

The Birth and Growth of the American Flag

The American Flag

By JOSEPH RODMAN DRAKE

WHEN Freedom from her mountain height
Unfurled her standard to the air,
She tore the azure robe of night,
And set the stars of glory there;
She mingled with its gorgeous dyes
The milky baldrick of the skies,
And striped its pure celestial white
With streakings of the morning light;
Then from his mansion in the sun
She called her eagle-bearer down,
And gave into his mighty hand
The symbol of her chosen land.

MAJESTIC monarch of the cloud!
Who rear'st aloft thy regal form
To hear the tempest-trumpings loud,
And see the lightning lances driven,
When strive the warriors from the storm,
And rolls the thunder drum of heaven—
Child of the Sun! to thee 'tis given
To guard the banner of the free,
To hover in the sulphur's smoke,
To ward away the battle-stroke,
And bid its blendings shine afar,
Like rainbows on the cloud of war,
The harbingers of victory.

FLAG of the brave, thy folds shall fly
The sign of hope and triumph high,
When speaks the signal trumpet tone,
And the long line comes gleaming on;
And yet the life blood, warm and wet,
Has dimmed the glistening bayonet,
Each soldier's eye shall brightly turn
To where thy sky-born glories burn;
And, as his springing steps advance,
Catch war and vengeance from the glance;
And when the cannon-mouthings loud
Heave in wild wreaths the battle shroud,
And gory sabers rise and fall
Like shoots of flame on midnight's pall,
There shall thy meteor glances glow,
And cowering foes shall sink beneath
Each gallant arm that strikes below
That lovely messenger of death.

FLAG of the seas, on ocean wave
Thy stars shall glitter o'er the brave;
When death, careering on the gale,
Sweeps darkly round the bellied sail,
And frightened waves rush wildly back
Before the broadside's reeling rack,
Each dying wanderer of the sea
Shall look at once to heaven and thee,
And smile to see thy splendors fly
In triumph o'er his closing eye.

FLAG of the free heart's hope and home,
By angel hands to valor given!
Thy stars have lit the welkin dome
And all thy hues were born in heaven.
Forever float that standard sheet!
Where breathes the foe that falls before us,
With Freedom's soil beneath our feet,
And Freedom's banner streaming o'er us!



Colonial—1686. The earliest notice of a New England flag emblematic of the union of more than one colony.	Taunton—1774. At Taunton, Mass., in 1774, two years before the Declaration of Independence, this flag was unfurled.	Bunker Hill—1775. This is the standard the colonists carried at the battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775.	Pine Tree—1775. The earliest use of the pine tree on American flags was July 15, 1775, as shown here.	Rattlesnake—1776. Flags with thirteen stripes, alternate red and white, became very popular early in 1776.	Crescent—1776. This is the most famous of flags used in the South at the beginning of the revolutionary war.	Grand Union—1776. This standard was variously called the "Union Flag," "Grand Union Flag" and "Great Union Flag."	Betsy Ross—1777. The first American flag adopted by Congress, 1777, was made by Betsy Ross.	Our Flag—1818. April, 1818, Congress passed an act to establish the flag of the United States.
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