

In the early days of the Revolution, the colonists used all sorts of flags as banners to fight under.

Ships going out of New York harbor carried a flag with a picture of a beaver. The beaver was the emblem of New York State. The first ship sent out by George Washington flew a flag with a pine tree on it. Some ships carried a flag showing a cluster of thirteen arrows held in a fist. One very popular flag bore a rattlesnake with thirteen rattles. Under it appeared the motto DON'T TREAD ON ME.

Almost a year had passed since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and still there was no flag for all the colonies. Finally, on June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress reached a decision. It said that the flag should have a blue square with thirteen white stars in it. It should also have thirteen stripes of red and white. A committee was set up to see that such a flag was made.

At that time there was a young woman named Elizabeth Griscom Ross living in Philadelphia. She was a widow. Only five months earlier her husband had been killed in the war. Before the war he had run an upholstery business, and after his death Betsy Ross carried it on.

One day three gentlemen came to call on Betsy. One of them was George Washington himself.

Washington came straight to the point. "Madam, can you make a flag for us?"

"I can try, sir," she replied modestly. Then Washington took a paper out of his pocket. On it was sketched the design for the new flag. He spread it out for her to study.

"Have you any suggestions?" he asked.

Betsy looked at the design carefully. Yes, she did have some suggestions.

"I think, sir, that it would look better if the length were greater."

The general thought about this for a moment. Then he replied, "I think you are right."

"And," she added, "I wouldn't scatter the stars on the blue background. I think they would please the eye more if they were arranged in a pattern, like a circle."

"I believe you are right about that, too. Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. Instead of a star with six points, I would suggest a five-pointed one. It would look better."

"Isn't that harder to cut out?"

"Oh, no, sir." She picked up her scissors, folded a piece of paper, and with a few snips showed him a perfect five-pointed star. Yes, it did look better. It seemed more balanced, for it stood on two legs.

"Thank you, madam, for your good ideas," said Washington. "We shall count on you to make this flag."

Betsy went to work at once. When the flag was finished, everyone agreed that it was a beauty. It was carried into the hall of Congress, and there it was approved. From that moment it became the American flag.

The Star-Spangled Banner went into general use with the armed forces on land and sea. Betsy Ross got the contract to make all the flags. She held this job long after the war was ended.

In her old age Betsy became blind and could no longer make flags. However, she had taught her daughter Clarissa the art of

flag making, so Clarissa was able to carry on the business. And Betsy herself was not idle. She trained her little grandson to pick out the kind and color of material she needed. She was able to sew away, making rag rugs, until her death at eighty-four.

That grandson, William Canby, was

eleven years old when Betsy Ross died. It was he who told the public how the first Stars and Stripes was made. Some historians think the story is only a legend. But many others believe it is true, for it is quite possible that young William heard the tale from his grandmother's own lips.

CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. The flag with the rattlesnake on it had the motto**
 - A Carry a Big Stick
 - B Don't Tread on Me
 - C Fight to the Death
- 2. The Continental Congress decided upon the flag's**
 - A size
 - B shape
 - C colors
- 3. Betsy Ross's husband was not with her because he had been**
 - A sent to sea
 - B killed in the war
 - C captured by the enemy
- 4. Betsy thought the stars should be**
 - A scattered about freely
 - B placed in straight lines
 - C arranged in a circle
- 5. Betsy thought that the flag should have stars with**
 - A four points
 - B five points
 - C six points
- 6. Washington was afraid that such a star would be hard to**
 - A cut out
 - B sew straight
 - C see clearly
- 7. Of Betsy's three suggestions, Washington accepted**
 - A one
 - B two
 - C all
- 8. Betsy Ross made**
 - A all the flags used by the army
 - B most of the flags used by the army
 - C none of the flags used by the army
- 9. Clarissa took over the flag making when**
 - A the war ended
 - B Betsy became blind
 - C machines came into use
- 10. Betsy's grandson helped her when she turned to**
 - A making rag rugs
 - B writing her life story
 - C designing men's clothing