

The American Flag

By Karen Ferguson, Town Historian

The Second Continental Congress approved the design for its first national flag on June 14, 1777. This effort was meant to bring unity and pride for those fighting for the Revolution. George Washington realized the significance a single representation of brotherhood would have on the morale of the troops and spearheaded the flag's creation. It was decided that there would be 13 stripes alternating red and white and the union be represented as 13 white stars on a blue background symbolizing a new constellation. For years it was thought that Betsy Ross designed the first flag; however, it has been confirmed that Francis Hopkinson, a delegate from New Jersey and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was the designer.

It wasn't until almost 100 years later that various individuals called for celebrations commemorating the flag's birthday and encouraged Americans to observe the day. There was one individual named George Morris of Connecticut who supposedly organized the first formal celebration in 1861. There was another individual, a Wisconsin schoolteacher, in 1885 who urged his students to observe the day and then went on to write an essay that was published in a Chicago newspaper urging all Americans to proclaim June 14 as the day to celebrate the flag. The American Flag Day Association was founded in 1888 by William Kerr of Pennsylvania. President Woodrow Wilson also proclaimed June 14 as the official date for Flag Day in 1916 but Congress didn't permanently establish the date as National Flag Day until 1949.

Our current flag design with the 13 stripes and now 50 stars was designed by a 17-year old boy named Bob Heft who turned his creation into his history teacher as a class project. His design was prior to Alaska and Hawaii officially becoming a state but felt it was eminent since discussions were underway. He received a B- for his project. However, Bob was not discouraged. In addition to giving his design to his teacher, Bob Heft sent it to his Congressman, Walter Moeller, who then presented it to President Eisenhower after both states received statehood. Eisenhower selected Bob Heft's design over several others and The American Flag as we know it today was flown for the first time on July 4, 1960. Heft's teacher then changed his grade to an A.

Our flag has also been the inspiration to countless songs including our National Anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner" written in 1814 by Francis Scott Key. These songs serve to celebrate its significance and importance throughout our country's history.

While not a Federally-recognized holiday, all Americans are still encouraged to fly U.S. flags during the week of June 14. As it was in 1777, it is still a symbol of pride and unity for those who have fought for our freedom in the past, as well as for those serving today. As citizens of the United States, let us not take for granted the freedoms we have and may we, too, fly our flag proudly to display our gratitude and patriotism for our country.

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Figure 1: First American Flag (1777 design)



Figure 2: Current US Flag (1960 design)