

About our flag's myths

Myth: Betsy Ross created the country's first flag.

Fact: Historians say "not true."

They credit a somewhat obscure signer of the Declaration of Independence, Francis Hopkinson from New Jersey, as the probable designer. He chaired a Continental Navy unit that designed emblems for the new country, including the great seal of the U.S. He also served in Congress.

Ross indeed sewed flags for about 50 years, but her well-known version with the stars in a circle appeared in the early 1790s, well after the Hopkinson design adopted by the Second Continental Congress in 1777.

Myth: The flag has always had just 13 stripes.

Fact: Not true. The second official flag had 15. When the next version was approved in 1818, the flag reverted to 13 alternating red and white stripes since Congress decided that adding a strip for every state would be too cumbersome. Instead, a star is added when new states are admitted to the union.

Myth: Some of our country's flags were in colors other than red, white and blue.

Fact: False. Only flags adopted by Congress are considered official, and from the very first one, all have been red, white and blue. Some flags during the Revolution and later were of other designs and colors, but none were official.

Myth: When a new flag is adopted, old ones should be destroyed.

Fact: Once adopted by Congress, a flag is always official and may continue to be used.

Myth: Each color in the flag represents a virtue of the country.

Fact: Not officially. A resolution of the Second Continental Congress in 1777 says only that the flag shall have 13 stripes, alternating in red and white, and 13 stars, representing the union (country), set in a blue field signifying “a new constellation.”