

Betsy ROSS

(1752 – 1836)

Betsy Ross was a seamstress and flag maker. Some people believe that she made the first American flag during the War for Independence from a sketched design that George Washington gave her.

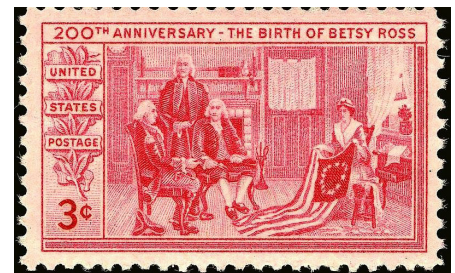
Betsy's Childhood

Betsy was born into a Quaker family in January 1st, 1752. She was the eighth of 17 children. Like her sisters, she attended Quaker schools. She was taught to sew by her great-aunt Sarah.

After she finished her schooling at a Quaker-run school, her father apprenticed her to a local upholsterer named William Webster. At the age of 17, she met John Ross, an Anglican, and they decided to get married. This was a problem as it was forbidden to marry outside of the Quaker religion, and Betsy was expelled by her family.

In 1755, Betsy and John set up their own upholstery business together, and Betsy continued this business after John died.

Her day-to-day work involved making flags, repairing uniforms and making tents and blankets for the Continental Army.



Betsy Ross 200th Anniversary commemorative stamp, issued 1952

The legend of the flag

A legend has been built up about how Betsy Ross created the first American flag, even though there is no official evidence to prove it.

The story was first publicly told after her death, many years later by her grandson, William Canby.

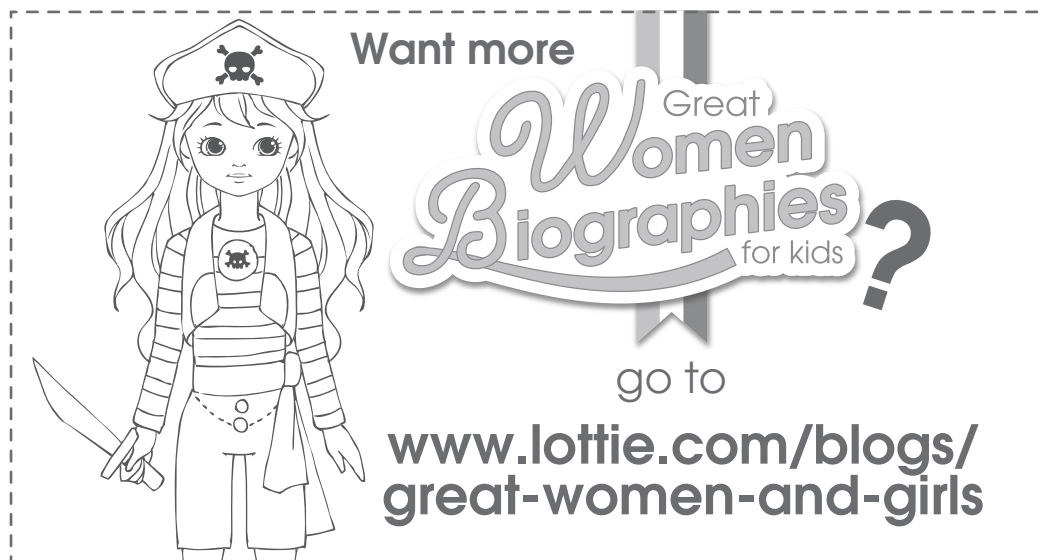
William explained how his grandmother had often talked about a visit she had received in late May or early June of 1776 from three men: General George Washington, Robert Morris and George Ross. During this meeting, she was shown a sketch of a flag and asked if she could make a flag just like the design. The sketch of the flag had 13 red and white stripes and 13 six-pointed stars.

Betsy is said to have agreed to make the flag, but also that she suggested a couple of changes, including arranging the stars in a circle and reducing the points on each star to five instead of six.

The evidence

There is no evidence to say for certain that Betsy Ross created the first flag. However; it is true that she was a flag maker, and there is evidence that she was paid in 1777 by the Pennsylvania State Navy Board for making “ships colours”.

On June 14, 1777, Congress formally made the Stars and Stripes as the national flag.



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