

Middle School Advisory

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Betsy Ross: A Woman of Her Time

Betsy Ross was known for possibly helping create or sew the first flag of the United States of America. Even though no one knows whether or not the story is true, Betsy Ross was still an important woman of the American Revolutionary War time period. She helped the United States in her own way and was an example of the many amazing women of her time.

Betsy Ross was born Elizabeth Griscom in the town of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on January 1st, 1752. She was the 8th in a line of 17 children. Her family was Quaker and they were originally from England. She learned to sew when she was very young and was very good at it. After learning how to sew in the Quaker schools she grew up in, she did an apprenticeship with an upholsterer. Betsy Ross worked there as a seamstress as well as at a sewing shop making clothes, blankets, etc.

She met and fell in love with her future husband John Ross while working for the upholsterer. It was a scandal at the time because John Ross was Anglican and Betsy was Quaker. Neither of their families approved of their desire to marry outside of their religions. However, they were married anyway in 1773. Betsy was then kicked out of her church. John and Betsy opened their own upholstery business and worked together happily for years. In 1776, John died after a gun powder explosion and Betsy continued making flags in their store.

In 1777 she remarried to Joseph Ashburn, a sailor, who later died in a British prison in 1781. In 1783 Betsy got married for the 3rd time, this time to John Claypoole. Claypoole had

met Joseph Ashburn while they were both in prison. He delivered Ashburn's final farewells to Betsy and that is how they met. They remained married for 34 years until John passed away from a disability. Each time Betsy Ross was widowed she was left alone and in charge of the property, business, household and children.

During the 1770's America was fighting for its independence from Great Britain in a conflict which is today known as the American Revolutionary War. America wanted to be independent from Great Britain. According to national records, Betsy Ross made flags for the Navy. There are records that show she was paid for making "ship's colours, &c." (Biography) for the Pennsylvania State Navy Board.

Betsy is famous because of a story surrounding the creation of the first American Flag. It was during this revolutionary time period that Betsy was said to have created the first American flag. The story is that George Washington, the country's soon to be first president, asked her to make a flag for the new country.

After her death, Betsy Ross's grandson publicly shared the family legend of Betsy making the first flag when his story was printed in Harper's Monthly Magazine in the year 1873. According to him, during the American Revolution in the year 1776, three men came to Betsy requesting her help with the first American flag. Those three men were George Washington, Robert Morris, and her first husband's uncle George Ross.

According to legend, Betsy Ross designed the flag with 13 stripes of red and white, with a blue rectangle in the upper left hand corner that contained 13 stars. The 13 stars and stripes represented the original 13 colonies in America in 1776. It is said she made the flag at her house.

The house she supposedly lived in is now a popular tourist attraction in the heart Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

It is unclear whether or not she actually helped create the first American flag. The problem with the story is that George Washington was not in Philadelphia at the time. He was actually fighting in the war in New York. Most historians believe Betsy did not create the first flag. A colonial leader of the time Francis Hopkinson may have had something to do with the design of the first flag. According to records, Hopkinson submitted designs to the government that resemble the first flag. He may have helped in the creation of the first flag but again, we do not know this to be certain.

Betsy Ross died in Philadelphia at the age of 84 on January 30, 1856. Betsy Ross is also known for her other contributions during this important time in America's history. She is celebrated for sewing flags for the navy and assisting soldiers. She helped soldiers by giving them food and water and taking care of them if they were injured.

Even though Betsy Ross' life and work is a mystery of history, she remains a legend of the time because of all of the things she has done and hardships she endured. She was widowed three times and persevered through the hardships of single motherhood. Betsy Ross at times successfully managed a business, her property, and her household completely independently. She was the perfect example of the many strong, amazing, and self-sufficient women of the revolutionary time period that aided in the successful birth of a new nation.

Works Cited

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