

The United States Flag in the American West:

The Evolution of the United States Flags Produced by or for U.S. Government Entities During the Westward Movement, 1777 – 1876

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Our Janus-like perspective of the flag of the United States, like all historical endeavors, is tinted by factors that tend to distort not only how we look at the past but also what we are looking for. As we all recognize, our speculation about the flags of our past is limited by the documentation available, both in quantity and in quality. The physical evidence that survives from the early history of the United States flag is limited, whether scribbblings on paper, interpretations of artists of the period, or surviving flags themselves. This paucity of evidence concerning the United States flag in its first century of existence can mystify us as we leap into the early phases of the 21st-century communication revolution. Yet another, equally challenging problem exists when we attempt to study the history of the United States flag—the distortion caused by the 20th-century pervasiveness of flags in our everyday life. Today, the United States flag is everywhere—flying above most American businesses, in our schools, in our churches, in our sports facilities, and in private homes. And of course, it flies from nearly every facility owned, leased, or rented by the government of the United States—and at the close of the 20th century those facilities seem ubiquitous.

However, as we peer back across two centuries, we must realize that the pervasiveness of the government of the United States was not a common feature of American culture during the first hundred years of our flag's existence. And the presence of the government of the United States and its agencies was even less in the American West (that territory west of the Mississippi River acquired by purchase, treaty, or war from 1803 until 1853 and largely settled by Americans during the second half of the 19th century). Therefore, an examination of flags introduced into the American West must rely on the evidence available stemming from the activities of the governmental agencies operating in that vast region.

From the ratification of the Constitution until the American Civil War, the agencies of the United States government served the limited responsibilities of the central

government. Of these agencies, only four held property requiring identification of federal ownership or needed United States flags for other purposes: the Revenue Service of the Treasury Department, which collected customs duties and enforced laws against smuggling; the relatively small U.S. Navy; an equally small United States Army; and an obscure entity first known as the Indian Bureau.

THE REVENUE SERVICE

Of these, the Revenue Service had no presence in the American West, at least until Texas and California joined the union. Therefore its flag of 16 alternating red and white vertical stripes, adopted in 1799 and differing considerably from the national flag adopted in 1777, had little or no impact in the West. Indeed, at the outbreak of the Civil War, the Service was limited to eight cutters, operating from eastern seaports.

THE U.S. NAVY

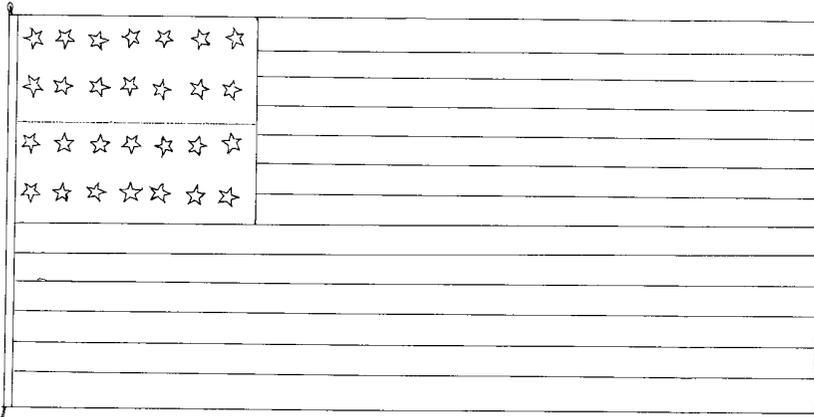
Similarly, until the Mexican War, the U.S. Navy maintained only a minimal presence along the western Gulf coast and the Pacific coast. Although the Pacific whaling fleet would pay many visits to the Mexican communities along the coast of Alta California, the U.S. Navy was limited to a Pacific Squadron. Initially commanded by Commodore John Drake Sloat (replaced by Commodore Robert F. Stockton in mid-July 1846), this squadron numbered only five major ships at the beginning of the Mexican War.

During the opening stages of the war with Mexico, these five ships (Commodore Sloat's frigate, U.S.S. *Savannah*; Commodore Stockton's frigate, U.S.S. *Congress*; and the sloops of war, U.S.S. *Portsmouth*, U.S.S. *Cyane*, and U.S.S. *Levant*) would help seize Alta California from the Mexican government's loose control. Sailors sent ashore from the U.S.S. *Savannah*, acting as infantry or pikemen, seized Monterey on 5 July 1846 and raised the U.S. flag (probably from the U.S.S. *Savannah*) there on 7 July 1846. On the next day, Commodore Montgomery and sailors of the U.S.S. *Portsmouth* occupied San Francisco and raised the U.S. flag (probably from the U.S.S. *Portsmouth*). After Commodore Stockton arrived from Honolulu aboard the U.S.S. *Congress*, the navy joined Army Captain John C. Frémont's ragtag forces in a campaign against San Diego and Los Angeles. After Mexican resistance melted, Stockton's sailors marched into Los Angeles on 13 August 1846. With these relatively easy "victories", Commodore Stockton declared the annexation of California and wrote to Washington that "the flag of the United States is flying at every commanding position, and California is in undisputed military possession."¹ The flags that Stockton proclaimed to be flying undoubtedly belonged to the ships of his squadron, for it is unlikely that the 700 American immigrants (who formed less than 10% of the population of California) had brought with them or made many U.S. flags.

The United States Navy, which had been allowed to decline into oblivion at the close of the American Revolution, was resuscitated in 1798 when war with Revolutionary France threatened. It first flew the 15-star, 15-stripe flag of 1794, and, after May of 1818, the 20-star, 13-stripe flag of the third flag act. By March of 1846,

¹ David Nevin, *The Mexican War* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1978), p. 108.

the ships of the U.S. Navy officially should have flown a “Stars & Stripes” of 27 stars, in recognition of Florida’s entry into the Union on 3 March 1845. However, given their distance from U.S. Navy yards, it would seem likely that many of the ships of the Pacific squadron still flew the 26-star flags that had been official between 1837 and 1845. Nevertheless, in the U.S. Naval Academy Museum is the U.S. ensign that served the U.S. naval garrison at San Jose, California during the siege that began on 9 November 1847 and lasted until the garrison was relieved on 16 February 1848. This 5 foot by 12 foot U.S. national flag incorporates a canton with 28 stars in five



horizontal rows of seven stars each.² Because the garrison commander of San Jose, Lieutenant Charles Heywood, had served aboard the U.S.S. *Cyane*, it is highly likely that this 12-foot ensign had been a part of that ship’s complement of flags. Hence by 1847 some of the Pacific squadron had been furnished with ensigns of 28 stars, in recognition of the admission of Texas into the union on 29 December 1845.

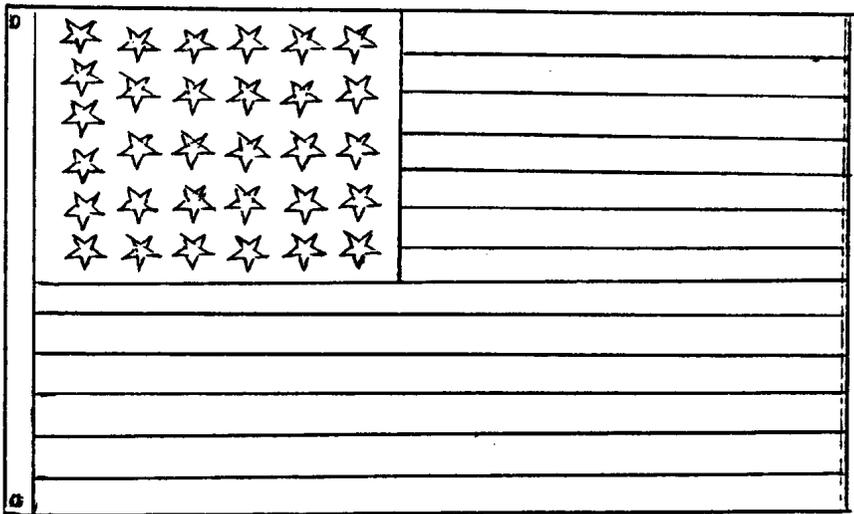
Whatever the number of stars on the flags flown by the naval forces occupying California, their patterns seem to have been relatively fixed. Within a month after Congress passed the third flag act in April of 1818, the Navy Department issued a circular through the Navy Commissioners that specified that the 20 stars on the U.S. flags of naval vessels would be in four horizontal, staggered rows of five stars each. In September of 1818, however, the Navy changed the arrangement. Instead of staggered rows, the stars of each of the four rows were in vertical alignment. This pattern of aligned rows would dominate U.S. naval ensigns throughout the 19th century. The surviving flags of both 26 stars and 28 stars dating from the war with Mexico

² H. C. Washburn, *Illustrated Case Inscriptions from the Official Catalogue of the Trophy Flags of the United States Navy* (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1913), pp. 70-71; catalog no. 69.

continued that tradition.³

In addition to specifying the star arrangement of the U.S. ensigns, the Navy also regulated the sizes of the ensigns flown from her ships. Navy regulations usually provided for a series of sized ensigns, the size provided depending on the rating of the ship to which the flag was issued. (By 1863, there were four ratings for ships of the line, each of which was allocated a certain number of ensigns of different sizes.) The ensigns were usually sized and numbered from “1” up, with the lower number referring to the largest size, and working up to smaller, higher-numbered types. Usually the higher-numbered, smaller-sized flags were designated as “boat flags”, i.e. flags for the small boats and ketches of larger ships of the line. As of 1863 there were five sizes of “boat flags”, numbered “10” through “14” and having fly dimensions respectively of 10, 8, 7, 6, and 5 feet. (Hoist dimensions for the same numbers respectively measured 5.3, 4.2, 3.7, 3.2, and 2.5 feet; the fly dimensions of the canton were also provided, being respectively 4.0, 3.2, 2.8, 2.4, and 2.0 feet.)⁴

Through the Mexican War and into the early 1850s, boat flags carried the same



number of stars as the larger ensigns. For example, the ensign that followed Commodore Matthew Perry ashore in Japan in 1853 was only 33 inches by 54 inches, thus qualifying by its size as a “boat flag”.⁵ Nevertheless, it bore a full complement of

³ For an example of a 26-star U.S. flag (with the stars set in five horizontal rows (4-6-6-4) captured during the War, see *Banderas: Catálogo de la Colección de Banderas*; Museo Nacional de Historia (Mexico City, 1990), p. 59. For examples of two 28-star U.S. flags also captured, with the stars in six vertical rows (4-5-5-5-4) and another with the stars set in four horizontal rows (7-7-7-7), see p. 68 of the same source. Another U.S. naval ensign in the collection of the U.S. Naval Academy Museum (No. 21—that of the U.S.S. Spitfire) bears its 28 stars in five staggered horizontal rows (6-5-6-5-6).

⁴ “[Extract From Regulations]”, enclosed with a letter from Gustavus A. Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy to Quartermaster General M. C. Meigs, 17 July 1863 with endorsements, in “Consolidated Correspondence File of the Quartermaster General”, Record Group No. 92 (National Archives), under subject heading “Flags”.

⁵ This flag is currently displayed in the U.S. Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis, Maryland. Dimensions appear in “Preservation of Flags”, *Report No. 334, 62nd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 3, #19*.

31 stars (appropriate from 1850 through 1858) set in six vertical rows, 6-5-5-5-5-5.

Boat flags were used by the detachments of seamen and marines who participated in the expeditions to capture Monterey and San Diego, and—in the case of Los Angeles—capture, lose, and recapture the city. Contemporary illustrations, made by one of the expedition's naval gunners, of the camps and combat on the San Gabriel River near Los Angeles in January of 1847 depict small U.S. ensigns about 3 feet by 5 feet among the lines of seamen serving as infantry (16 stars are visible on one of the flags; however, the star count is likely the result of artistic license rather than an accurate depiction).⁶

During the war with Mexico and probably earlier, ensigns and other ships' flags were prepared at the various navy construction and repair yards. In 1845, when the 27-star flag became official, the Brooklyn Navy Yard (officially the Navy Yard New York) advertised for 15 pieces each of "wide" red, white, and blue bunting, as well as one piece each of green and yellow bunting. (A "piece" was then a bolt of a certain width cloth, 40 yards long.) The contract was awarded to William Aymar & Co.⁷ In the following year, with the 28th star for Texas becoming official on 4 July 1846, the Boston Navy Yard (officially Navy Yard Charlestown) received 30 pieces each of red and white bunting, 20 pieces of blue, 5 pieces of yellow, and 2 pieces of green bunting from Horton, Cordis & Co., while Charles A. Secor & Co. provided the Brooklyn Navy yard with 20 pieces each of wide white and blue bunting, 20 pieces of unspecified width scarlet bunting, 5 pieces each of yellow and green bunting, and 40 pieces each of "narrow" white and scarlet bunting.⁸ In 1847, the year Iowa's 29th star was added to the Union, it was time for the Norfolk Navy Yard (officially Gosport Navy Yard) to replenish its bunting supply. Bonsal & Brother provided the yard with 20 pieces each of red, white, and blue bunting, 5 pieces of yellow bunting and 3 pieces of black bunting, plus 300 yards of muslin (bleached cotton), presumably for stars.⁹

Reflecting the close of hostilities with Mexico, the amount of bunting required by the navy yards diminished in 1848, though new flags would be required to accommodate Wisconsin's admission that year as the 30th state. The Kittery Navy Yard in Maine received from Burritt & Timberlake 6 pieces each of white, scarlet, and blue bunting in 18-inch width and 6 pieces each of white and scarlet bunting in 9-inch width; 2 pieces of 18-inch-wide yellow bunting were also received. That same year, the Boston Navy Yard received from Horton, Cordis & Co. 10 pieces each of white, scarlet, and blue bunting, 3 pieces of yellow, and 1 piece of green bunting, while the

⁶ The original nine illustrations are held by the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History's History Division. Four of these illustrations appear in David Nevin's *The Mexican War* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1978), pp. 120-125.

⁷ "Supplies for the Navy—Class No. 1—Ship Chandlery.", appended to the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1 December 1845, in Senate Document No. 1, 29th Congress, 1st Session* (Congressional Serial Set No. 470), p. 756; see also p. 766 for the award to William Aymar & Co.

⁸ "List of Contracts Under the Cognizance of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repairs, Made and Received from 22d November, 1845 to 22d November, 1846; Prepared in Conformity with the Act of Congress of April 21, 1808.", appended to the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 5 December 1846, Senate Executive Document No. 1, 29th Congress, 2nd Session* (Congressional Serial Set No. 493), pp. 486-488.

⁹ "List of Contractors Under the Cognizance of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repairs, Made and Received from November 22, 1846 to November 22, 1847, Prepared in Conformity with the Act of Congress of April 21, 1808.", appended to the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 6 December 1847, Senate Executive Document No. 1, 30th Congress, 1st Session* (Congressional Serial Set no. 503), p. 1011. In addition to the bunting and cotton, the yard at Norfolk (Gosport Navy Yard) received 20 pounds each of red, white, blue, and assorted sewing thread, evidently for the making of these flags.

Philadelphia Navy Yard acquired from the same company much smaller amounts: 120 yards of 18-inch width and 80 yards of 9-inch blue bunting, 200 yards of 18-inch width and 120 yards of 9-inch width white bunting, and the same amounts of red bunting. 40 yards of yellow bunting was also acquired by Philadelphia in 18-inch width. Surprisingly, since the red, white, and blue bunting was undoubtedly intended for U.S. ensigns to be made at the depot itself, the Philadelphia Navy Yard was also furnished by the same company with “5 large American ensigns, 3 American jacks, 3 American pennants, and 5 American broad pennants” at prices respectively of \$26.50, \$9.50, \$8.00, and \$12.00 each. A host of signal flags and foreign national flags was acquired at the same time.¹⁰

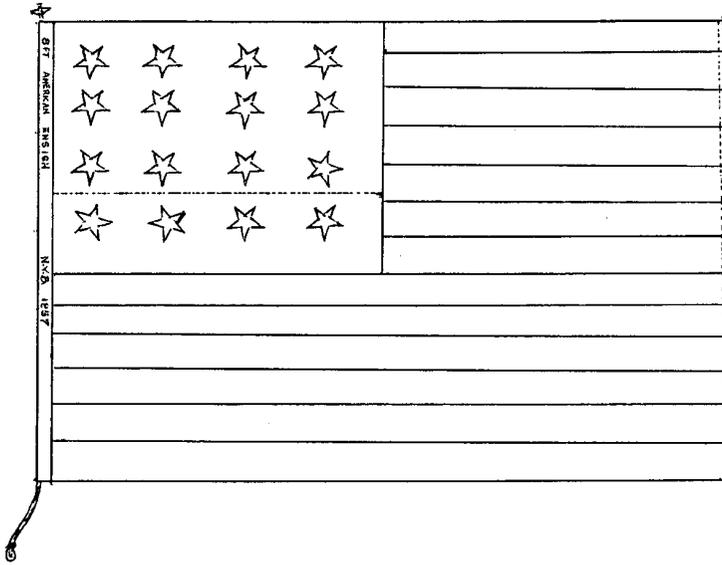
In 1849, evidently having expended its 1847 receipts, the Gosport Navy Yard replenished its bunting supplies, once again from Bonsal & Brother, receiving 50 pieces each of blue, red, and white bunting, 5 pieces each of yellow and green bunting, and “800 yards white muslin for stars”, as well as assorted spools of cotton thread.¹¹ In 1850, undoubtedly anticipating the addition of California’s star as the 31st state on 4 July 1851, the Brooklyn Navy Yard again ordered new supplies of bunting, this time from Tucker, Cooper, & Co., who delivered 5 pieces each of 18-, 12-, 9-, and 4-inch width red, white, and blue bunting, plus 50 yards of white muslin.¹² These documents show that each navy yard—rather than a central depot—was responsible for the manufacture of the flags for the ships that it served. To date, the earliest U.S. ensign extant with the identifying marks of any navy yard is a 16-star boat flag from the Boston Navy Yard (abbreviated N.Y.B. on its heading) dated 1857.¹³

¹⁰ “List of Contracts Under the Cognizance of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repair, Made and Received from November 22, 1847, to December 1, 1848; Prepared in Conformity with the Act of Congress of April 21, 1808.” appended to the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 4 December 1848, House Executive Document No. 1, 30th Congress, 2nd Session* (Congressional Serial Set No. 537), pp. 642, 664, and 669-670. The foreign flags acquired by the Philadelphia Navy Yard from Horton, Cordis & Co. in 1848 included ensigns and pennants of England, France, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Austria, the Neapolitan States, Greece, Sardinia, Tuscany, Turkey, Egypt, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Brazil, and Argentina (“Buenos Ayrean”). Also obtained were two sets of signal flags and 8 quarantine flags.

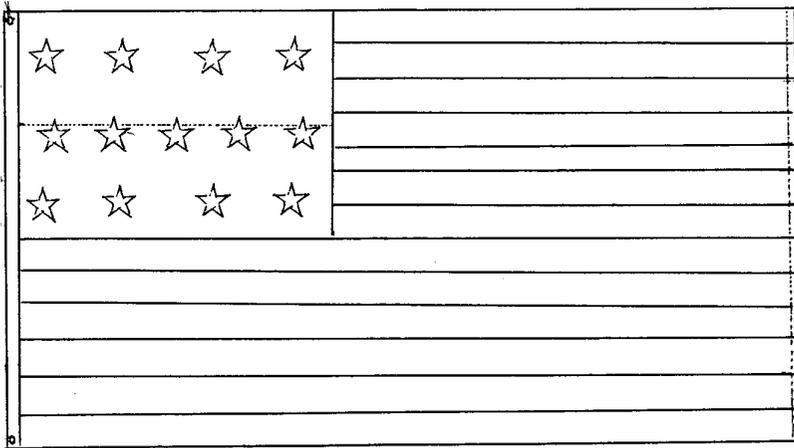
¹¹ “List of Contracts Under the Cognizance of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repair, Made and Received from December 4, 1848, to November 14, 1849; Prepared in Conformity with the Act of Congress of April 21, 1808.” appended to the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy of 1 December 1849, Senate Executive Document No. 1, 31st Congress, 1st Session* (Congressional Serial Set No. 549), pp. 500-501. The thread evidently intended for flags consisted of “50 dozen spool cotton, Nos. 18 and 20.” Other white and black thread was also purchased but it is grouped with other materials not used for flag production.

¹² “List of Contracts of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repair, Made and Received from November 14, 1849, to November 14, 1850.” appended to the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1850, House Executive Document No. 1, 31st Congress, 1st Session* (Congressional Serial Set No. 595), p. 260. The order also included 20 pounds of black and white thread for constructing the flags.

¹³ Private collection; Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

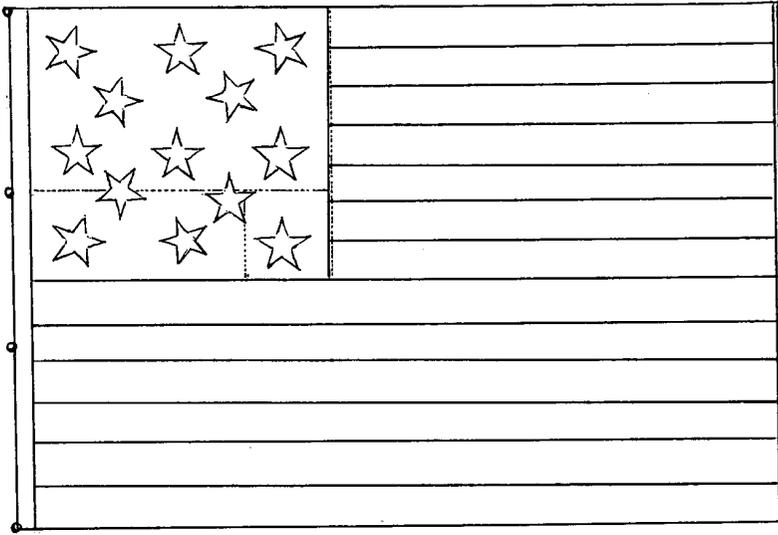


In 1861, at least the Boston Navy Yard changed the marking of the boat flags made there. These distinctive 16-star boat flags bear the yard’s new abbreviation “NYC” (for Navy Yard Charlestown), the number or the size of the flag, and the year of manufacture, “1861”.¹⁴



¹⁴ In her book, *Thirteen Star Flags: Keys to Identification* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), Grace Rogers Cooper (on p. 33) referred to two such 16-star boat flags with the “NYC 1861” markings, one in the collection of “The Flag House” in Baltimore, and the other in the collections of Smithsonian. Unfortunately, in describing the Smithsonian example, she provided mixed measurements from two examples in Smithsonian’s collection of 16-star flags. One, that which measures 29–29 3/4 inches by 54–55 inches (accession no. 320,757.01/catalog no. 79,538M) bears only the initials “WDA” on its heading. The other, which measures 50 1/2 inches by 72 inches (of originally 84 inches) (accession no. 1977.0216/catalog no. 59,875N) bears the marks “7 Ft BOAT ENSIGN” and “N.Y.C. 1861” on its heading. This is the flag for which Mrs. Rogers provided internal data. Of three other 16-star boat flags examined, none of the others bear similar heading marks, suggesting that such flags were prepared at yards other than the Navy Yard Charlestown.

Later in the Civil War, probably as early as 1862, boat flags began to bear 13 stars set in three horizontal rows, 4-5-4, and after 1870 the arrangement became five horizontal rows, 3-2-3-2-3.¹⁵



About 1890, the marking system of the headings on these boat flags usually identified the navy yard where manufactured, the date of manufacture, and the size. Such flags were recognized officially in 1912, but discontinued in 1916. As the most prolific flag in the service of the U.S. Navy, boat flags had the greatest presence on the coast of the American West in the decades after the American Civil War.

THE U.S. ARMY

While the navy's presence in the American West before the war with Mexico is understandably meager, the misconception prevails that the U.S. Army had a strong presence in the West. That was not the case until the close of the Mexican War. The Army's presence in the Louisiana Purchase was tenuous and limited. Those 14 forts or cantonments which were established followed three watercourses into the territo-

¹⁵ For further data on the 13-star navy boat flags, see Dr. John Lyman's article, "Small Boat Flags" in *The Flag Bulletin*, [101] Vol. 22, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct., 1983), pp. 222-225. For an example of one of these later 13-star boat flags with a marked heading, see Boleslaw & Marie-Louise d'Otrange Mastai, *The Stars & The Stripes: The American Flag as Art and as History from the Birth of the Republic to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 182. The heading is marked "U.S. Ensign No. 7 NAVY YARD N.Y. APRIL 1891". A similar example survives dated 1884 survives in a private collection.

ry acquired in 1803: the Red, Arkansas, and Missouri Rivers.¹⁶ West of these posts, the U.S. Army had no major presence.

From the end of the Revolution through the Indian Wars in the Northwest Territory, the U.S. Army had identified its forts and posts with garrison flags. In 1781-1782, Philadelphian Rebecca Young, widow of William Young, made at least five flags, each described as either a “Continental Standard” or a “Continental Fort flag”, for each of which she was paid \$26 60/90.¹⁷ No flag specifically identified to Mrs. Young is known to exist; however, at least one flag, claimed to have flown over Fort Independence in Boston in 1781, may have been her handiwork.¹⁸ Unfortunately no textile analysis has ever been undertaken on this flag. Mrs. Young’s son, William Young, and her daughter, Mary Young Pickersgill, would continue in their mother’s profession—Mary made the most famous of garrison flags, the original “Star Spangled Banner”.¹⁹

During the period of the second, 15-star, 15-stripe U.S. flag (1794-1818), there was little standardization of the flags purchased by the Army for its posts, forts, and garrisons. In 1801 a garrison flag was made by Hannah Knox for Fort Jay that was 27 feet by 45 feet. Later the same year Hannah Knox completed another garrison flag for Fort Mifflin that was 25 feet by 55 feet. Two years later, seven garrison flags were ordered from Anna Hoskins that were to be 10 feet by 31 feet. A drawing accompanying the order indicates that the stars were to be arranged in a diamond configuration in five horizontal rows, 1-4-5-4-1. Three of these flags were requisitioned for forts on the eastern seaboard, with one for Fort Jay and two for Fort Independence. What became of the other four is not recorded; however, by April of 1804, Fort Jay was again clamoring for another flag. As a result, William Young was directed to prepare another four garrison flags, each 10 feet by 31 feet. While these dimensions would hold for the period 1803-1804, in 1805 the size was changed to 18 feet by 36 feet. On 20 April 1805 Young received an order for “making 2 U.S. ensigns, 16 Stripes, garrison flags, 18 by 36 ft, cont’g. 416 yds ½ yd wide Bunting”. Why only 16 stripes were specified is an enigma, as the Indian Department flags

¹⁶ Francis Paul Prucha, *A Guide to Military Posts of the United States* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1964), pp. 55, 94, 81, 111, 112-113, and 115 (for posts on the Red River), 45-57, 108, 76, 116, and 106 (for posts on the Arkansas River), and 60, 96, 57, and 85 (for posts on the Missouri River). Along the **Red River** through Louisiana and the border with Texas, five posts were established: Fort Adams (1798-1810) at the confluence of the Red and Mississippi; the post at Natchitoches (1804-1822) and its replacement, nearby Fort Jessup (1822-1846) in Louisiana; Cantonment Taylor (1821-1824) at the Arkansas-Louisiana Border; and Fort Towson (1824-1854) and Fort Washita (1842-1861) in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Along the **Arkansas River**, five posts were established between 1804 and 1842. Arkansas Post (1804-1808) was the earliest, established at the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi. Fort Smith (1817-1871) followed at the border with Indian Territory. Fort Gibson (1824-1890) was established seven years later within Indian Territory, while Fort Wayne (1838-1842) and its successor, Fort Scott (1842-1873) were constructed further north in the Missouri-Kansas border. The **Missouri River**, the most important tributary within the Louisiana Purchase, surprisingly was the location of only four major military posts before the Mexican War. Fort Belle Fontaine (1805-1826) controlled the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi just north of St. Louis. This garrison was followed three years later by Fort Osage (1808-1819) just west of present Kansas City, which in turn was abandoned for Fort Atkinson (1819-1827) near present Omaha, Nebraska. In 1827 both Forts Belle Fontaine and Atkinson were deactivated in favor of Fort Leavenworth on the Missouri River at the Kansas line.

¹⁷ Mrs. Young’s work for the Army’s Quartermaster Department is listed in Alexander J. Wall’s article, “the Flag with an Eagle in the Canton”, appearing in *The New York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (October, 1933), pp. 51-67, esp. pp. 61-62.

¹⁸ For a color illustration of this flag, see Boleslaw & Marie-Louise d’Orange Mastai, *The Stars & The Stripes . . .* (fully cited in footnote 15), p. 48.

¹⁹ This flag is analyzed by Grace Rogers Cooper in her *Thirteen Star Flags: Keys to Identification* (Washington: The Smithsonian Press, 1973), pp. 32-33.

Young made earlier were all required to have 17 stripes and 17 stars. Both flags were to be shipped to St. Louis for forts in the West. In 1806 three other garrison flags were made in the same size (18 feet by 36 feet), one for Fort Olcott and two for future requisitions.²⁰ The number of stripes and stars was not recorded.

The Fort McHenry garrison flag was initially 30 feet by 42 feet, composed of 15 stripes and 15 stars arranged in five horizontal staggered rows of three stars each. In the interim, however, other dimensions would be used. A requisition from Fort Columbus in New York Harbor in 1810 requested a garrison flag 30 feet by 40 feet.²¹ At least eight garrison flags were made for the U.S. government in 1811 by Elizabeth Claypoole (see below). No size was specified; however, each flag was to contain 161 yards of bunting. By comparison, the four flags made by William Young in 1804 (each 10 feet by 31 feet) required 90 yards of bunting each. Standardization, at least of the garrison flag, would have to wait until the third flag act.

In April of 1818, the United States Congress adopted its third act relative to the nation's flag, returning to a constant number of 13 stripes, but allowing an additional star within the canton on the 4th of July following the admission of each new state into the Union. Upon its adoption, the new flag bore 20 stars. In September of 1818 a letter from the Inspector General of the Army to the Commissary General of Purchases not only enclosed a drawing of the new "Standard flag of the United States, approved by the President, for all Military Garrisons and Public Arsenals", but also provided that it should not "exceed Forty feet fly and Twenty feet hoist." Materials specified for the flag included "37 yards of blue bunting for a field 7 stripes wide & 15 feet long", 55 yards of red bunting and 50 yards of white bunting for the 13 stripes, and 4 yards of cotton for the flag's stars.²² These specifications would continue in force through the Mexican War, being repeated in the Army Regulations of 1834, 1835, 1841, and 1847:²³

The garrison flag is the national flag. It is to be made of bunting, not to exceed forty feet fly, and twenty feet hoist. To be composed of thirteen horizontal stripes of equal breadth, alternately red and white, beginning with the red. In the upper quarter, near the staff, will be the Union, composed of a number of white stars, equal to the number of States, distributed over a blue field, one-third the length of the flag, and to run down to the lower edge of the fourth red stripe from the top.

No flag from 1818 through 1847 conforming to these specifications and regulations apparently survives, although they most certainly were made. On 17 February 1835, Commissary General Calendar Irvine instructed his office to "Issue to Salley Downing as much Bunting &c. as will made Six Garrison Flags."²⁴ On 8 July 1840,

²⁰ Various documents filed in the Consolidated Correspondence File of the Quartermaster General (Record Group No. 92), National Archives; box 426 and box 596, the latter in the folder "Flags (1803-1888)".

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

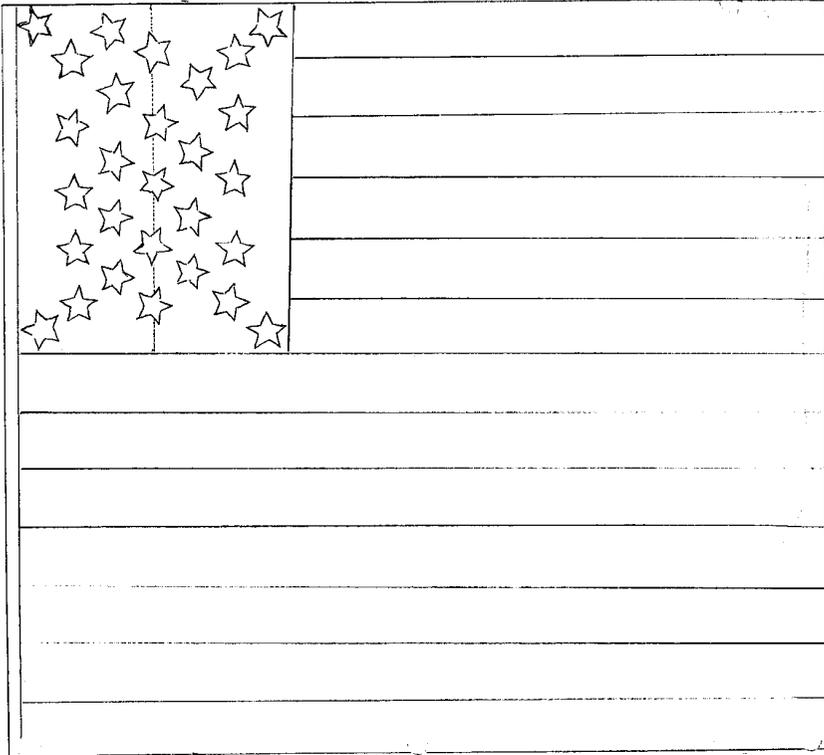
²² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²³ *General Regulations for the Army* (Washington: Francis P. Blair, 1834), pp. 230-231; *General Regulations for the Army of the United States . . . Published by Authority* (Washington: Globe Office, 1835), pp. 235-236; *General Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1841* (Washington: J. & G. S. Gideon, 1841), pp. 80-81; and *General Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1847—By Authority of the War Department* (Washington: J. & G. S. Gideon, 1847), pp. 156-157.

²⁴ Commissary General of Purchases, *Supply Orders Issued, 21 September 1830—20 June 1836*, Record Group No. 92 (National Archives), p. 419.

Irvine directed that a garrison flag be sent to Captain Harvey Brown, 4th U.S. Artillery, for the garrison at Fort Mackinac in Michigan Territory.²⁵

The earliest surviving example of a large garrison-type flag dates to the Mexican War and was used at both Vera Cruz and at Mexico City.²⁶



This flag, however, departs significantly from the regulations then in force. The flag itself measures only 16 feet by approximately 18 feet, nowhere near the 20 feet by 40 feet mentioned in regulations (the regulations, however, merely specify that the garrison flag was “not to exceed” the parameters established, not necessarily always conform with them). At 6 feet on its fly, the canton is indeed one-third the flag’s length; however, it drops through six stripes, not seven, thereby resting on a red stripe rather than a white one. The canton bears 28 stars, seemingly laid out in diagonal rows. The star arrangement is in fact a truncated diamond.

The U.S. Army introduced the diamond-shaped star pattern for garrison flags about 1845. Twenty years later, the commander of the Army’s main clothing manufactory, the Schuylkill Arsenal, reported on the diamond pattern’s history. Assistant Quartermaster General G. H. Crosman, in a “Memorandum, relative to the arrange-

²⁵ Author’s collection.

²⁶ Formerly West Point Museum collection, accession no. 2475/catalog no. 4070. This flag was transferred to the Army’s Center for Military History in the 1980s.

ment of Stars on National Flags”, noted that:²⁷

In 1845 Gen’l Stanton, then in charge of the clothing depot, here, directed the stars placed so as to form a diamond in the center of the blue field and reduced the length of the fly flag from 40 to 36 feet, the present regulation dimensions.

No particular mode of arranging the stars has ever before been directed, and in order to comply with the law by allowing an additional star for every state admitted into the union it became necessary to adopt some tasteful arrangement of them for the purpose, and the present one is believed to be generally approved.

To place the stars in parallel lines would necessarily leave a vacant place unfilled, and injure the appearance of the blue field of the union.

It will cost much to alter those on hand—69 garrison and 284 storm.

The memorandum appended a series of line drawings of star arrangements of U.S. flags then stored in the Schuykill Arsenal. General Crosman noted:

Enclosed herewith are drawings of the several modes adopted for the arrangement of these stars of the union, at different periods on the flags and colors made at this depot, the last one of which was No.—upon the recommendation of the chief inspector Mr. Campbell, approved and authorized by myself as well suited to the purpose of arranging the additional stars of any new state admitted into the Union.

Although the numbers were not affixed to the drawings referred to by General Crosman, the only diamond-shaped star pattern illustrated appears in the upper left hand corner of the drawing and depicts a 35-star diamond pattern (with two vertical rows at each end, having two blanks open for a 36th and 37th star in the upper left quadrant. The pattern is nearly identical to the star arrangement used on the 33-star garrison and storm flags flown at Fort Sumter in April of 1861. Another very similar flag survives in the Mastai collection, also with 33 stars, four of which were added after the flag’s manufacture.²⁸

The Army regulations of 1857, 1861, 1861 Revised, and the same updated in 1863, indeed list the change that Colonel Stanton made in the garrison flag dimensions: 20 feet by 36 feet. In addition to the revised size for the garrison flag, the paragraph on that flag ends by specifying that “The storm flag is twenty feet by ten feet; the recruiting flag, nine feet nine inches by four feet four inches.”²⁹ When these

²⁷ This memorandum, dating from 1865 or 1866, was appended to a letter from Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln to Colonel Commandant C. G. McCawley, U.S.M.C., 8 July 1881 in response to McCawley’s inquiry of 13 May 1881. The “Memorandums” had been forwarded to Lincoln by Brigadier General D. H. Rucker, Assistant Quartermaster General at Philadelphia on 1 June 1881; see 3rd endorsement on Philadelphia, Letters Received (Record Group No. 92), National Archives, Box 65, 3261 (A.G.O.) 1881.

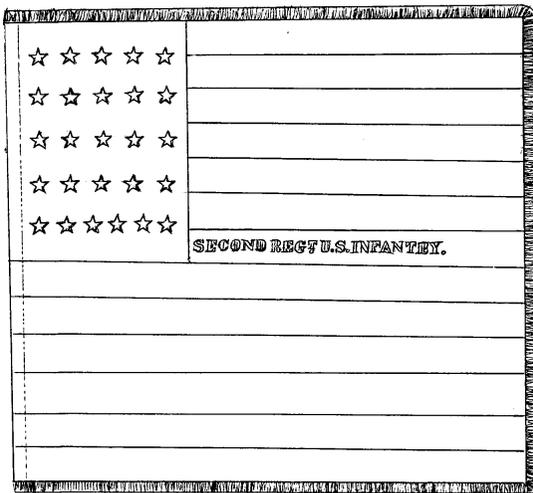
²⁸ Boleslaw & Marie-Louise d’Otrange Mastai, *The Stars & The Stripes . . .* (fully cited in footnote 15), p. 112; the similar, 33-star “diamond pattern” garrison flag of Fort Sumter is illustrated on p. 125.

²⁹ *Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1857* (New York: Harper & Brother, 1857), pp. 436-437, pars. 1368-1373; *Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1861), pp. 436-437, pars. 1368-1373; *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States 1861, with a full index—By Authority of the War Department* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1861), pp. 475-476, pars. 1436-1441; and *Revised United States Army Regulations of 1861, with an Appendix containing the changes and Laws Affecting Army Regulations and Articles of War to June 25, 1863* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1863), pp. 235-236.

smaller flags were officially authorized is not known; however, as early as January, 1835, the training depot for the recently formed U.S. Regiment of Dragoons was provided with “1 Recruiting Flag” of unspecified size.³⁰

During the American Civil War, great numbers of recruiting flags were purchased by two of the three major clothing depots. The Cincinnati Depot contracted for 500, and the New York depot purchased a prodigious 3,108, and also bought a total of 1,186 storm flags and 638 garrison flags. The Cincinnati Depot purchased 430 storm and 180 garrison flags, while the Philadelphia Depot only purchased 50 storm flags.³¹ Both the New York and Philadelphia depots also bought large quantities of red, white, and blue bunting during the same period, evidently to manufacture storm and garrison flags. Several recruiting flags survive, and in all cases the stars are arranged in parallel rows.

Although the commander of the Schuykill Arsenal evidently introduced the diamond-shaped star pattern for garrison and storm flags in 1845, he did not alter the star arrangement of the national color. First permitted for artillery regiments in 1834 and then expanded to infantry regiments in 1841 (though in fact the flags would seldom be issued until 1843—1844), the new silk colors for the identification of foot regiments of the Army were to be 6 feet on the staff by 6 feet, 6 inches on the fly. In other respects the flags were to duplicate the design of the garrison flag. This meant that the canton, while seven stripes deep, at one third of the 6 foot, 6 inch fly dimension would only measure 27 inches wide. The national colors manufactured until 1881 (except those made at the New York Clothing Depot during the Civil War) continued this narrow, compressed canton. The earliest surviving national color, that of the 2nd Infantry pre-dating 1845, bears 26 stars in five horizontal rows of 5-5-5-5-6.³²



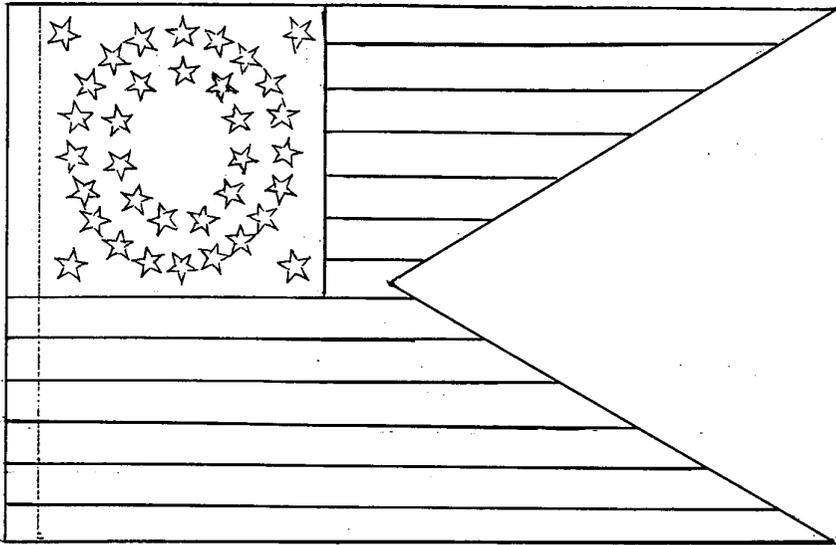
³⁰ Commissary General of Purchases, *Supply Orders Issued, 21 September 1830—20 June 1836* (Record Group No. 92), National Archives, p. 418.

³¹ Figures are based on the author’s analysis of contract files and records in the papers of the State Department, National Archives. The compiled figures differ from those reported at the end of the war for the three depots, which show a cumulative total of 762 garrison, 1,497 storm, and 3,527 recruiting flags purchased during the war; see U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series III, Vol. 5, p. 285.

³² West Point Museum collection, accession no. 2478/catalog no. 4075.

Those made during the Mexican War for the new regiments added to the Army during that conflict bear 28 stars in five staggered rows of 6-5-6-5-6.³³ A national color made in Philadelphia in 1861 also continues that tradition of parallel rows, its canton bearing six rows of 5 stars each and four additional stars added singly in each corner of the canton.³⁴

Contrary to Hollywood myth, the mounted forces in the West did not carry the “Stars & Stripes” before the Civil War. The five mounted regiments then in service bore only a dark blue standard with the arms of the United States painted at regimental level. Each company also used a red-over-white swallowtail guidon. In 1862 the design of this guidon changed to the “Stars & Stripes”, using a double ring of stars. After a large number of the old-pattern guidons were altered to the new design by Philadelphia contractors Horstmann Bros. & Co. and Evans & Hassall, contracts were let for thousands more.



By war's end, 7,856 had been delivered to the three major clothing depots, enough to furnish the needs of the ten post-war western cavalry regiments until 1883.³⁵ In that year, embroidered guidons of the same pattern were purchased, and continued in use

³³ Examples of national colors from the Mexican War survive in the West Point Museum collections of four of the new regiments created at the beginning of that conflict, those of the 10th (accession no. 2485/catalog no. 4085), 12th (accession no. 2486/catalog no. 4090), 13th (accession no. 2488/catalog no. 4092), and the 16th U.S. Infantry (accession no. 2489/catalog no. 4094). A similar color also survives for the old 3rd U.S. Infantry (accession no. 2479/catalog no. 4076).

³⁴ Wisconsin Veteran's Museum; Madison, Wisconsin, catalog no. 1964.219 (national color, 3rd Wisconsin Infantry).

³⁵ Figures on guidon purchases are based on the author's compilation of contracts held in the State Department records, National Archives. This total differs from the count of 10,216 guidons purchased as of mid-1865; see U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Army* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series III, Vol. 5, p. 285.

until 1885, when the Army reverted to the pre-war red-over-white swallowtail design. Except for these post-war guidons, the U.S. flag was seldom in evidence among the army forces in the West, as regulations exempted the display of colors by foot units unless five or more companies were gathered together—an infrequent practice in the garrisoning of the West.

With the exhaustion of the supplies of Civil War colors, guidons, and larger post flags, the Army finally adopted new regulations governing the flags, which included illustrations of the star arrangement. As early as 1881, the Army's Quartermaster General S. B. Holadbird noted that: "The specifications now in force require the stars to be placed or arranged in 5 rows parallel to the longer edges of the flag."³⁶ Indeed, the Quartermaster specifications for 1889 depict such an arrangement for the 38 stars, with the five horizontal rows of seven stars each parallel to the edges of the flag, all in vertical and horizontal alignment, while three others "float" at the ends of three of the rows.³⁷ At least one surviving flag in the Mastai collection follows this pattern.³⁸ By the 1880s both the Army and the Navy were making their national flags and U.S. ensigns with parallel rows of stars.

THE INDIAN DEPARTMENT

While the flags of the army and the navy gradually reached some degree of conformity by 1880, their impact and display in the American West was severely limited. The navy's contact was primarily coastal, and the army's posts and forts, at least in the pre-Mexican War period, were few and widely scattered. While "showing the flag" by either service was, hence, infrequent, another government agency, at least through the first quarter of the 19th century, made significant efforts to "show the flag". This agency was the Indian Department.

Formed during a period of economic austerity, the Indian Department was created as an alternative to military conquest of the American Indian tribes. In the belief that hostilities could be averted if the tribes were dealt with fairly, the Indian Department set out to establish a series of western "factories" (trading posts run by a government factor) to provide an honest and fair market for trade goods. Agents located at or near the factories were authorized to visit with delegations from the tribes, prepare preliminary agreements, and present gifts to win the Indians' friendship to the American cause. As part of the ceremonies of friendship that accompanied formal relations, it was customary to present visiting chiefs with a military uniform, a silver medal bearing on its obverse side the likeness of the current president of the United States (in three sizes, depending on the importance of the chief), and a flag of the United States. The rituals and types of gifts attempted to match the quality and quantity provided by the foreign governments competing for the tribes' loyalty. All of these "presentation items" were obtained through government agencies.

³⁶ Brigadier-General S. B. Holadbird, Assistant Quartermaster General to Secretary of War Robert Lincoln, 9 May 1881, endorsement no. 3 on letter from Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln to Colonel C. G. McCawley, U.S.M.C., 8 July 1881 (fully cited in footnote 24).

³⁷ *Specifications for Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage and Clothing and Equipage Materials* (Philadelphia Depot of the Quartermaster's Department, 1889), pp. 24-25 (for Garrison Flag), 26-27 (for Post Flag), and 28-29 (for Storm and Recruiting Flag).

³⁸ Boleslaw & Marie-Louise d'Otrange Mastai, *The Stars & The Stripes* . . . (fully cited in footnote 15), p. 165.

The army provided uniforms; the mint struck the medals; and the Indian Department purchased the flags.

While a request by an Indian tribe for the presentation of a “Flag of the United States” can be documented to 3 June 1777,³⁹ the earliest flags actually representing the United States known to have been specifically delivered to an Indian tribe were manufactured in 1788, when to “2 Continental Jacks” were purchased “for use of the Cherokee Indians”.⁴⁰

The reference to these flags as “Continental Jacks” evidently distinguished these flags from the “United States Jack”, which during this period would have been the same as the “Artillery flags” flown on field guns—a dark blue field bearing 13 white stars. As “continental jacks”, the flags instead apparently consisted of a field of horizontal stripes. Indeed, a 15-stripe “jack” survives that was presented to the Miami chief She-Moc-E-Nish by General Anthony Wayne after the treaty of Greenville in 1795. The flag consists of 15 wool bunting stripes, alternating (from the top), blue-white-red, in five sets of three.⁴¹

Another of the southern “five civilized tribes” received the first flags that definitely conformed to the design of the “Stars & Stripes”. On 20 December 1803, Henry Dearborn of the Indian Department asked the War Department for “Five Flags of about 9 feet by 6 with the Eagle, 17 Stars & 17 Stripes made of bunting”. On 26 December, Dearborn reiterated his request to Commissary General Irvine in writing. By 2 January 1804, these five flags were ready to be delivered via stage to Washington, D.C. for a deputation of visiting Choctaw Indians.⁴² Eight months later, Tench Coxe, “Purveyor of Public Stores,” ordered another “4 United States Ensigns, three yards square each with the American Eagle painted & gilt, staffs, brass mounting, tassels etc. complete” from William Young. These were delivered on 7 August 1804, and Young received payment of \$106 (\$26.50 each) on 9 August.⁴³

Many more of these Indian presentation flags were made in the intervening months; Lewis & Clark carried a number of them on their Journey of Discovery from 1804 through 1806. On 4 August 1804, the two explorers addressed the Otoe Indians, having first distributed presents among the chiefs, noting afterwards:⁴⁴

The great chief of the Seventeen great nations of America . . . has sent by us one of his flags, a medal, and some cloathes, such as he dresses his war chiefs with, which he directed should be given to the great chief of the Ottoe nation to be kept by; him, as a pledge of the sincerity with which he now offers you the hand of friendship.

³⁹ *Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania From Its Organization to the Termination of the Revolution* (Harrisburg: Theo. Fenn & Co., 1852), Vol. 11, p. 212. The Pennsylvania Council did not provide the requested flag; instead, the matter was referred to the Continental Congress.

⁴⁰ Record of Money Received and Disbursements, Oct. 1781—Oct. 1788, Record Group No. 93, National Archives, Vol. 96, p. 341.

⁴¹ Rear Admiral William B. Furlong, Commander Byron McCandless, and Harold D. Langley, *So Proudly We Hail: The History of the United States Flag* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), pp. 159-160.

⁴² Consolidated Correspondence File of the Quartermaster General, Record Group No. 92, National Archives; under subject heading “Flags”.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, subject heading “flags.”

⁴⁴ Donald Jackson (ed.), *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), p. 205; see also pp. 207-208.

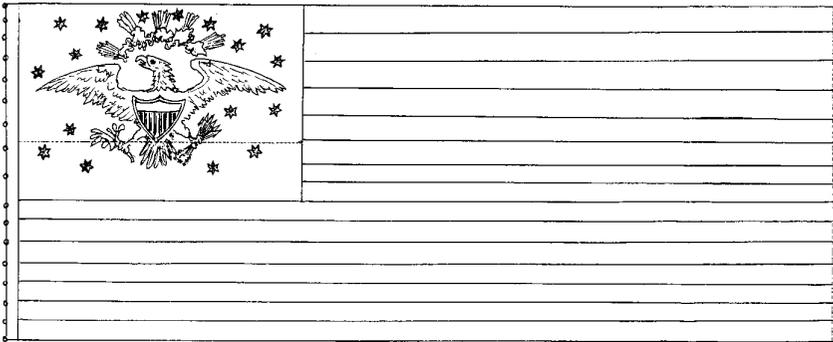
On 30 August 1804, the explorers recorded similar gifts to the Sioux, stating in their journals:⁴⁵

We there acknowledged their chiefs, giving to the grand chief a flag, a medal, a certificate, with a string of wampum; to which we added a chief's coat. This is a richly laced uniform of the United States artillery corps, and a cocked hat and red feather.

On 25 September 1804 similar presentations were made to the chief of the Teton Indians and on 29 October 1804 to the chief of each town of the Mandan Indians.⁴⁶

Lewis & Clark were not alone in the presentation of U.S. flags to the Indian nations. Zebulon M. Pike, another explorer of the Louisiana Purchase, received instructions from his commander on 30 July 1805: "Your own good sense will regulate the consumption of your provisions, and direct the distribution of the trifling presents you may carry with you, particularly your flags."⁴⁷ James Wilkerson, who had penned these instructions to Pike, later corresponded with Henry Dearborn of the Indian Department regarding French and British flags that he had received. On 27 May 1806 he explained that several visiting chiefs had recently shown willingness to come under the protection of the U.S. flag:⁴⁸

They have delivered up to me many old French & British Commissions, with five flags, seven grand and three second sized medals, all British. The flags I shall immediately replace and request that you many be pleased to attend to the subject & transmit me the medals heretofore required with a proportion of arm bands.



At least one Indian presentation flag from 1803-1812 survives. Supposedly presented to the Chippewa chief, Sheboy-way, by Andrew Jackson, it is quite large, measuring 58 inches by 150 inches. The bunting field consists of 15

⁴⁵ John Bach McMaster, *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis & Clark . . .* (New York: Allenton Book Co., 1922), Vol. 1, p. 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 130 and 174.

⁴⁷ Donald Jackson (ed.), *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike with Letters and Related Documents* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), Vol. 1, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

alternating red and white stripes—eight red and seven white. Its wool canton bears 17 gold-painted six-pointed stars and a fully painted rendition of the United States coat of arms.⁴⁹ The eagle on this flag is very similar to that painted for the First Troop Philadelphia Light Horse in 1798 by Christopher Gullergey, a Danish immigrant artist then residing in Philadelphia, making Gullergey the likely artist; the flag was most probably made in 1808 or 1809.

The presentation of U.S. flags with eagles in their cantons is documented again in 1808 and 1809. On 20 February 1808, the Secretary of War informed Michigan Territory Governor Hull that “Eight small flags for Indian chiefs, have been ordered to be sent you from Philadelphia.”⁵⁰ At that time, Michigan Territory included lands claimed by the Chippewa in the peninsula between Lakes Superior and Michigan. The next year, Governor Hull was seeking further presentation gifts but was having a problem securing them due to ice in the rivers in New York. Tench Coxe, purveyor of public stores, met with Hull, and they agreed to secure the presentation gifts in Philadelphia. On 17 April 1809, Coxe wrote the Secretary of War:⁵¹

The materials for Colors on hand belong to the War Department. I applied to the Superintendent for an order for a sufficient quantity to have them made, but as I have not received it, I presume he waits your instruction, which I ask the favor of you to give. The fields and eagles for the colors are painted and ready for completion.

The Secretary of War authorized the transfer to Coxe on 20 April 1809.⁵²

The reference to the “fields and eagles for colors are painted and ready for completion” makes sense in light of an inventory made on 14 December 1810 of “Indian flags” then in store. The inventory listed “34 in all, which is expected will be sufficient for 1811, or till further orders.”⁵³ Of these, however, four were at the arsenal (probably the Schuylkill Arsenal) with the added note “no fields not made up”. The other 30 were divided between two other individuals. Of these 14 were “in Mr. Berrett’s hands painting”. The reference was to Philadelphian William Berrett, who advertised himself in the Philadelphia directory since at least 1793 as a sign and coach painter. An accomplished artist who could paint fabrics as well, Mr. Berrett was evidently painting the eagles upon the cantons of the Indian flags in 1810. The other Indian flags were listed as “16 fields with Mrs. Claypoole.”

That Mrs. Claypoole is better known by her married name, from her first husband John Ross: Elizabeth (“Betsy”) Ross. After Mr. Ross’s demise in January of 1776, Elizabeth remarried, first in 1777 to Captain Joseph Ashburn, who would die in an English prison after his capture at sea, then to another Revolutionary War patriot,

⁴⁹ Chicago Historical Society; Chicago, Illinois; collection no. 1920.744. Regrettably, in cataloguing this item, the history that applied to it was assigned erroneously to 1920.745; nevertheless, the 1899 catalogue of the “Gunter Collection”, *The Catalogue of America’s War Museum . . .* (Omaha: Greater America Exposition Co., 1899), pp. 32-35, Case no. 18-4C, clearly identifies the flag presented to “Sheyboy-way” as a flag with 17 stars. Catalogue no. 1920.745 only bears 13 stars arcing over the eagle’s head.

⁵⁰ Clarence Edwin Carter (comp. & ed.), *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume X, the Territory of Michigan* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), p. 198.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 277.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁵³ Consolidated Correspondence File of the Quartermaster General, Record Group No. 92, National Archives; subject heading “Indian flags”.

John Claypoole, who would survive until August of 1817. By 1810 she was sewing flags for the Indian Department under the name of Mrs. Elizabeth Claypoole. In the following year she sewed at least another eight flags for the government, for on 2 September 1811, Elizabeth Claypoole was paid \$71.45 for her services, which included “making 8 flags containing each 161 yds [at] \$6 for \$48.00”.⁵⁴ Another \$12.40 was paid under the same bill for “40 yds. muslin” @ 31 cents per yard; this presumably was for the stars for the eight flags made. Mrs. Claypoole also received \$7.50 for 15 yards of linen at 47 cents per yard (presumably for the flags’ headings), and \$4.00 for thread. Since 40 yards of muslin were also consumed in making these flags, presumably they all bore white cotton stars. Seventeen would have been the appropriate number in 1811.

Given the amount of bunting and muslin consumed by these eight flags it is unlikely they were for the Indian Department, particularly since they had cotton stars rather than painted stars or no stars at all. Nevertheless, Mrs. Claypoole definitely continued to make flags for the Indian department after 1810. On 1 May 1816, Thomas L. McKenney, then Superintendent of Indian Affairs, wrote to Henry Simpson in Philadelphia requesting he buy or:⁵⁵

have made twelve small flags with an eagle painted on each side. Mr. Bronaugh once purchased such as I now want from a Mr. Claypoole of Philadelphia, from whom you can get every information respecting them. I wish them, when done, to be put into a box and sent by the stage to this office.

Two weeks later, McKenney acknowledged that he had learned that these flags were nearing completion. He further communicated to Simpson on 7 June that the flags had arrived by stage and then informed him on 20 June that the cost had been \$148.62, about \$12 each.⁵⁶

The reference to “small” flags in the 1808 and 1816 correspondence implies that more than one size was made for presentation; indeed, two sizes were available. On 16 July 1817, Superintendent McKenney informed Missouri Territory Governor William Clark that he had sent 3 large and 3 small flags to Clark and was rushing 12 more to him. In describing the flags, McKenney commented that:⁵⁷

the flags that are sent, are inferior in their exterior to those furnished heretofore but they are intrinsically better, being painted on bunting, which from its roughness shows less acceptably to the eye; but one of these flags will outlast two of the ordinary kind painted on glazed staff.

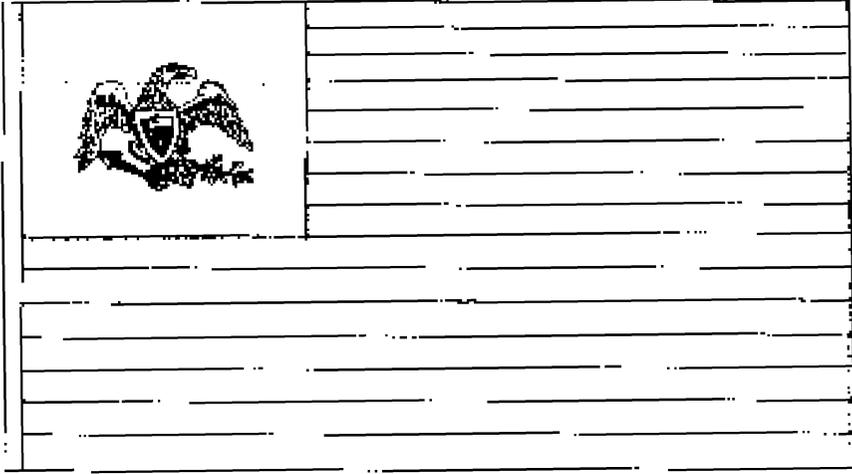
⁵⁴ Bill of 2 September 1811 to “Elizabeth Claypoole” for \$71.45, Tench Coxe Papers, Record Group No. 92, National Archives, Box 17. Elizabeth Claypoole was engaged in War Department work earlier. On 24 November 1808, Tench Coxe recorded in his day journal that 11 yards of “blue Kershaw” were to be sent to Mrs. Claypoole “to be made into Standard[s]”. On 2 February 1809, the Military Store Keeper at Philadelphia noted to Tench Coxe that “Mrs. Claypoole charges for making 2 Garrison and 2 silk flags and 7 Regimental Colors”, at the same time noting that he had only received 2 garrison flags, 5 regimental colors, and 1 battalion color.

⁵⁵ Thomas L. McKenney to Henry Simpson, 1 May 1816, Letters Sent, Office of Indian Trade, Record Group No. 75, National Archives, Vol. “D”, p. 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. “D”, pp. 39, 55-56, and 65.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. “D”, p. 378.

On the same day that McKenney wrote Clark, he also wrote Simpson in Philadelphia stating “order dozen flags to be sent to Gove. Clark—largest size, 7’ 6” x 4’ 8””; cost is \$12.”⁵⁸ Hence the flags furnished in 1817 were definitely of two sizes, the larger 56 inches by 90 inches, with the eagle painted on a bunting canton rather than on the glazed cotton used previously. The \$12 cost was the same as charged by Mrs. Claypoole in 1811.



Two flags survive which conform approximately to this “large size” Indian flag. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin has a 15-stripe flag in bunting, with a dark blue bunting canton with the remnants of a painted eagle and no stars. The flag measures 56 inches on the hoist and 108 inches remain of its tattered fly. Its provenance holds that it had been used by an Indian named Waumegesako, after he received it from “president” Jackson.⁵⁹ Given the 15 stripes, more likely it was given to the chief in recognition of his services in the War of 1812, when Andrew Jackson was a general.

Another flag of the same basic design (formerly at the Minnesota Historical Society but now held by the New York State Museum) was reputedly presented to the Iroquois in 1813.⁶⁰ This flag measures 54 inches by 114 inches. Like Waumegesako’s flag, the field is composed of 15 red and white bunting stripes. The 30 inch by 37 inch canton bears a full painted coat of arms of the United States in surprisingly good condition, and no stars. The eagle is nearly identical to the rendition William Berrett applied to regimental standards of the U.S. Army from about 1809 through 1844.

When the U.S. Army expanded its infantry force in 1808, it initially had the standards for the new regiments embroidered in Philadelphia by Eliza and Anna Leslie. They continued to produce standards for the Army during the War of 1812. Even before the War, however, the Army experimented with painting its standards instead of using embroidery. One of the first so painted belonged to the 4th U.S. Infantry, and it was executed by none other than William Berrett. He received most of the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. “D”, pp. 366-377.

⁵⁹ State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Madison, Wisconsin; collection no. 51.163.

⁶⁰ New York State Education Department, Anthropology Section; Albany, New York; collection no. OID 1/H25.

commissions to paint colors during the War of 1812 as well. He continued to paint the scrolls on regimental colors and the coat of arms on the United States standards until at least the 1830s. By 1845, however, Samuel Brewer, also of Philadelphia, had replaced him as the War Department's chief artist for decorating colors for the Army.

Orders for flags for the Indian Department, then known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, continued through the 1820s. On 11 October 1821, McKenney ordered from Simpson in Philadelphia another six flags with eagles and stars, three of the large size and three of the small, "such as you have heretofore procured for this department."⁶¹ Here at least we have evidence that the flags from the 1820s bore stars around the painted eagles. Nearly three years later, on 29 July 1824, McKenney ordered twelve large and six small size flags to be given to Missouri Territory Governor William Clark for distribution to tribes in his western territory.⁶² On 5 May 1825 Superintendent McKenney described to the Secretary of War how his Office of Indian Affairs would use the medals and flags he was preparing to have made.⁶³

It is the practice of our agents, and especially those on our North Western Frontier, to take medals of the King from Indians who receive them from British Traders, in which case they always present another, of their "Great Father". So with flags. The British Standards are taken from them, and American given in their stead. Our relations reaching toward the Spanish lines, in the direction of Santa Fe, again pursuing the same policy will find it necessary to exchange medals of the Spanish Monarch with the Indians in that quarter; it is somewhat essential to have them early, that such an interchange may attend upon the first intercourse.

Here we see clearly the government's attempt to influence the American Indian tribes, not with military force, but with presents. And one of the prime presents was the U.S. flag.

Territorial Governor William Clark continued to be the main conduit for the flags distributed in the West during the 1820s. On 26 March 1827, McKenney informed Clark that:⁶⁴

I have this day sent to the office of the wagon transportation line between this city and Baltimore, one large box, directed to you, containing 38 flags and 60 medals for your Superintendence, with the necessary direction for its transportation from Baltimore to St. Louis. . . . Of the 38 flags, consisting of two sizes—there are 21 ornamented with Eagles and stars and 17 with stars only; of the 60 medals, there are 10 of the largest size, 20 of the middle, and 30 of the smallest.

⁶¹ Thomas L. McKenney to Henry Simpson, 11 October 1821, Letters Sent, Office of Indian Trade, Record Group No. 75, National Archives, Vol. "F", p. 268.

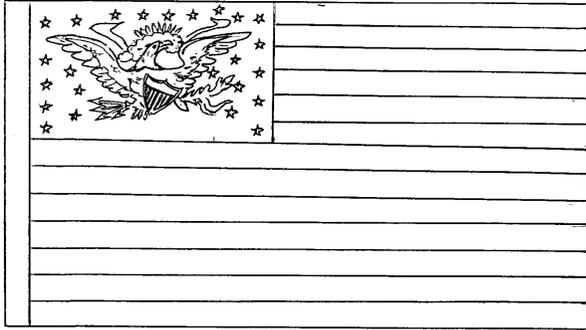
⁶² Thomas L. McKenney to Henry Simpson, 29 July 1824, Letters Sent, Office of Indian Affairs, Vol. I, p. 154.

⁶³ Bauman L. Belden, *Indian Peace Medals Issued in the United States* (New York: The American Numismatic Society, 1927), pp. 27-28.

⁶⁴ Thomas L. McKenney to William Clark, 26 March 1827, Letters Sent, Office of Indian Affairs, Vol. III, pp. 474-475.

From 1822 through 1836 the flag of the United States bore 24 stars. However, that shipment of flags provided to Missouri was divided nearly equally between a “small” size without the coat of arms of the United States and a “large size” that bore both stars and eagle.

A bunting flag in the Smithsonian Institution’s Natural History Museum bears 24 gold-painted five-pointed stars surrounding a crudely painted representation of the coat of arms of the United States.⁶⁵



The flag measures 44 inches by 78 inches. The canton extends to the depth of only 6 stripes so that it rests on a red stripe. No provenance can be assigned to the flag; however, it is nearly identical to another 24-star flag in the collections of the Oklahoma Historical Society.⁶⁶ This flag bears the same 24 gold-painted stars surrounding the painted coat of arms of the United States. The canton also extends just through the six upper stripes, resting on a red stripe. Made of bunting, the flag measures within 2 inches of the Smithsonian flag, at 46 inches by 80 inches. The flag is claimed to have been presented by Andrew Jackson to the Chickasaw leader Levi Colbert for his service at the battle of New Orleans. However, since the flag is associated with a silver “peace medal” bearing the likeness of John Quincy Adams (president from 1825 to 1829), the flag likely was presented during Adams’ presidency in honor of Colbert’s earlier service.

On 1 February 1830, John Daugherty, Superintendent of the Upper Missouri Agency wrote to Thomas McKenney:⁶⁷

I request that you will please have me furnished with 24 medals, and the same number of U.S. small Indian flags. I would like to take them with me, as I shall have important use for them early in the Spring.

An endorsement on the letter noted, “let the flags be given; we have no medals suit-

⁶⁵ Smithsonian Institution, Museum of Natural History; Washington, D.C.; accession no. 32,743A. This flag is illustrated in *So Proudly We Hail...* (fully cited in footnote 41), pp. 190-191.

⁶⁶ Oklahoma Historical Society; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; accession no. 5444. This flag is depicted in color in *So Proudly We Hail...*, pp. 178-179. The text erroneously states that the number of stars is 25, rather than 24, and incorrectly notes that ten of these stars were “added” at a later date.

⁶⁷ John Daugherty to Thomas L. McKenney, 1 February 1830, Letters Received, Upper Missouri Agency, Office of Indian Affairs, Record Group No. 75, National Archives.

able to the occasion. Soon as they can be rendered it will be & a supply forwarded.”

Did the presentation of these flags to the Indian chiefs serve any purpose? Superintendent McKenney, admittedly a biased observer, thought so. In his *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes* published in 1827, he related an incident involving a flag replacement:⁶⁸

This same [Chippewa] Indian had a British flag also, which he afterwards brought, and in full council, laid at our feet. On seeing it there the Indians set up a shout, and in their remarks, gave proof that they knew the import of a flag, and also what its surrender meant. This flag was ordered to be replaced with an American flag.

The recognition of the importance of the U.S. flag was not quickly lost on the American Indian. On 1 September 1862, Captain James L. Fiske, leading an immigrant train across the northern plains happened upon a “medicine lodge”. He described in his diary what he encountered:⁶⁹

Near this lodge we found a beautifully formed and spotted mare, still living, which they [the Blackfoot Indians] had cut in different parts of her body and then left as a sacrifice. They had also left in the lodge several worthless guns, some blankets, skins, moccasins, a scarf, an American flag, which had probably been presented to them by the American Fur company, and a British flag with the letters H.B.C. on it.

Thus the Blackfoot nation knew the importance of flags, and even integrated them into religious ritual.

CONCLUSION

The United States flag, as provided by the U.S. government and its agencies, indeed saw extensive use in the American West during the first century of its existence—in various forms. However, the principal agency to spread the flag to the West was not the Army or the Navy, but the Indian Department. The flag it brought to the West was not the plain “Stars & Stripes” with varying star arrangements but a different type of United States flag—one, for the most part, with an eagle in its canton, sometimes with stars, sometimes without. And that flag’s primary purpose was not waging war but promoting peace.

⁶⁸ Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes, of the Character and Customs of the Chippewa Indians, and of the Incidents Connected with the Treaty of Fond Du Lac* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1959 reprint of 1827 edition), p. 314.

⁶⁹ Captain James Fiske, *North Overland Expedition for Protection of Emigrants from Fort Abercrombie to Fort Benton*, 1862, House Executive Document No. 80, 37th Congress, 3rd Session (Congressional Serial Set No. 1164), p. 25.