

## The Origins of the U.S. Flag

by Catherine Millard

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### How did the United States Flag Originate? - Betsy Ross and the Stars and Stripes:

At 239 Arch Street in historic Philadelphia, stands the restored colonial home of **Betsy Ross**. Here she received a committee from Continental Congress comprised of **George Washington, Colonel George Ross and Robert Morris**, who commissioned her to make the first American flag in 1776. It was Washington's desire to have a six-pointed star. However, when Betsy Ross, with a deft snip of her scissors, cut a perfect, five-pointed star for him, the committee, unanimously impressed, opted for five points in each star of the star-spangled banner.

The large Ross family consisted of seven children. Betsy's family Bible is on permanent display in the Ross home, showing forth in whom she and her family placed their trust. Betsy Ross and her family were members of Christ Church – "The nation's church" – in Philadelphia. A plaque in that church designates her family pew, not far from George and Martha Washington's pew, together with a depiction of the original 13-star flag, and the inscription:

Here worshipped Mrs. Elizabeth Ross  
Who, Under the Direction of a  
Committee of Continental Congress  
Composed of:  
George Washington  
Robert Morris  
and  
George Ross  
Was the Maker of the  
First American Flag  
1777

### Francis Scott Key and the Star-Spangled Banner:

On September 14, 1814, Christian Patriot, **Francis Scott Key**, wrote his heaven-inspired poem at an inn in Baltimore harbor, portraying America's flag – her foremost symbol, representing her origins, dependence upon Almighty God and the value system as a nation. Ever since he came ashore from a ship after watching the American flag fly triumphantly through the bombardment of Fort McHenry, his immortal poem has been cherished by Americans with the deepest patriotic devotion. It is interesting that many people are only familiar with the first stanza of this poem. However, the remaining stanzas clearly speak of the relationship of God to this nation and its citizens' dependence upon Him. It is here printed in its entirety:

## The Star-Spangled Banner

O say! Can you see, by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rocket's red glare, the bomb bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.  
O say, does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,  
As it fitfully blows half conceals, half discloses?  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream,  
'Tis the Star-Spangled Banner – O long may it wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,  
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion  
A home and a Country should leave us no more?  
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution.  
No refuge could save the hireling and slave  
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,  
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph doth wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

O thus be it ever when free men shall stand  
Between their loved homes and war's desolation!  
Blest with victory and peace may the heaven-rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!  
Then conquer we must when our cause it is just  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."  
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

These magnificent words, depicting love of God and country, were adapted to the inspiring music of John Stafford Smith (c. 1780).

On March 3, 1931, an Act to make the Star-Spangled Banner the national anthem of the United States of America, was resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled (36 U.S.C. Sec. 170).

Millions of Americans throughout the ensuing years have paid homage to their flag – the Star-Spangled Banner, by singing the National Anthem, giving full expression to their love of Almighty God and their homeland.

**Poems of Francis Scott Key**  
Author of “The Star-Spangled Banner”

**On Reading Lines by Fawcett**  
**On Revisiting Scenes of Early Life**

So sings the world’s fond slave! So flies the dream  
Of life’s gay morn; so sinks the meteor ray  
Of fancy into darkness; and no beam  
Of purer light shines on the wanderer’s way.

So sings not he who soars on other wings  
Than fancy lends him; whom a cheering faith  
Warms and sustains, and whose freed spirit springs  
To joys that bloom beyond the reach of death.

And thou would’st live again! Again dream o’er  
The wild and feverish visions of thy youth  
Again to wake in sorrow, and deplore  
Thy wanderings from the peaceful paths of truth!

Yet yield not to despair! be born again,  
And thou shalt live a life of joy and peace,  
Shall die a death of triumph, and thy strain  
Be changed to notes of rapture ne’er to cease.

**“All Things Are Yours.”**  
I Corinthians 3:21

Behold the grant the King of kings  
Hath to his subjects given:  
“All things are yours,” it saith; all things  
That are in earth and heaven.

The saints are yours, to guide you home,  
And bless you with their prayers;  
The world is yours, to overcome  
Its pleasures and its cares;

And life is yours, to give it all  
To works of faith and love;

And death is yours, a welcome call  
To higher joys above;

All present things are yours: whate'er  
God's providence decreed.  
Is from His treasures called with care,  
And sent to suit thy need;

And things to come are yours: and all  
Shall ever ordered be,  
To keep thee safe, whate'er befall,  
And work for good to thee;

And Christ is yours – his sacrifice,  
To speak your sins forgiven:  
His righteousness the only price  
That thou canst pay for heaven.

Thus God is yours – thus reconciled,  
His love your bliss secures,  
The Father looks upon the child  
And saith, "All things are yours."

### **Efficacy of Prayer**

"When I called upon thee thou heardest me,  
and enduedst my soul with much strength."  
Psalm 103:3

When troubles, wave on wave, assailed,  
And fear my soul appalled,  
I knew the Lord would rescue me,  
And for deliverance called.

Still onward, onward came the flood;  
Again I sought the Lord,  
And prayed that he the waves would still  
By his resistless word.

But still they rushing came; again  
Arose my earnest prayer,  
And then I prayed for faith and strength  
Whate'er he willed, to bear.

Then his felt presence was my strength,  
His outstretched arm was nigh;

My head he raised, my heart he cheered,  
“Fear not,” he said, “’tis I.”

Strong in that strength, I rose above  
The tempest’s fierce alarms;  
It drove me to a port of peace,  
Within a Saviour’s arms.

### **Life**

If life’s pleasures cheer thee,  
Give them not thy heart,  
Lest the gifts ensnare thee  
From thy God to part:  
His praises speak, his favor seek,  
Fix there thy hopes’ foundation;  
Love him, and he shall ever be  
The rock of thy salvation.

If sorrow e’er befall thee,  
Painful though it be,  
Let not fear appal thee:  
To thy Saviour flee;  
He, ever near, thy prayer will hear,  
And calm thy perturbation;  
The waves of woe shall ne’er o’erflow  
The rock of thy salvation.

Death shall never harm thee,  
Shrink not from his blow,  
For thy God shall arm thee,  
And victory bestow:  
For death shall bring to thee no sting,  
The grave no desolation;  
’Tis gain to die, with Jesus nigh,  
The rock of thy salvation.

### **Man**

“The days of man are but as grass; for he  
flourisheth as a flower of the field.  
“For as soon as the wind goeth over it, it  
is gone, and the place thereof shall know  
it no more.  
“But the merciful goodness of the Lord

endureth forever and ever upon them that  
fear him, and his righteousness upon  
children's children;  
"Even upon such as keep his covenant and  
think upon his commandments to do them.  
"The Lord hath prepared his seat in heaven,  
and his kingdom ruleth over all."  
Psalm 103:15-19

Such are thy days – so shall they pass away –  
As flowers that bloom at morn, at eve decay;  
But then, there comes a life that knows no end –  
Rich in unfading joys that far transcend  
Thy highest thoughts or warmest wishes – given  
To those whose days on earth have fitted them for heaven.

### **Home**

O! Where can the soul find relief from its foes,  
A shelter of safety, a home of repose?  
Can earth's brightest summit, or deepest hid vale,  
Give a refuge no sorrow nor sin can assail?  
No, no, there's no home!  
There's no home on earth; the soul has no home.

Shall it leave the low earth, and soar to the sky,  
And seek an abode in the mansions on high?  
In the bright realms of bliss shall a dwelling be given,  
And the soul find a home in the glory of heaven?  
Yes, yes, there's a home!  
There's a home in high heaven: the soul has a home!

O! holy and sweet its rest shall be there,  
Free forever from sin, from sorrow and care;  
And the loud hallelujahs of angels shall rise  
To welcome the soul to its home in the skies.  
Home, home, home of the soul!  
The bosom of God is the home of the soul.

### **Hymn**

Lord, with glowing heart I'd praise thee  
For the bliss thy love bestows,  
For the pardoning grace that saves me,

And the peace that from it flows.  
Help, O God! my weak endeavor,  
This dull soul to rapture raise;  
Thou must light the flame, or never  
Can my love be warmed to praise.

Praise, my soul, the God that sought thee,  
Wretched wanderer, far astray;  
Found thee lost, and kindly brought thee  
From the paths of death away.

Praise, with love's devoutest feeling,  
Him who saw thy guilt-born fear,  
And, the light of hope revealing,  
Bade the blood-stained cross appear.

Lord! This bosom's ardent feeling  
Vainly would my lips express;  
Low before thy foot-stool kneeling,  
Deign thy suppliant's prayer to bless.  
Let thy grace, my soul's chief treasure,  
Love's pure flame within me raise;  
And, since words can never measure,  
Let my life show forth thy praise.

(For further information see the book, *The Christian Heritage of the 50 United States of America*, © 2000. ([www.christianheritagetours.org](http://www.christianheritagetours.org)).