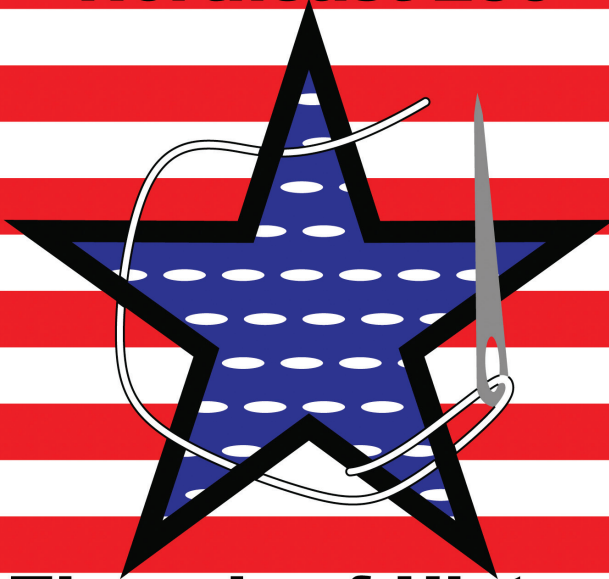


Northeast 250



Threads of History

**A Project of Mural Arts Philadelphia
Tacony LAB Community Art Center in
honor of our nation's
Semiquincentennial celebrating history
in Northeast Philadelphia**



Northeast 250: Threads of History is a project of Mural Arts Philadelphia Tacony LAB Community Art Center as we recognize the Semiquincentennial Celebration of the birth of our nation. NE 250 is an event series to highlight the places and history found in Northeast Philadelphia alongside the many organizations that steward this history. At each event there will be an opportunity to learn more about the history while participating in community art making.

Please enjoy this booklet of interesting information about flags by Maureen McDevitt Greene (Friends of Northeast Philadelphia History) and Betsy Ross' ties to Northeast Philadelphia by Gail McCormick (The Historical Society of Frankford). To learn more, join us for a workshop!

This project is centered around the idea of individual flags and the connections that Betsy Ross has to Northeast Philadelphia. At each event, a team of artists with ties to Northeast Philadelphia will be engaging with community members to create a series of flags as well as make-and-take traditional crafts, with different activities at each event.

The event series will take place from March 2026 to July 5, 2026 at historically and culturally significant locations throughout Northeast Philadelphia.

Check the link to our event schedule found on the back of this booklet for more information about upcoming events.

Northeast 250: Threads of History

Partner Organizations

Friends of Northeast Philly History

Glen Foerd on the Delaware

Riverfront North Partnership

One River Alliance

Daughters of the American Revolution: Flag House Chapter

Mayfair Business Improvement District

Tacony Historical Society

Tacony Community Development Corporation

Pennepack Baptist Church

Trinity Church Oxford

The Historical Society of Frankford

Treasure Philly!

Artist Team

Lucia Alber

Bob Dix

Michelle Reiman

Colleen Ott

Tiffany Katen

Laura Lynn Stern

Zoey Storck

Jackie Lehrian

Project Managers

Barb Baur

Emily Hitchner

So many flags!



In the 1700's, flags were used largely by ships and the military, so they needed to be recognizable because there were a lot of different groups. There were flags for the British armed forces, for colonies' militias, and less formal groups who banded together for mutual defense.



Many flags were variations on the British flag with the crosses of St. George (England) and St. David

British Red Ensign, also known as Queen Anne's Flag



(Scotland) – the Union Jack -- layered in the canton to represent Britain, on a red field.

Colonists were also familiar with British chartered trading companies who had their own navies and land locations and flags.

British East Indies



Hudson Bay Company



Every flag was a handmade work of art!

Revolutionary flags were hand-made. Craftspeople: tailors, upholsterers, and seamstresses, put them together, often based on a sketch or verbal description. They used whatever fabric was available; the finest were silk, then wool, then cotton.

Some flags still in existence were made of damask – more suited for draperies. Others show a distinct floral pattern.

After painstaking hand sewing, some were then sent to artists who painted on designs and lettering. Not all were professionally made. The wives and mothers of officers sewed some flags.

Colonists were thrifty!! It is believed that a number of colonial flags were repurposed Hudson Bay flags. White stripes or changed cantons could easily be added. At least one well-preserved flag clearly shows the Union Jack behind an American canton. etc.

Colorful Flags

Light Horse of the City of Philadelphia flag: an original Revolutionary War banner painted by Philadelphia artist James Claypoole around 1775. It is a significant historical artifact that reflects the shift from British to American symbols during the war for independence.

The flag originally featured the British Union in its upper corner, still faintly visible, but it was later repainted with 13 stripes following the Declaration of Independence. It is believed to be one of the earliest surviving flags to feature 13 stripes.



The unit that carried this flag still exists today in the Pennsylvania National Guard as the **First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry**. It remains one of the oldest continuously serving military units in the United States.

Flag of the Bucks of America from Massachusetts, the only all-African American militia unit of the Revolutionary War.



The Gadsden flag, which echoes a Ben Franklin cartoon from the French and Indian War, is often cited as the most popular symbol of the American Revolution. It conveys a strong message of alertness and is even now associated with the ideas of individualism and liberty.



Green was also a popular color. This 1770 flag was that of the **Green Mountain Boys** militia and later the flag of the Vermont Republic before it was added as the 14th state. It is still the flag of the Vermont National Guard.

The George Rogers Clark Flag 1779: this red and green striped flag was used by General George Rogers Clark during his attack on a British fort in 1779.



Delaware Militia Flag: A British officer captured it from a Delaware militia unit shortly before the Battle of Brandywine in 1777. Research suggests the original flag may have been captured before it was completely finished, which might explain its unique design compared to other period flags.



New England, known for pine trees, used them in several designs. Puritans objected to the Union Jack, due to the crosses. Pine trees became a popular symbol, often supporting Home Rule.



The Colonists were increasingly unhappy.

As the relationship between the colonies and the crown soured, they also were used for protest. At least some of the pines commemorated an early skirmish between unhappy colonists and British authorities over hefty fines for anyone chopping down pine trees.

The Sons of Liberty formed to oppose the Stamp Act in 1765. By 1766, they were calling for revolution. “No Taxation without Representation” was a simple motto although, at first, they were loyal to the Crown. The British outlawed the “rebellious stripes,” so the Sons of Liberty changed their flag to a horizontal pattern of 13 stripes to mark the 13 colonies.



Flags took on plain revolutionary spirit. One popular flag was simplicity itself:



**War is upon them, but they are still loyal!
So Red, White, and Blue had an edge.**

By 1775, the Continental Union flag—remarkably similar to the East India Company flag—was approved and flags were requisitioned as military equipment. A year away from declaring independence yet most colonists felt themselves to be loyal so the canton reflects the connection to Britain. Even after July 1776, many patriot flags continued to have the Union Jack.



Pennsylvania Militia Flag, also known as the “Brandywine Flag,” is the earliest surviving flag featuring both stars and stripes to represent the US. It was created in the summer of 1777 in Philadelphia for the Chester County Militia and is believed to have been at the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777, where American forces tried to defend Pennsylvania from capture. The red silk banner has a small painted canton in the upper left with 13 stars and 13 stripes.



So, we have a design! Or do we?

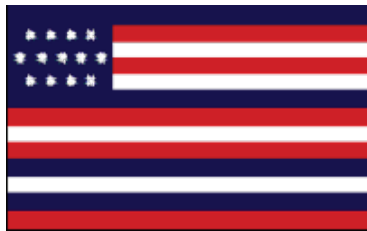
1777 June 14 – Continental Congress adopts the following:
“Resolved, That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.”

The “Betsy Ross Flag” removed the Union Jack ties to England and symbolized a “new constellation.” This was to become the “Stars and Stripes.”

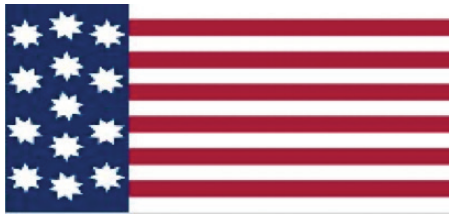


**Red and White Stripes and a Blue Canton...
easy, right?**

Stationed in Europe, Ben Franklin was asked about the design of the new flag so one could be made for John Paul Jones’ ship, sailing back to America. His answer, not having seen one, resulted in blue stripes being added to the field!



Some cantons and whole flags with their creators' own designs! And there were many more!



The Flag Acts of 1794 and 1818 tried to get more conformity in design, but it wasn't enough. Makers were still creative!

The Flag at the Civil War and beyond

The US flag was used by just military and government until the Civil War when the flag that flew over Fort Sumter was toured throughout the North. People suddenly wanted flags as a symbol of their patriotism. This came just as mass production of flags became possible.

By 1912, there were at least 66 assorted designs in use which led Pres. Taft to issue an Executive Order to specify the size and

placement of the design elements and the size and shape of the flag but not the specific colors.

In 1934 the exact shades of color were standardized.

We are now on our 27th approved design. The 48-star flag lasted for 47 years until Alaska was added in 1959. On July 4, 1960, Hawaii became the 50th state and that flag has been in use longer than any other.

Local flags of note

Fort Mifflin Flag: Borrowed from a nearby ship, it flew the whole time the soldiers were defending the fort. When cannon fire knocked it down, two soldiers were killed putting it back up. A replica flies over the fort to this day.



Washington Headquarters Flag: long thought to be what he flew at his headquarters, it is now believed to be a canton for a larger flag.



The Hanover Associators flag was used by a militia company formed on June 4, 1774, in Hanover, Lancaster County, PA. It features a crimson field with a rifleman in a green hunting shirt and buckskin leggings, standing on guard with the motto "LIBERTY OR DEATH."



Our history making flag!

Philadelphia's City flag is the first official city flag in the nation! The blue and yellow bands memorialize the Swedish settlers. The center panel has the seal of Philadelphia with a plough, a ship, and scales and our motto "Philadelphia Maneto" or "Let Brotherly Love Continue." Oddly, that is a mixture of Latin and Greek! It was formally adopted on March 27, 1895.



Betsy Ross and Her Northeast Philadelphia Advocates

Elizabeth "Betsy" Griscom Ross Ashburn Claypoole (1752-1836) was born in Gloucester County, New Jersey, the daughter of Quakers Samuel and Rebecca James Griscom. When Betsy was a child, the family moved to Philadelphia, where her father became a prominent builder and a member of the prestigious Carpenters' Company. Educated in a Quaker school, Betsy was apprenticed as a teenager to a well-known Philadelphia upholsterer, where she met her future husband John Ross. After their marriage in 1773, John and Betsy established their own upholstery business on Arch Street, which Betsy continued by herself after John's tragic death in early 1776, when he was killed by a gunpowder explosion while serving with the Pennsylvania Militia. Betsy's skill as a seamstress provided her steady income during the Revolutionary War, as she made and repaired uniforms, tents, and blankets for the Continental Army. She also made flags for the Pennsylvania Navy, the beginning of a fifty-year career as a flag maker.

Nearly a century after the Revolution, Betsy's grandsons William

(1825-1890) and George Canby

(1829-1907), and her grandniece

Susan McCord Turner (1819-1910)

began to share the stories they testified to have heard directly from their ancestor during her lifetime.

In an 1870 presentation to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania,

William Canby first asserted that his

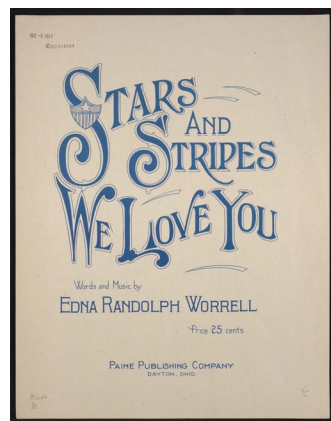


grandmother's oral history confirmed that she had created the first American flag in June 1776. He claimed that a special committee, consisting of Gen. George Washington, financier Robert Morris, and Col. George Ross, uncle of Betsy's late husband, visited her Philadelphia shop, where they asked if she could make a flag according to their sketched design, which consisted of thirteen stripes and a field containing thirteen six-pointed stars. Betsy Ross's relations would continue to assert for another century that Betsy first suggested that the flag include five-pointed stars, which she demonstrated were easier to create, and that her sample flag introduced the five-pointed stars in a circular pattern.

Susan McCord Turner and her descendants would be among Northeast Philadelphia's strongest advocates for Betsy's flag making story. Susan Turner recalled many stories handed down from "Aunty Claypoole," including childhood visits to Betsy's upholstery shop, then on Front Street. Susan recalled seeing the large room in which young women apprentices were making flags. One of the last public events that Betsy Ross attended was Susan's 1835 marriage to Frederick Turner at the Church of the Epiphany, Fifteenth and Chestnut Streets. Betsy Ross Claypoole died six months later, on 30 January 1836. Frederick Turner was co-owner of a stationery business at 15 North Sixth Street prior to his death in 1848. The family's home, "Moss Rose Cottage," was located on the Oxford Road near Five Points.

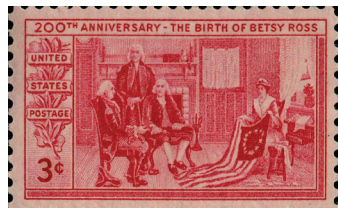
Betsy Ross's flag making story grew in popularity during the U.S. Centennial held in Philadelphia, but became a national legend in 1893, when Charles H. Weisgerber's wall-size painting *Birth of Our Nation's Flag* was displayed in the Pennsylvania Pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair. The painting, currently in the "Revolutionary Things" exhibit at the State Museum of Pennsylvania, depicts the family story. Betsy Ross is the central figure, with George Washington, Robert Morris, and George Ross admiring her creation of "The First American Flag." On June 14, 1893, Philadelphia first officially celebrated "Flag Day," the anniversary of the Continental Congress's adoption of the first flag in 1777. In 1896, Betsy's grandson George Canby celebrated Washington's Birthday at the Bridesburg Public School, presenting his grandmother's oral history about her flag making career and a copy of Weisgerber's painting to the school. Bridesburg School's principal T. Worcester Worrell was married to Susan Turner's daughter Nina Acadia Worrell (1842-1924).

In 1898, Charles Weisgerber purchased the former Ross home at 239 Arch Street and began organizing the American Flag House and Betsy Ross Memorial Association. The membership certificates were illustrated with a colored lithograph of Weisgerber's *Birth of Our Nation's Flag*. In 1901, Susan McCord Turner and her female descendants organized the "Betsy Ross Chapter" of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), which was accepted as the "Flag House Chapter" in 1903. The chapter, now open to any woman eligible for DAR membership, continues the tradition of Flag Day celebrations and support for the Betsy Ross House. Early meetings of the Flag House Chapter were often held at "Column Hall," the colonial home



of T. Worcester and Nina Turner Worrell, located at 4356 Tacony Street in Frankford. In January 1909, at the age of eighty-nine, Susan McCord Turner provided her testimony about Betsy Ross, which was notarized by Frankford conveyancer Edward Stearne. Like the Canbys, Susan reiterated Betsy's story about the first flag, but she also provided anecdotes illuminating her relative's generous personality.

Susan Turner's granddaughter Edna Randolph Worrell (1876-1961) would devote a lifetime to promoting the legacy of her illustrious great-great aunt through her membership in the Flag House Chapter and her career as a musician, composer, and Ladies' Home Journal editor. Passionate about patriotism, Edna often led Flag Day events in Philadelphia and frequently impersonated Betsy Ross at the Flag House. In 1951, Edna, the Flag House Chapter, and other fans of Betsy Ross's legacy successfully lobbied for a United States Postage stamp to commemorate the 200th anniversary of her birth. The three-cent stamp depicting Birth of Our Nation's Flag, the iconic illustration of her importance to the Revolutionary cause, was issued in Philadelphia on January 2, 1952. In describing this stamp, the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum succinctly addresses Betsy Ross's significance, regardless of one's view of the authenticity of the "first flag" story. We remember this multi-talented woman for her "legendary patriotism." She and other women of her generation "symbolize women's contribution to the American Revolution and founding of the new nation."





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Project Info