

The history of the American flag

National flags serve to unite citizens of a given country. Flags wave proudly in front of government buildings and schools, and they also identify athletes during international sporting competitions. In many countries, flags also serve as symbols of honor for members of the military and their families.

For more than 200 years, the American flag has been a symbol of unity and pride in the United States. The red, white and blue flag has a storied history and has gone through various incarnations. The following are some of the more interesting facts pertaining to the American flag.

- Six different flag designs were flown before Betsy Ross announced that she had sewn the official American flag. These designs included a series of alternating red and white stripes, the Liberty Tree, the Sons of Liberty, and the Forester flag designs. The Continental Army once used a flag featuring a snake with the mantra "Don't Tread on Me."

- On June 14, 1777, the Second Continental Congress proposed and passed the Flag Act of 1777. This resolution was designed to facilitate the creation of an official flag for a nation that was aiming to earn its independence from Great Britain. The flag was to have thirteen stripes, alternating red and white, with thirteen white stars on a blue field. The thirteen stars signified the original members of the Union.

- The American flag remained unchanged until 1795, when the stripes and stars were increased to 15 for the addition of Kentucky and Vermont to the Union.

- After seeing the new 15-star and striped flag flying over Fort Mifflin during the War of 1812, Francis Scott Key was inspired to write the poem that would eventually become the nation's national anthem.

- A sea captain from Massachusetts



named William Driver named a large, 10-foot-by-17-foot flag "Old Glory" after it survived multiple defacing attempts during the American Civil War. Driver's nickname of the flag inspired the name to be used for all American flags.

- Although Flag Day was established as a formal national holiday in 1949, it was not made a federal holiday. Flag Day is only an official holiday in the state of Pennsylvania. This may be fitting because legend holds that Betsy Ross sewed the first flag in Pennsylvania.

- Today's flag features the original 13 alternating white and red stripes (in 1818, another design went into effect, permanently setting the number of stripes at 13 in honor of the original colonies) and 50 stars to represent the states of the Union. The colors of the flag signify as follows: red for hardiness and valor, white for purity and innocence, and blue for vigilance, perseverance and justice.

The American Flag has been a fixture of the United States for centuries and continues to serve as a symbol of pride, valor and history.

The history of America's Independence Day

Few summertime holidays elicit as much excitement as the Fourth of July, also known as Independence Day in the United States. Each year, family, friends and revelers anticipate the arrival of the holiday so they can host barbecues, enjoy the sun, listen to their favorite summertime tunes, and commemorate the freedoms afforded by the monumental events that led to the holiday's establishment.

Independence Day became a federal holiday in 1941, but July 4th has stood as the birth of American independence for much longer. July 4th marks a pivotal moment in the American Revolution. According to PBS, the colonies were forced to pay taxes to England's King George III despite having no representation in the British Parliament. Taxation without representation became a battle cry and was one of several grievances colonists had with Great Britain.

Conflict between the colonies had been going on for at least a year before the colonies convened a Continental Congress in Philadelphia in June of 1776, says Military.com. On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress voted in favor of independence from England. Two days later, on July 4, 1776, delegates from the 13 colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence is an historic document drafted by Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was considered the strongest and most eloquent writer of the declaration writing committee charged with putting the colonies sentiments into words. Richard Henry Lee of Virginia was one of the first people



to present a resolution for American independence, and his commentary was the impetus for the formal Declaration of Independence. A total of 86 changes were made to Jefferson's original draft until the final version was adopted. The signing of the document helped to solidify independence, and eventually lead to the formation of the United States of America.

A total of 56 delegates signed the document. Although John Hancock's signature is the largest, it did not hold more weight than the other signatures. Rather, rumor has it, Hancock signed it so large so that the fat, old King could read it without his spectacles. However, the National Archives says it was also customary that, since Hancock was the president of the Continental Congress, he be the first person to sign the document centered below the text.

The Pennsylvania Evening Post was the first newspaper to print the Declaration of Independence on July 6, 1776. The first public readings of the Declaration were held in Philadelphia's Independence Square on July 8, 1776.