

Flags of the American Revolution. An overview

The national war of independence by which the United States separated from Great Britain (1775-1783) - known to Americans as the Revolution or Revolutionary War of American Revolution - is being commemorated by Americans in celebrations known as the Bicentennial. An important and intimate part of the Bicentennial revolves around those flags flown or supposedly flown at the time of the Revolution and this therefore seems an appropriate occasion to examine certain characteristics of the flags in question.

This is far from the first such examination; indeed, the fascination of Americans for their early flags is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Aside from a few instances - e.g., the use of the Artigas flag in Uruguay or the flag of Cespedes in Cuba - historical flags have little currency outside of publications specifically on the subject, probably because of the very political associations which originally caused those designs to be abandoned. On the contrary in the United States flags from the nation's past are made in replica in sizes ranging from 4" by 6" (10 by 15 cm.) up to 12' by 18' (3.66 by 5.49 m.) for display in homes, schools, commercial enterprises, even on public buildings. Moreover, there are countless items of everyday use - chinaware, clothing, items of home decoration, calendars, stationery, sales premiums, packaging, etc. - which feature the same flags.¹⁾ The extent of their use suggests that the average American is as familiar with the "Betsey Ross flag" and Bennington flag as with the flag of his home state.

Remarkably, the most popular of all historical flags, at least until recent years, has been the "Confederate Battle Flag" representing a former enemy of the United States, the Confederate States of America. The number of countries in the world in which the flag of a former secessionist territory may be flown with complete impunity must be very limited indeed and the United States is probably unique in allowing such a flag to be flown over public buildings and carried by current units of its armed forces.²⁾

The popularity of historical flags in America is not limited to those of the Revolutionary War era, as use of the "Battle Flag" suggests. Flags of explorers and settlers - such as the Vikings, Dutch, French or the Russian-American Company - are also common. A number of states have permanent exhibits which purport to feature all the sovereign flags which have flown over the territory in the past: there are even huge commercial amusement parks with the themes "Six Flags Over Georgia" and "Six Flags Over Texas". The underlying logic of these displays is an assertion of pride in national growth and a reaffirmation of the values supposedly inherent in the different phases of national history exemplified by these flags. Certainly America's political pluralism and ethnic diversity are reflected in the flags. This and other lessons are often taught by means of flag displays in schools, at scout meetings, and in patriotic gatherings.

While it is not possible to catalog all the books that have dealt with this subject, a few of the more important ones should be cited. The earliest in the monumental tome "History of the Flag of the United States of America" by Admiral George Henry Preble, reprinted several times in the 19th and early 20th centuries. His book has been the principal source for all later writers and, unfortunately, his

mistakes as well as his correct information have been repeated countless times. His color plate V, "Flags of 1775-1777" has probably caused more harm to American vexillology than any single page ever published. Strangely, the flags of this plate do not conform in several instances to the corresponding text, leading to the surmise that it was drafted by someone other than Preble and/or not carefully checked by him.

In 1907 Gherardi Davis published a book, subsequently supplemented by two further volumes, on the "Regimental Colors in the War of the Revolution". A combination of factors - including the fact that the edition of each volume was limited to 125 copies and that the author used large photographs to illustrate known flags remaining from the Revolution - has made this collection an extremely sought-after item. Based in large part on the Davis books, but with extensive supplementary material in both text and illustrations, are two volumes published by the Sons of the American Revolution in Philadelphia. 3) The more recent, authored in 1948 by Frank Schermerhorn and entitled "American and French Flags of the Revolution, 1775-1783", is probably the best single book on the subject ever published despite its many errors and deficiencies.

The imminence of the Bicentennial has brought a flood of new books and articles on the subject, some of which have contributed to our knowledge of one or another specific flag, although "Thirteen Star Flags" by Grace Cooper and "Flags of the American Revolution to Color" are the only ones to add substantially to our knowledge of the field in general. A series of articles appearing in *The Flag Bulletin*, including an edited transcript of the Davis book, eventually will provide the most comprehensive review on Revolutionary War Flags. Still in the works is a book to be published by the Smithsonian Institution which should be a major landmark of vexillological publication.

One of the remarkable things about the use of historical flags in the United States is the lack of discrimination between "type flags" and "unique flags" and between military colors and those flags intended for hoisting, whether on land or sea. There is only one Bedford flag, whereas there were many versions of the Stars and Stripes; moreover, the former was rendered in oil on silk damask, while the latter were usually made of wool or linen with a pieced or applique construction. Nevertheless, today both flags are reproduced in identical fashion in great quantities for hoisting.

There is also little sense of exclusivity regarding the use of replica flags: a person in the Far West may fly the "Fort Moultrie flag" which originally was an official South Carolina state flag. On the other hand if not geographically or chronologically appropriate, such choices are not completely arbitrary. Different versions of the Stars and Stripes are by far the most popular designs because they evoke the nation as a whole. The "Gadsden flag" is also extensively used, probably because of the symbolism of its design - a coiled rattlesnake with the warning "Don't Tread on Me" - which seems relevant to many political situations. Snake flags of one kind or another have, indeed, been displayed throughout American national history - not simply as commemorative replicas of Revolutionary War Flags, but as current symbols of protest - by both leftists and rightists wishing to express defiance of or support for certain ideological principles.

That the "Gadsden Flag" and certain others have been referred to in quotation marks requires a word of explanation. In many cases the original flags on which the modern replicas are based had no single

official or even unofficial name; or such a name may have been lost to us. In the case of unique flags, i.e., ones of which only a single example was in existence for use by a specific military unit, it was really unnecessary to have a name for the design, other than the simple generic (e.g., cornet or ensign).

Today the situation is quite different: flag manufacturers making these designs in the thousands, book reproducing and discussing them, and individuals flying them demand names by which the flags may be referred to. Thus certain names have been spontaneously created which are almost universally followed by the general public and specialists alike, even when the names do not correspond to historical reality. For example, the yellow flag with the coiled rattlesnake and motto referred to as the "Gadsden flag" was apparently used as a personal rank signal by the first Commander of the American Navy, Commodore Esek Hopkins. The existence of other rattlesnake flags in his native Rhode Island suggests that it was a popular motif in that state and that it should be known as the "Hopkins flag" or "Rhode Island rattlesnake flag". Nevertheless, the original flag was admired by a certain Col. Christopher Gadsden from South Carolina who presented a replica to the provincial congress (i.e., legislature) of his home state. That flag was hung in its chamber and has long since disappeared, but the design has ever since been known as the "Gadsden Flag". Attempts to change this name have been made difficult by widespread public acceptance of the term, which in turn makes flag manufacturers reluctant to abandon it in their catalogs and publicity material.

Another example is the "Grand Union flag", which has also been referred to as the "Cambridge flag". Alfred Merton Cutler in his "The Real First National Flag" 4) has laid to rest any possible legitimate use of the latter term. He also noted

The author has found no contemporary reference to this flag under the name of "Grand Union"; there is mention of it as "Continental" and "Congress Colours". It is not inappropriate to name or call the flag "The Great Union", because in one sense, it represented in the canton and field of its design, respectively, a combination of The Union of the Mother Country with The Union of the Colonies. After the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the design became incongruous, so that thereafter when it was termed the "Continental (or Congress) Colours", that name was then more accurately appropriate and distinctive, although the design was retained unchanged and so used until June 14, 1777.

Washington, following what was apparently the very first hoisting of this flag, referred to it simply as "the Union flag". 5) Newspaper accounts mention it as "the great Union Flag", 6) probably suggesting by the use of the word "great" the large size of the flag. Preble has two unsubstantiated quotations in which reference is made to the "grand union flag". 7) He subsequently uses that name for the flag, thus apparently initiating the substitution of this neologism for the name by which the flag was familiarly to Americans at the time of its actual usage.

In some cases the existence of two names has fostered the impression that there were two distinct flags whereas in fact a single basic design, sometimes with slight variances, was in use at the time without any collective name by which they might be known. Thus, just as the term Stars and Stripes is regularly applied to all American national

flags regardless of the number of stars, so in the period from 1686 to 1776 there were a number of variations of a flag sometimes referred to as the New England flag. The jack and ensign form of the final version of the New England flag have found their way into history book under the names "Continental flag", "Bunker Hill flag", "Washington's cruiser' flag", "pine tree flag", liberty tree flag", and "Massachusetts navy flag." There is strong sentiment among non-vexillologists to cherish such names and even flag designs, regardless of scholarly opinions of their authenticity. It seems impossible to remove a given flag from the public consciousness, once it has appeared in a book. Inexplicably, however, certain flags seem to be more popular than others without regard to their similarity of design, verifiable background, or association with an historical event or person.

In addition to the problems relating to the names of the flags in question, the designs themselves in many cases are misunderstood and misrepresented. The apparent weight of evidence through continued reprinting of unverified material has made it difficult to establish correct designs, although some progress has been made in recent years. For example, the stars in the flag of the Rhode Island regiment, shown as white in Preble's plate referred to above, were in fact clearly gold and were shown as such inter alia in a series of postage stamps issued in 1968 by the United States Post Office. While there is an almost identical flag from the same state in which the stars were white, the problem of the proper color was relatively easy to resolve because the two flags in question are still in existence and can readily be examined by the public at the state Capitol in Providence, Rhode Island. 8) Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that a committee to investigate the question, established by the North American Vexillological Associations, did not reach any unanimous agreement on the coloring of the stars and even after a visit to the flags in question.

Close examination of an original flag has also turned up new evidence affecting our understanding of the origins of the American national flag. For years books stated that the canton of silver and blue stripes in the flag carried by the Philadelphia City Cavalry (or Light Horse Troop) was a plausible origin for the stripes in the national flag of the United States, since it was known that the banner had been made during the summer of 1775 and that the troop which carried it served as an escort to Gen. George Washington when he left Philadelphia to take command of the continental troops in Cambridge, Massachusetts 9) It was surmised that his sight of the flag with stripes suggested that as a device-albeit in red and white instead of silver and blue - appropriate for the nation itself, symbolizing thirteen colonies united in an attempt to restore their lost liberties through military struggle with Great Britain.

Unfortunately for this theory it was discovered in 1972 that the original canton of the flag was a British Union Jack. The stripes had been painted over that emblem, obviously at a later time and probably because of their use in the national flag. That this had not previously been noted was perhaps because past vexillologists had seen not the original flag but a somewhat later replica also carried by the troop; or perhaps because they had worked from photographs of poor quality which did not show the Union Jack under the stripes. Yet ironically the first published photograph to show the Union Jack clearly (in Boleslaw and Marie-Louise Nastal's *The Stars and Stripes*) was not

appreciated by these authors, who instead repeated the traditional story about the flag as a source of the stripes now forming part of the American national flag.

Not all analysis, of course, can be based on the direct evidence of an original flag. In the case of the Bedford flag, a similarity of design and of manufacturing technique to flags made in England in the previous century (i.e., the mid-1600's) has established the basis for believing that the flag is the same as that carried by the Three County Troop, which otherwise is known only from a manuscript illustration in Britain. The arguments adduced to prove that the two flags are the same, presented in a paper delivered by this author at the 3rd International Congress of Vexillology, constitute a hypothesis which might be revised or refuted by further documentation in the future.

Another example is illuminating insofar as the process of establishing correct designs is concerned. Preble, following a published account of the battle of Fort Moultrie on 28 June 1776, describes the flag used on that occasion as a "large blue flag...with a crescent in the dexter corner...with the word LIBERTY emblazoned in it.) 10). His illustration, obviously a reconstruction based on the verbal description, shows the word Liberty written along the bottom side of the flag in large letters. Nevertheless in 1972 local historians in South Carolina, investigating contemporary evidence in anticipation of using the flag on trailmarkers along an historical route through the state, determined that no illustrations made at the time of the battle show any such word on the flag. The conclusion, therefore, was that either the flag never had the word written on it or that it must have appeared on the crescent itself (being too small to be seen in the artistic representations). This idea is reinforced by knowledge that the design of the flag was based on the blue uniforms of the defenders of the fort, which were decorated with a cap badge in the form of a silver crescent inscribed Liberty or Death. Again, a combination of contemporary evidence and modern hypothesis have formed the basis for a reconstruction which may reasonably be held as reliable until such time as further new documentation or new interpretation is found.

Unfortunately, such evidence has been lost - even within the present century - which would be of enormous value to vexillologists in making definitive statements on Revolutionary War flags. For example, the flags known to have existed within the past century (that of the Haverford Associates, that of the New-buryport Company, and the Moulton flag) have disappeared and only second-hand evidence is now available concerning them. Flag "historians" have frequently been careless in their references, such that documentary material which would tend to prove certain claims one way or the other cannot be traced for lack of precision. Countering this is the strong and growing excellence of source material on the period available as published material or micro form. Enormous patience is, of course, required to read through the voluminous documentation for those few, elusive references to flags, many of which are tantalizingly brief or frustratingly unclear. Nevertheless, as a corollary to the high American interest in historical flags, it is probably safe to assert that no country has been more thorough in the vexillological researches undertaken into its past.

A number of questions have arisen as a result of the extensive public use of and interest in Revolutionary War flags. A query frequently posed is: What were the original flags of the states at the time of the Revolution? In fact only two such flags existed, those of South

Carolina and Massachusetts. Despite the strong American tradition of political individualism, even today maintained in the federal political system and the local autonomy of cities, flags were not created for the vast majority of the states until late in the 19th century. Prior to the Revolution Maryland, as a proprietary colony, was entitled to and indeed made use of the armorial banner of its proprietors, the Lords Baltimore. That handsome black and gold banner, incorporated today into the Maryland state flag and influential in the design of the Baltimore city flag, ceased to be used at the time of the Revolution because of associations with the past regime.

South Carolina officially adopted as a flag the blue banner with the white crescent in the upper hoist referred to above under its popular name, the Fort Moultrie flag. It thereby established a tradition, confirmed during the Civil War (1861-1865) and continuing on to the present day (the state flag now being the same with the addition of a white palmetto tree in the center). Massachusetts in April of 1776 adopted for its navy a white flag with a green pine tree and the motto "Appeal to Heaven." That design had previously been employed (without the motto) as one version of the New England flag and the suggestion was once made that it might serve as the ensign for all American vessels. Its use was revived in the 1960's and in 1971 the version without the motto was officially recognized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as its official state flag for use on water.

Some of the other states had emblems which can be found today in their state-flags- the anchor and stars of Rhode Island and the state arms on blue of New York being the most familiar examples. Nevertheless their use at the time of the Revolution was strictly limited to regimental colors, the exact form varying from one regiment to the next and the flags being - so far as we know - in no wise comparable in usage to the modern state flag. It is not even possible for us to designate an authentic flag from each of the original thirteen states, no regimental colors of any kind being known to exist for Georgia, North Carolina, or New Jersey.

Here indeed is one of the fundamental problems of any study of the flags of this period: there are something on the order of seventy Revolutionary War flags known to have been used, either during the years of war or immediately before or immediately afterward when pre-Revolutionary agitation and post-military consolidation were underway. Considering the number of units participating in the war - many of which had more than one flag, particularly over the course of several years' service - and in light of the extensive usage of the Continental Colors and Stars and Stripes on ships, public buildings, and even by private citizens, it must be reasonably be assumed that we have remaining to us fewer than one percent of the Revolutionary War flag originally used. Obviously those remaining provide little basis for generalization about designs, even if we take into consideration the standardized patterns which supposedly existed for both military and naval flags of certain types.

There is a further problem which regards the authenticity of the flags that do remain to us. It is extremely difficult to date with any precision the years of manufacture or use of a flag and very few have a lineage confirmed by contemporary newspaper accounts, diaries, letters, or similar documentation. In many cases, of course, the design may provide some clues: the Westmoreland County color, for example, combines the rattlesnake emblem first used in 1754 by

Benjamin Franklin and the Union Jack which appears to have been used last in America in late 1777. Three other examples show the general difficulty of establishing a definitive list of Revolutionary War Flag

Unofficially, the Bennington Flag is recognized and flown as America's Bicentennial flag. Its popularity undoubtedly stems from the fact that it is recognizably American in its design, yet distinctive enough to be flown together with the current flag without duplicating it. Most of the information we have concerning it derives from the book *The Stars and Stripes in 1777* by John Spargo, and its enlarged reedition Spargo admits that it is only local tradition which supports the claim that the Bennington flag was carried or otherwise displayed during the Battle of Bennington (just outside the town of that name in Vermont) on 16 August 1777. Recent textile examination by experts from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, however, have suggested that the flag was made in the 19th century - possibly as a flag to celebrate the Centennial of 1876. The "state of art" in the dating of flags by thread analysis, fiber count dye characteristics, and similar technical aspects is not very far advanced, despite the significant improvement it constitutes over previous methods of determining the age of flags. At this point it is simply impossible to determine whether or not the Bennington flag is an authentic American Revolutionary War flag - and hence a legitimate claimant to the title of first Stars and Stripes used in battle - or whether it is only an interesting relic of the late 19th century.

Likewise, a flag preserved in Easton, Pennsylvania, has an unusual formation that suggests an early variant of the Stars and Stripes - perhaps an experimental model. Its field of blue bears an oval of 12 eight-pointed white stars surrounding a thirteenth in the center of the flag's fly end, the canton consisting of thirteen horizontal red and white stripes. Local supporters in Easton believe it to be the very flag hoisted on the reading of the Declaration of Independence in that town in July of 1776, and, hence, an inspiration for the national flag adopted less than a year later in nearby Philadelphia. Scholars rather tend to view it as an early century flag, but the similarity of manufacturing details makes it difficult to be more precise than to place it within the fifty year period starting from the Revolution through about 1826.

For the same reason the Guilford Court House flag, supposedly carried at the Battle of Cowpens (North Carolina) in 1781 presents an enigma which only further documentation can help us to resolve. An intriguing hypothesis has been advanced by the Smithsonian that the original flag had fifteen stars and fifteen stripes of which a number have been lost (or cut away) in the intervening years. (1) Local pride naturally likes to see this flag as an early, authentic North Carolina banner associated with the very first days of the young republic and in the absence of overwhelming documentary evidence to the contrary, scholars find it difficult to deny this point of view categorically.

A problem of a completely different sort is presented in the concern of Americans for proper etiquette in the flying of replicas of his torical flags in modern situations. Where a single pole exists, the Bennington or "Betsey Ross flag" is frequently a substitute for the current flag of fifty stars, although many look on this as being improper in light of the Flag Code injunction against displaying "any other national or international flag equal, above, or in a position

of superior prominence or honor to, or in place of the flag of the United States at any place without the United States ..." Since the Code is only a set of recommendations or guidelines for those who are not subject to government or military requirements and since there are no penal provisions associated with the Code, such reservations are unjustified.

When an historical flag is flown from the same pole as the current national flag, there is no question as to its proper display: it should be below and of the same size or smaller than, the current Stars and Stripes. A problem arises where there are two or more poles: there they have simply been no traditions developed in the United States (or elsewhere in the world) to answer the questions arising from the simultaneous display of several flags from different historical eras. It is the recommendation of the Flag Research Center that historical flags be considered secondary only to the current official flag of the same entity or its equal. Thus "the Betsy Ross flag", as the supposed original flag of the United States, would take precedence over a current state flag, historical state flag, current city or corporate flag - in that order - but would be secondary to the fifty-star Stars and Stripes. In actual practise when large groups of such flags are flown together, it is frequently the custom to arrange them in their chronological order - the main problem with this arrangement being that so little is known about the precise dating of most of the flags. There are also many overlapping dates, as many of the original flags continued to be used for a number of years.

Of the flags which do remain to us is known so that broad categories can be established for the analysis of the subject in a systematic fashion (2). The earliest group of flags might be called banners of agitation; they commenced to be used in 1765 with the Stamp Act Protest and disappeared in the first years of armed conflict (1775-1776) as more formal and more official flags took their place. The early flags are characterized by the extensive use of words - including such slogans as "Liberty", "No Popery", and "George III". These flags are mostly adaptations of the British Red Ensign or Union Jack, although there is, strong evidence suggesting that flags composed of red and white stripes were used as the factional emblem of radicals, in particular the sons of Liberty.

The second group comprises all sorts of military colors - camp markers, guidons, infantry colors, cavalry cornets, etc. These were largely unique flags made of silk with their designs painted on, although a number of them have sewn parts as well. Stars and stripes were frequent motifs, but allegorical scenes of great complexity and symbolism were often used as well. For hundreds of flags that belonged to the United States at the time, only pure speculation can exist as to design. Even reconstructing a design from fragments is extremely difficult. For example, a fragment of the flag carried by the Green Mountain Boys is blue with white stars on it and green threads on all four sides. It has frequently been reconstructed as the canton of a plain green flag, but it might as easily have been the center of a plain green flag or a canton for a flag that bore some emblem on the green.

The third major group consists of versions of the two basic national flags used during the Revolution, the Continental Colors and the Stars and Stripes. This article is not the appropriate place to give a complete history and analysis of these two flags, but certain points

should be made which relate specifically to their modern usage in replica. The Continental Colors, although never clearly adopted by Congress, in fact constituted the first national flag of the United States and provided not only the canton and field pattern and the thirteen stripes followed subsequently in the 27 different versions of the Stars and Stripes, but clearly shows the British provenance of their design and colors.

More flattering to the national ego is the story of Betsy Ross. This patriot widow, according to the legend, is visited by the Father of Our Country (i.e. General George Washington) and asked if she can make the first flag for the nation. American initiative rings from her legendary reply: "I don't know, but I'll try". Then the Great Man sits down and listens to her suggestions for changes in the design - which he readily accepts - following which the first flag is sewn. Polk art throughout the 19th and 20th centuries has produced numerous representations of the scene, although for the sake of visual appeal the visit of Washington and his committee of Congress are usually made coincidental with the sewing of the flag which the legend places at a later date.

I have dealt elsewhere with the documentary evidence concerning the known involvement of Mrs. Ross with the flag 13) Here it is appropriate to know that there is an entirely separate question to be considered, namely whether the design traditionally associated with the story and known as the "Betsy Ross flag" - in which the thirteen stars are arranged in a ring in the canton- in fact has any proven association with her. The books supporting her claim seem universally to favor this design and even those which cast doubt on the Betsy Ross legend illustrate this flag 14). Her granddaughter made small replicas of this design and the public is firmly wedded to it as her flag, but contemporary evidence from the Revolution is an entirely different matter.

There appear in fact to be only three times items supporting the existence of such a flag in the Revolution, none is an actual flag and two were the work of foreigners. A fourth apparent piece of evidence, namely the flag in a portrait of Washington by Peale, in fact turns out to be simply a blue flag showing a ring (or oval) of stars without any stripes. It is believed that this was a version of the personal rank flag of Washington as Commander in Chief.

The only American evidence favoring the "Betsy Ross flag" pattern is a powderhorn from Rhode Island 15) in which the flag with a ring of stars is shown next to the Continental Colors, the two flags being separated by the word "which?", presumably indicating confusion in the mind of the soldier who carved the powderhorn over the proper national flag in late 1777. Another representation is part of the crest in a coat of arms proposed for the United States by William Barton, an Englishman 16) The third version is found in an engraving for the membership certificate of the Society of the Cincinnati (a veterans' organization of Revolutionary War soldiers) created by Pierre C. L'Enfant, a Frenchman 17) (The stars are actually an oval, but here as in the Peale portrait this may be due to a distortion for artistic purposes).

It is my hypothesis that Europeans who had not seen an actual American flag invented the ring of stars pattern for heraldic reasons. It certainly was known to all that the stars numbered thirteen, to correspond to the states which had risen in rebellion against Great Britain-

Thus the semi pattern which would have been shown if the canton had an indeterminate number of stars seemed inappropriate to those who liked strict heraldic logic. Americans did not think in heraldic terms, however, and examples of the flag as flown from the very earliest days to the beginning of the twentieth century make it clear that the stars were in fact almost as likely to be in an irregular scattering as in a regular figure. Moreover, those of the latter type, (i.e. a geometric pattern) tended to favor simple rows of stars, staggered or not, with the most common arrangements of the thirteen-star flag known to us from contemporary evidence being rows of 3-2-3-2-3 or 4-5-4-. A ring or oval or square of twelve stars with one in the center, aesthetically much more pleasing than the empty ring of thirteen stars, was also common. In any event the present popularity of the ring of stars, apparently a 19th century invention, began when it appeared in patriotic paintings, such as "Washington Crossing the Delaware" by the German painter Emanuel Leutze and "The Spirit of '76" by Archibald Williard.

From the perspective of 1975 it is the "Betsy Ross flag" which alone symbolizes the national flag at the time of the Revolution - an idea supported by the government itself in the issue of millions of postage stamps with a representation of this flag prominently featured. In this regard the United States is not alone in having a mistaken idea of its most prominent historical flag. Other examples could be cited where faulty historical research has led modern citizens of a particular country into misconceptions about their own authentic flag past, the most notable examples being the provincial flags of the Orange Free State and Transvaal 18) Ironically, the number of "Betsy Ross flags" probably is ten times or more greater than the total number of flags of thirteen stars actually used during the years (1777-1795) when that number was official. Whatever the historical inaccuracy of its design, we cannot disregard the usage today of the "Betsy Ross flag", which might accurately (if clumsily) be described as the "unofficial American national flag flown in honor of the Revolutionary War".

A similar flag situation exists in Charlestown, Massachusetts, concerning the Bunker Hill flag. Again, full documentation cannot be presented here on the legend, but the conclusions of this researcher are that the flag shown by John Trumbull in his painting "The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker's Hill" - i.e. a red flag with a green tree on a white canton - was in fact the American standard on that fateful day, 17 June 1775, when American farmers and tradesmen stood up to British regulars in defense of their liberties.

Based on information first published by Benson J. Lossing and subsequently repeated by Preble and most flag books, the modern "Bunker Hill flag" - actually a Charlestown community flag - is blue with a white canton bearing, in addition to the green tree, the red cross of St. George. This is used by the local schools, by the Charlestown Militia (a community organization for Revolutionary War military reenactments) and is widely sold as a souvenir. It is also displayed as a community flag by people from Charlestown in demonstrations against school busing, the political issue which has done the most to arouse local citizens in recent years. Linked to their opposition to outside interference in community affairs (which is the way a large number in Charlestown view the court-ordered busing to achieve school integration) is a xenophobic rejection of "outsiders". This included the author of this article, who lives a bare six miles (ten kilome-

ters) from Charlestown, when he has attempted to set the historical record straight concerning the flag used at the Battle of Bunker Hill. While some members of the community (for example, librarians at the Charlestown Branch of the Boston Public Library) have been sympathetic to a disinterested historical analysis, many local citizens feel that a change in the flag design now used is somehow an attack on the identity and personality of Charlestown itself. This recalls the reaction of the late president of the United States Flag Foundation, a scion of Rhode Island ancestry from pre-Revolutionary days, in dealing with the question of the correct color of the stars in the Rhode Island regimental flag: "We don't want outsiders coming into Rhode Island and telling us the color of the stars in our flag".

In sum, Revolutionary War era flags in the United States present characteristics unique in the world. The actual number of original flags is rather restricted and the amount of information about them, particularly that without contradiction and without imprecision, very limited indeed. Nevertheless, the flags as group and certain ones in particular have had an enormous influence on the national mentality and continue to this day to be known and used in replica by large segments of the population. The perception of national origins and of national character; the assertion of revolutionary origins (which, paradoxically, is often a counterpart to a rejection of revolutionary attitudes towards contemporary politics), commercial and artistic exploitation of flag themes, and community identification with "their own" flags from the past are important characteristics to be observed. In analyzing the flags of the American Revolution, therefore, the vexillologist must be aware that the subject he is studying is far from a dead issue: the flags in question have two "existences" to consider--their original usage and modern adaptations. Finally, change in the very process of study of the subject is far from over, despite the great volume of material published, some as much as a century ago. Regarding each flag there is without question still more to be discovered, analysed, and hypothesized; far from being overworked, the subject of American flags of the Revolution remains a rich vein for future vexillological work.

FOOTNOTES

1. For more information on this subject, see my report on "Flags in Advertising", to be published in the *Recueil* of the 4th International Congress of Vexillology, (Turin, 1971).
2. See Harold R. Manakee and Roger S. Whiteford, *The Regimental Colors of the 175th Infantry (Fifth Maryland)* (?Baltimore: Military Department, State of Maryland, 1959), pp.51ff.
3. The first one, published in 1913, is entitled *The Standards, Flags and Banners of the Pennsylvania Society of the Sons of the Revolution*.
4. Published in 1929 by the School Committee of Somerville, Massachusetts; the quotation is from page 3.
5. *Ibid.*, p.9
6. *Ibid.*, p.10
7. From page 218 of the 1860 edition (Boston: A.Williams).

8. See also the discussion on pages 34-36 in Howard M. Chapin's *Illustrations of the Seals, Arms and Flags of Rhode Island* (Providence Rhode Island Historical Society, 1930).
9. See especially William M. Narkee, *Historical Development of the American Flag* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1952)
10. *Op. cit.*, pp. 209-210
11. Grace Rogers Cooper, *Thirteen-Star Flags: Keys to Identification* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1973), p.27
12. This categorization is made clear in my *American Flags of the Revolution* (Franklin Center: Franklin Mint, 1975)
13. "Face to Face with Betsy Ross", *The Flag Bulletin*, Vol. XIV, no 1 (January-February 1975), pp. 3-26
14. See, for example, Milo M. Quaife, Melvin J. Weig, and Roy E. Appleman *The History of the United States Flag*, (New York: Harper and Bros. 1964).
15. See Stephen V. Grancsay, *American Engraved Powder Horns* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1946), p.20.
16. E. Totten, *The Great Seal of the United States* (New Haven: c. 1896), Volume I, p.79.
17. Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.5.
18. The original flag of the Orange Free State had eight stripes instead of seven and the original flag of the Transvaal had the national motto inscribed upon it; see C.Pama, *Lions and Virgins* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1965), pp. 74-75.

