She quickly siezed a sheet of paper and clipped out a five pointed star. The decision was made in her favor both with regard to the stripes and the character of the stars.

Before leaving them Washington remarked, "This design of the flag you are requested to make has already been accepted by the Continental Congress . . . . but congress must see the completed flag to pronounce it

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official." He added a few words kindly, for example, "Other wars and other generals may come and go, but to you will always remain the sole honor of having made the first flag of the United States, a flag which may float for centuries."

"God grant it!" said Betsy Ross, "It remains for Your Excellency to make it possible."

We have to-day the Betsy Ross society and every possible record concerning her well preserved.

The first appearance of the flag of the stars and stripes was probably at Fort Stanwicks on the investment of that fort by General St. Clair with an army of Great Britain and Indians combined, in August 1777. The garrison had previously heard of the Act of the Continental Congress and before its promulgation by the Hon. Secretary, and having a strong desire to display some national emblem to the view of the investing host, they are said to have torn up shirts and other garments to construct a flag as nearly as was possible like that intended by the resolution of congress. The flag was made and unfurled to the breezes

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at that fort which was successful in holding at bay and defending itself against every attack made by the army of St. Clair. The victory of General Herkimer and the approach of General Arnold and his force defeated and finally scattered the hosts of the enemy to the four winds.

Historic research appears to confirm the statement that Paul Jones took the stars and stripes to sea with him on the Ranger June, 1777. This, of course, was before the bill establishing the ensign was passed by congress, but it was not before it had been introduced. He reports that at Quiberon Bay, February 14, 1778, this flag was saluted by the French admiral with the number of guns usually given to an admiral of any other nation. His report further alleges that this salute was equivalent to a recognition of the independence of the United States.

Indeed this was the first salute of our flag by a foreign power.

In conformity with the Act of the Continental Congress, as published, many flags were constructed. The thirteen stars were usually arranged on the blue background



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in a circular form. Some flags had twelve stars placed along the edges of the field with one in the center.

It will be remembered that Paul Jones on the Ranger fought against Admiral Drake on the 24th of April, 1778. This was the first naval engagement in which our flag was displayed.

It is alleged that the first product of Betsy Ross' genius appeared above a public building in Philadelphia. But beyond a doubt the stars and stripes of thirteen each were unfurled at the disastrous battle of Brandywine, not far south of Philadelphia, on September 11th, 1777. This was eight days after the signing and publication of the resolution which made them the flag of the United States.

Lately, at the last anniversary, I was at Schuylerville, which was the old Saratoga, and saw the place where Burgoyne surrendered October 17, 1777. I gave the address in view of the grand monument over which our beautiful flag is floating to-day. That same flag was present when Burgoyne surrendered to General Gates, one hundred and twenty-seven years ago. It is said that the sight of this



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new constellation cheered the patriots of our army amid their prolonged sufferings around the camp fires at Valley Forge the ensuing winter. I know that it was waving triumphantly at the last surrender, namely that of Cornwallis to Washington in Yorktown, Va., October 19, 1781.

Looking abroad we notice that on January 28, 1778, John Rathburne, commanding the sloop of war Providence, raised the stars and stripes over the captured fort of Nassau on the Island of New Providence, Bahama Islands. This was the first time the stars and stripes had floated over captured foreign territory.

The honor of hoisting our beautiful flag, after the treaty of peace with Great Britain, in a British port has been claimed by several vessels. The weight of evidence is with the ship Bedford, Captain William Moores, a ship that sailed out of Nantucket. The Bedford entered the port of London February 3, 1783, proudly displaying the stars and stripes. She was laden with a cargo of whale oil. At first she was not allowed to enter the port until much consultation had taken place between the Commissioners

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of the Customs and the Lords in council. The delay was occasioned on account of several Acts of Parliament still in force against the rebels of America. But at last, as the Captain was furnished with a pass for his ship from Admiral Digby of the English service, she was allowed to enter and unload.

Quite early in 1794, in consequence of the admission of Vermont, which had taken place in 1791, and of Kentucky, 1792, into the sisterhood of states, a bill was introduced and finally passed to increase the stars and stripes on the flag to fifteen, this act to take effect May, 1795. This resolution originated in the senate. When presented to the house there was much opposition manifested in the debate. The principal objection alleged was with regard to the time of the change. It will be noticed that the time finally fixed upon for the change in the flag was the 4th of July.

It was this design embracing the fifteen stripes and stars which is found in the flag presented by James Monroe, then our minister to France, to the French national

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convention. It was given as a pledge of the pleasure and ardor with which the American people siezed every opportunity of cementing and consolidating the union and the good understanding between France and the United States.

In return for this marked courtesy, on the 1st of January, 1796, the minister of the French Republic to the United States presented the colors of France to us with appropriate remarks.

The flag of fifteen stars and stripes floated above the old Constitution before Tripoli; also by the Constellation in her action with The L'Insurgente and La Vengeance. Again, it was the flag of Lake Erie, of Fort McHenry at New Orleans. The flag of the Enterprise in her action with the British brig Boxer had the 15 stars in parallels, five in each horizontal line.

The admission of Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana and Indiana made some changes in the flag desirable. On April 4, 1818, and Act to Establish the Flag of the United States was approved. The first section reads as follows:

Be it enacted, etc. that from and after the 4th



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day of July next the flag of the United States be thirteen horizontal stripes alternate red and white; that the union have twenty stars, white in a blue field. . . .

Section 2d. And that it be further enacted that on the admission of every new state into the Union one star be added to the union of the flag on the 4th of July succeeding such admission. It is a little odd that no arrangement of the stars in the flag was directed and that this has resulted in different combinations. There is one set of flags with the twenty stars outlining a star; one in the form of U S; others with the twenty stars strewn over the field irregularly; but mostly in horizontal rows.

On the 4th day of July, 1857, a gentleman amused himself by collating the various designs displayed on vessels, hotels and public buildings in and near New York. He found that there were nine different designs.

Today our flag contains the thirteen stripes and forty-six stars.

There are various hymns and songs of a patriotic

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nature touching our glorious flag. The one that excites the most reverence is what we usually call "The Star Spangled Banner". Francis Key had been a prisoner on board a British ship and he feared that the battle near Baltimore had gone against us. Inspired by his fears on that occasion and the joy which he felt when he found that the flag still waved, he gave us our national banner song, "The Star Spangled Banner."

Oh! say, can you see by the dawn's early light,  
 What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last  
   gleaming,  
 Whose stripes and bright stars thro' the perilous  
   fight,  
 Ore the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly  
   streaming;  
 And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in  
   air,  
 Gave proof through the night that our flag was  
   still there.

On the shore dimly seen thro' the mist of the deep,  
 Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence  
   reposes,  
 What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering  
   steep,  
 As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?  
 Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
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And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,  
'Mid the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,  
A home and a country they'd leave us no more!  
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution;  
No refuge could save the hireling and slave  
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,

Oh thus be it ever when free men shall stand  
Between their loved home and the war's desolation;  
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.  
Then conquer we must, for our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto, "In God is our trust."

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