

Exploring the Genealogy of the President's Flag of the United States of America, 1915–1959

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This paper summarizes one of the most involved, researched, and fast-tracked presidential flag-design processes in our nation's history. The journey begins, as with any genealogical research, with the relatives we already know and works back in time until we arrive at the earliest-known ancestors, then moves forward through recent generations. Along the way, a "family tree" takes shape, sometimes with surprises. Such is the case in "Exploring the Genealogy of the President's Flag of the United States of America."¹

Every flag has a story to tell—some more interesting than others. Presidential flags are no different. Their designers and makers have told some memorable stories over the years. But sometimes it's the untold stories that are the most interesting.

The author's travels to investigate privately held flags, the holdings of presidential libraries and museums, the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum, the historical records of The Institute of Heraldry, and today's Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support Flag Room turned out to be no different than the author's own family genealogical research, except for one very important aspect: the author's ability to inspect, catalog, and photograph more than 45 actual flags and colors of the office of the president of the United States provided indisputable physical evidence of their existence.

Accumulating many of the known official and unofficial source documents (books, periodicals, specifications, and regulations) has also provided some comprehensive insights into the purpose, display, and designs; the politics, stories, and society's commentary about the flags representing the highest

civilian office in our nation. More than 200 source documents and early and modern publications have provided a complex and sometimes conflicting story of one of today's most exquisite works of textile and vexillological art: the president's silken colors.

President Woodrow Wilson, 1915–1916

The 1916 president's flag design could have easily been today's design had it not been for some behind-the-scenes work by Vice Admiral Wilson Brown, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's naval aide in March 1945, and Commander Bryon McCandless, FDR's former aide from 1915, when Roosevelt was the assistant secretary of the Navy.

In September 1915 President Wilson was puzzled by the difference between the Army and Navy president's flags and colors: two different colors, two different designs. Both were official. This "double standard" caused considerable comment at the Grand Army of the Republic Review in Washington, DC, on 29 September 1915.²

President Wilson asked Assistant Secretary of the Navy Roosevelt and Lt. Commander McCandless, aide to the secretary of the Navy, and Assistant Secretary of War Henry Breckinridge to prepare a new design.³ McCandless recalled the 1915–1916 president's flag redesign process in a 29 May 1945, letter to James Vardaman, naval aide to President Truman:

In 1915 President Wilson reviewed the Grand Army of the Republic in its last march up Pennsylvania Avenue, fifty years after the two-day review at the end of the war between the states. At the reviewing stand were the Army President's Colors and the Navy's President's Flag. There was considerable newspaper comment about there being two flags for the Commander-in-Chief.

Shortly thereafter, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, sent for me. Upon reporting, I was introduced to the Assistant Secretary of War, Henry Breckinridge. The Assistant Secretaries asked me: "Why the two Flags at the President's reviewing stand?"

I pointed out that the Navy Presidential Flag was almost identical with the Army Regimental Color of the Infantry. The addition of the scroll under the eagle with the name of the regiment therein would make it an Army Regimental Color; hence confusion as to which it might be—a regimental or a presidential color.

The Assistant Secretaries desired my suggestion for a Presidential Flag. I proposed four stars in the Navy Flag to indicate the President as

the Eagle General and Admiral—the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy.

The next day Captain Douglas MacArthur, Aide to the Chief of Staff of the Army, phoned that he had been designated by the Secretary of War to work with me upon a design for a new Presidential Flag, and that the design proposed to the Assistant Secretaries was agreeable to him. He suggested I submit the design to the President. The Chief Constructor of the Navy, Rear Admiral David Taylor had his Chief Clerk, Mike Shaeffer, assist me in drawing up the sketch.

This design I presented to President Wilson in the White House. Mr. Wilson was greatly interested. He had wondered why there were two flags at his reviewing stand. He directed that the star in each corner be reduced by two-thirds of the size as drawn; also he wanted the President's Eagle on his flag instead of the Eagle of the great Seal. He took me to the entrance of the White House where there was a large circular bronze plate "THE SEAL OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES", with EAGLE in the center. Mr. Wilson directed Mr. Hoover, the head usher, to get an impression of the President's Seal and also a colored plate of the Seal. The Eagle of this President's Seal was placed in the President's Flag.

The plate I used as an illustration with the Flag in the *National Geographic Magazine*, *Flags of the World*, 1917. I prepared the flag material for that publication. Mr. Roosevelt helped me in the preparation of the flag material. This flag was used on the George Washington when President Wilson went to France.⁴

President Woodrow Wilson signed "Executive Order 2390: Establishing Exact Proportions for All Flags and Union Jacks" on 29 May 1916. The final paragraph in the executive order reads:

President's Flag: The President's flag shall be in accordance with the plan accompanying and forming a part of this order. In case sizes are needed other than the two sizes shown on the plan, they shall be manufactured in the same proportions as those shown.

. . . Attachment to (and part of) the order:

The colors prescribed for the President's flag are as follows:

Field of the flag, blue.

All stars, large and small, white.

The thirteen clouds, white with black stitching.

Motto ribbon, white with black letters and stitching.

Rays, gold stitching.
 Eagles beak, yellow.
 Feathers, white with black stitching.
 Legs and feet, yellow.
 Nails, white with black stitching.
 Olive branch, leaves green, olives light green.
 Arrows, white with black stitching.
 Shield, chief blue, strips alternate white and red, beginning with white on the outside.⁵

This eight-month project finally brought an end to two different “official” flags for the president of the United States of America since 1898. And this design would remain unquestioned—until March 1945.



Figure 1. President Wilson’s 1916 silken color of the Army and the Navy. Source: Author’s photograph of the artifact at the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum, QMR-411.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1945

Fast forward to 1945: Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to his fourth term of office in November 1944, with his new vice presidential candidate, Harry S. Truman. As World War II was near its peak in 1944, the Army and Navy decided to create new five-star officer ranks in December of that year, resulting in five-star general and five-star fleet admiral flags.

Early in 1945, the FDR White House pondered questions about the design of the current president’s flag with Naval Aide Wilson Brown and Assistant Naval Aide William Rigdon: is the four-star president of the United States outranked by the new five-star generals and admirals? FDR shared this concern

with the secretary of the Navy and the secretary of war in a brief memo on 12 March 1945.⁶ (Figure 2)

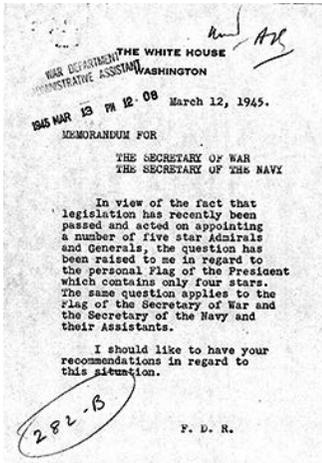


Figure 2. Roosevelt's memorandum regarding the four-star president's flag. Source: Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, 282-B.

Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, responded to the president the very next day, without directly answering the “flag of the president” question: “Replying to your memorandum of March 12th relating to the flags of the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy and their assistants, I have conferred with the Secretary of the Navy and he and I feel that our flags should remain as they are.”⁷

James Forrestal, the Secretary of the Navy, responded to the president, but not as quickly as Stimson, at 2:00 AM on 19 March:

In reply to your memorandum of 12 March I consider that the combination of the four stars and the Coat of Arms of the Presidential Seal in the personal flag of the President is symbolic of the high office over and above that of the Secretary of the Navy. Similarly the combination of four stars and a fouled anchor in the Flag of the Secretary of the Navy is symbolic of his office above that of an Admiral or an Admiral temporarily appointed to the rank of Fleet Admiral. I therefore do not recommend any change in the design in the personal flags of the President, the Secretary of the Navy, nor the Fleet Admiral.⁸

The official answers should have brought the question of a new flag for the president to a halt. However, FDR was not satisfied with the advice of his appointees. FDR apparently discussed the idea of a president's flag redesign with his naval aide, Vice Admiral Wilson Brown, and mentioned working with McCandless in 1916 on Woodrow Wilson president's flag redesign in

1915–1916. Brown then wrote a confidential letter on 20 March 1945, to McCandless, his friend, seeking his opinion on the president's flag:

With the creation of the rank of Fleet Admiral with a five-star flag, the question arises as to whether the President's flag (and possibly the Secretary's) should have added one or more stars as indicating superior command rank. I would very much value your opinion.

Will you give me your opinion of the following if you can give it off hand without any additional research:—

- (a) What is the origin of indicating rank by the number of stars—English, Dutch, American?
- (b) Having created a five-star flag, does it seem to you appropriate that the President's, as Commander in Chief, should be boosted also?

How many additional stars would you recommend and how would you arrange them?

I hope this finds you well and that you may be able to send me a prompt reply with permission to quote you. I hope you will hold it completely confidential between you and me that the subject is under consideration.⁹

Based on this series of correspondence, it is obvious that FDR and Brown did not wish to reveal their interests in exploring options for a new president's flag, especially to the War and Navy Department secretaries. McCandless began his research and preparation of a number of president's flag designs for FDR's review. Unfortunately, his response and design proposals were not completed until after FDR's death on 12 April 1945.

President Harry S. Truman, 1945

Immediately after President Roosevelt's death on 12 April 1945, Vice President Harry S. Truman became the 33rd president of the United States. This abrupt transition, coupled with Germany's pending defeat in Europe, quite likely could have stopped the quest for a new president's flag, but it did not.

Roosevelt's naval aide, Vice Admiral Brown, and Commodore McCandless are largely responsible for moving the redesign process forward in the earliest days of the Truman administration. What made their collaboration even more challenging were their assignments and their geographic separation at the time. Brown was transitioning to inactive duty and leaving the White House

staff, and McCandless was assigned to the Naval Repair Base in San Diego, California. But they persisted.

Preliminary Designs for a New President's Flag

McCandless responded to Brown's replacement, Captain James Vardaman, naval aide to President Truman, on 29 May 1945 (postmarked 31 May 1945) with a seven-page letter answering the questions posed by Brown on 20 March. This detailed letter was divided into the four sections:

- History of the presidential flag
- Suggested changes to the president's flag
- Origins of stars indicating rank
- Introduction of the eagle into the standards of the Army¹⁰

This letter also transmitted watercolor renderings of several designs suggested by McCandless (currently in the Truman Presidential Museum archives). His design proposals included a number of creative variations in an attempt to capture the grandeur of the office of the president and a variety of national symbols. The earliest of these included the familiar president's coat of arms in the center with four star-shaped groupings of twelve stars each near the corners of the flag, for a total of 48, representing the 48 states of the United States.

The four groupings of stars were to have represented President Roosevelt's "four freedoms"—freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. McCandless provided two variations on this basic theme with the president's coat of arms in the center:

- Four groups of six-pointed stars on a light blue banner: six-pointed stars from the 1782 Great Seal and light blue of the sash worn by George Washington across his chest between his coat and vest as commander-in-chief, and the color of George Washington's personal flag with six-pointed stars, a symbol of his rank and authority (Figure 3);
- Four groups of five-pointed stars on a dark blue banner: based on the traditions of the colors of the current (1916) president's flag and the flag of the United States (Figure 4); and
- A third design used the same coat of arms with a circle of thirteen stars on a dark blue banner. (Figure 5)



Figure 3. Byron McCandless's first proposal: light blue, May 1945. Source: author's photograph, Truman Presidential Library and Museum (TPLM).



Figure 4. Byron McCandless's second proposal: dark blue, May 1945. Source: author's photograph, TPLM.



Figure 5. Byron McCandless's third proposal: dark blue, thirteen Stars, May 1945. Source: author's photograph, TPLM.

A Red President's Flag

On one occasion, President Truman discussed the idea of a new president's flag with General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who suggested a red president's flag similar to the earlier designs of the Army's president's colors. McCandless prepared a rendering of such a flag in July (or August) 1945, based on the 1898 President's Fighting Flag with a circle of 48 stars. (Figure 6)



Figure 6. Byron McCandless's fourth proposal: red encircled by 48 stars, July 1945. Source: author's photograph, TPLM.

A penciled inscription on the back of the original drawing (Figure 6) reads: "The President's Fighting Flag.' Colored from 'The Flags of the Union' 1898. Positive Photostat copy accompanying. BMcC" (i.e., Byron McCandless).

In the June 1945 discussions, Truman favored a circle of 48 stars around the American eagle on a dark blue banner. McCandless went back to work preparing at least two other design proposals. He sent these to the White House in July 1945. (Note the stars pointing inward in McCandless's designs.)



Figure 7. Byron McCandless's fifth proposal: perched eagle encircled by 48 stars, July 1945. Source: author's photograph, TPLM.



Figure 8. Byron McCandless's sixth proposal: President's arms encircled by 48 stars, July 1945. Source: author's photograph, TPLM.

President Truman and his top aides were in Germany at the Potsdam Conference (17 July– 2 August 1945) and did not review McCandless's new work until their return later in August. Truman gave his preliminary approval to the design proposal with 48 stars surrounding the president's coat of arms shown in Figure 8.

The Office of the Quartermaster General Signs On to the Task

Lieutenant George McKee Elsey worked in the White House as an assistant naval aide during the World War II Roosevelt administration in the top-secret intelligence and communications center (the Map Room). He spent time traveling with the president to code and decode classified messages. Following FDR's death on 12 April 1945, three months into the president's fourth term, Elsey was asked to continue his classified work with President Truman. Elsey was also assigned to continue the next steps of the president's flag design with the Office of the Quartermaster General (OQMG), Heraldic Section, in late August 1945.

23 August 1945

Following preliminary discussions with Elsey, the Quartermaster General, Lieutenant General Edmund B. Gregory, sent the following letter, dated 23 August 1945, transmitting a "study on the President's Seal and Flags" by Arthur E. DuBois, Chief of Heraldry in the OQMG, to the president, via Elsey: "Here is transmitted a study on the President's Seal and Flags, which has been informally requested of Mr. Arthur DuBois of this office, which is recommended be given favorable consideration."¹¹ A file copy of the five-page study by Arthur E. DuBois contained 18 numbered paragraphs detailing the basis for the Chief of the Heraldic Section's recommendations.¹²

The original drawing included with the above letter, from DuBois to Elsey, has not been located. However, based on their discussions and final drawings, it most likely would have appeared as shown in Figure 9, combining DuBois's full color eagle, dexter (right-facing), in a circle of 13 stars.



Figure 9. Recreation of the OQMG's artist drawing for president's flags, 22 August 1945. Source: artistic representation of the 22 August 1945 (modification by the author of the author's photographs, TPLM).

23 August 1945

Elsey discussed the recommended president's flag designs with DuBois, Elsey summarizing their meeting in handwritten notes:

- 1) Eagle to be like the Great Seal
- 2) Stars—points out from center, radius
- 3) Natural color
- 4) The change would involve (President's) Seal as well as Flag
- 5) If head were not changed, there would be no change in Seal—just colored eagle & 13 stars
- 6) Note the colors & 13 stars, are as Blue Room chairs

DuBois's handwritten notes on the same date also summarized the discussion. Note DuBois did not want the number of stars to represent states in the Union.

- 1) Approve with 13—don't want contingent on states—also appearance
- 2) Eagle Dexter
- 3) Eagle "proper"
- 4) Executive (order) Heraldic description
- 5) Cloud effect as is OK
- 6) Leave 13 stars in—under a cloud as is
- 7) V.P.
- 8) Sizes¹³

27 August 1945

The assistant to Commodore Vardaman, Lt. Commander Clark Clifford (U.S.N.R.), prepared a memorandum to file summarizing President Truman's decisions regarding the new president's flag and the new presidential seal from a meeting on Sunday, 26 August 1945:

After considerable deliberation the President directed that a new flag model be prepared containing the following:

1. The eagle is to appear as it does in the DuBois model. The President would like to have the artist incorporate the effect into the new model which would make it appear lightning was issuing from the arrowheads clutched in the left claw of the eagle. The President's reaction was that

the importance of the new atomic bomb is so tremendous that some symbolic reference to it should be incorporated into the flag.

2. There are to be forty-eight stars in a circle around the eagle. The stars are to be slightly larger than in the McCandless model and two points of the star shall point inward as they do on the DuBois model.

Lieutenant George Elsey is to prepare a history of the events leading up to, and the adoption of, the new Presidential flag and seal. Such history shall contain, among any other facts and circumstances, the following:

1. Original letter of President Roosevelt with reference to contemplate adoption of new flag.
2. Exchange of correspondence between Admiral Brown, Commodore Vardaman, and Commodore McCandless.
3. All letters, memorandum and papers obtained from Mr. DuBois.
4. Exact copy of the Presidential order which will be signed by President Truman adopting a new flag and/or seal.
5. Scale drawing of new flag and seal.
6. All copies of models of flags considered but not adopted should be included among paper. A history and all accompanying memoranda, models and papers should be assembled and properly stowed in a chest made for this specific purpose. This shall be kept in the White House and shall then become part of President Truman's papers and effects for the interest and use of posterity.¹⁴

Initially, DuBois tried to discourage the use of 48 stars on the basis that the president's flag would have to be changed every time new states were added. However, the president's opinion prevailed. DuBois was also concerned about the unusual design of the left-facing white eagle on the president's coat of arms, which was incorrect according to the heraldic custom of a right-facing device. However, this left-facing eagle featured in coats-of-arms and on china and plaques has been in White House use since the 1840s.

Elsey wrote the following in a memorandum to Dubois:

The data prepared by you and forwarded by letter of the Quartermaster General of 23 August has been presented to the President.

It is requested that a new painting be prepared as soon as practicable similar to the one of 22 August, except that a circle of 48 stars should replace the present circle of 13 stars. The stars should be as large as artistic considerations allow. One point of each star should point outwards as in your painting of the twenty-second.

The President approves the eagle as you have proposed it, except that he would like to have a minor modification made in the cluster of arrows clutched in the eagle's left talon so that it would appear that lightning is issuing from the arrowheads.

The President believes that the importance of the atomic bomb is so significant that symbolic reference to it should be incorporated in his flag and seal.

The President wishes to adopt a new Presidential seal of the same design as the proposed flag. Accordingly, it is requested that a suitable model be prepared for his consideration.

The President is also interested in your comments concerning the flag of the Vice President. It is requested that you prepare several sketches depicting your suggestions for a new Vice President's flag.¹⁵

Lightning Bolts

President Truman's suggestion to have lightning bolts as a symbolic reference to the atomic bomb must have been received with very mixed reactions from White House staff and the Heraldic Section of the OQMG. The following artist's renderings were prepared for the president's review by the Heraldic Section. (Figure 10) One can only imagine how reluctantly this proposal was received by Arthur DuBois.



Figure 10. OQMG artist renderings of various types of lightning bolts for president's flags, August 1945. Source: author's photographs, TPLM.

George Elsey informed the author on 29 August 2013, that the president was eventually discouraged from sending such a visible and threatening message with addition of lightning bolts on the new President's Flag, Seal and Coat of Arms. "All the White House staff thought the lightning bolts were a mistake," Elsey noted. Charles Ross, Truman's friend and press secretary (1945–1950),

talked Truman out of this “damned fool idea.” George Elsey also added that “Charlie Ross often talked bluntly with his life-long friend, Harry S. Truman.”

The president’s flag design continued. According to Elsey’s recollections, “DuBois and I quickly came to an understanding. The new presidential flag should have a circle of 48 stars. The circle of stars would surround the presidential seal, which should be in full color, as it was not in the old flag.”¹⁶



Figure 11. Arthur DuBois's proposal: revised president's arms encircled by 48 stars, August 1945. Source: author's photograph, TPLM.

At the time, there was discussion about the design of the president’s coat of arms. Elsey continued, noting “DuBois seized the opportunity to correct an error that, purist that he was, had long bothered him: that the eagle’s head faced to its left, or “sinister” in heraldic terminology, was all wrong. A “bar sinister” in a coat of arms was an indication of illegitimacy. The eagle’s head must face (its) right, or dexter, the direction of honor. While this formality of heraldry was interesting to a scholar, it would mean nothing to the public.”¹⁷

14 September 1945

Artists in the Heraldic Section of the OQMG prepared the final artwork for the proposed president’s flag, including a full-size version of the automobile flag complete with fringe. A photograph of this rendering shown in Figure 12 was cropped for the black-and-white press release and for the executive order attachment.



Figure 12. OQMG artist's full-size rendering of the president's automobile flag, 14 September 1945. Source: author's photograph, TPLM.

2 October 1945

The mechanical drawing for the new president's color and flag (Figure 13) were prepared by the OQMG on 2 October 1945, superseding the previous drawing of 1 April 1930.¹⁸

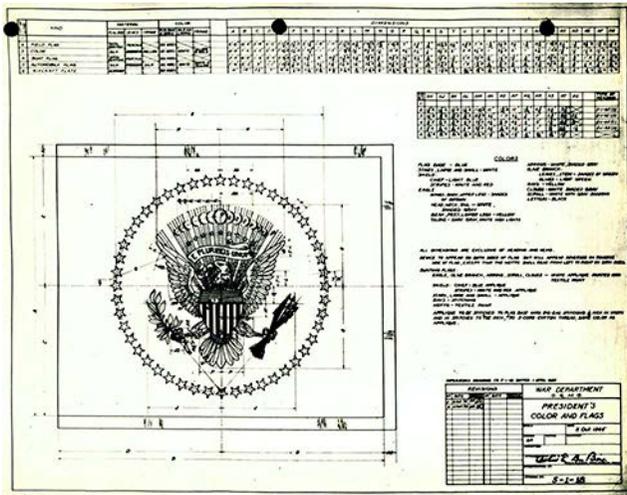


Figure 13. Final mechanical drawing, 2 October 1945. Source: author's photograph, *The Institute of Heraldry Archives*.

Elsy commented in his autobiography that since there was no apparent statutory basis for the design of the president's coat of arms, it could be revised as needed. However, communicating to the general public that the former presidential coat of arms was “illegitimate” probably would not be in the best interest of the White House during the final days of the war. Elsy continued:

I wrote the press release announcing that President Truman had modernized the presidential flag and had directed that the eagle in the presidential seal and flag turn away from the “arrows of war and face the olive branches of peace.” In the autumn of 1945, with World War II just weeks behind us, this caught the attention of the public, and the Truman administration was praised for capturing the mood of the country whereas, in fact, the change was due to Arthur DuBois's devotion to heraldic principles.¹⁹

23 October 1945: First Oval Office President's Silken Colors

Behind the scenes, the Quartermaster Corps was preparing the first set of new flags for President Truman's use at the signing of the executive order. This

set of flags was transmitted to the White House, via Elsey, accompanied by the following letter from Lieutenant General Gregory, Quartermaster General, dated 23 October 1945:

In accordance with informal request there are transmitted herewith the following:

One Color, President's, Silk

Three Flags, Automobile, President's, Silk

One Flag, Boat, President's, Bunting

One Flag, Field, President's, Bunting.²⁰

Heroic Needlework

Work on embroidering the new design of the president's color most likely began before the mechanical drawing was completed on 2 October 1945. Even today, embroidering the president's color requires two "flag ladies" working 10 hours per day in tandem approximately 45 days. By engaging two embroidery teams, it is conceivable that one could be completed in 22 to 23 days. The actual silken color delivered to the White House was dated 19 October 1945, on the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot inspection tag.²¹

25 October 1945

"Executive Order 9646: Coat of Arms, Seal, and Flag of the President of the United States" was signed by President Harry S. Truman.

27 October 1945, Hudson River, New York

Navy Day on Saturday, 27 October 1945, was a memorable day. World War II was over, and many warships and aircraft returned to New York for President Truman's review of the fleet. The new president's flag made its debut that Saturday at 11:00 AM during President Truman's commissioning ceremony speech onboard the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* at the New York (Brooklyn) Navy Yard. George Elsey, who played a major role in coordinating the events surrounding the design of the new president's flag, reflected on the moment in his autobiography, writing it "was a thrill to stand on the flight deck of the navy's newest aircraft carrier, with President Truman, and see "my flag" displayed for the first time."²²

Summary Timeline for a New President's Flag Design, 1945

Key events in the discussion, preliminary design, final design, and public presentation of the new president's flag seemed to happen relatively quickly, as shown in the following summary timeline. World War II was still under way, Germany was about to fall, and the atomic bombs were eventually dropped on Japan while the president's new flag was evolving:

- 12 March: Roosevelt discusses president's flag with Rigdon; memo to the War and Navy Department.
- 13 March: Secretary of War replies to Roosevelt "no change to the president's flag."
- 19 March: Secretary of Navy replies to Roosevelt "no change to the president's flag."
- 20 March: confidential letter, Brown discusses new flag with McCandless.
- 12 April: death of Roosevelt.
- 2 May: Brown advises McCandless that proposals have not arrived at the White House; Brown leaves the White House.
- 29 May: McCandless responds in detail to Vardaman.
- 30 May: Tyree telephone conversation with McCandless about samples.
- 6 June: McCandless recommendations from Tyree to Vardaman: light blue with six-pointed stars.
- 13 June: Truman reviews McCandless's designs.
- 18 June: Truman's response to McCandless: no six-pointed stars, eagle, color options, eagle in circle of 48 stars; Eisenhower suggested red background.
- 6 July: Truman et al. depart for Berlin, Germany, and Potsdam Conference.
- 17 July to August 2: Potsdam Conference in Germany.
- 23 August: DuBois's study and proposed flag transmitted to Elsey; Elsey meets with DuBois.
- 26 August: meeting with Truman on new design: Elsey to prepare history of events re flag, seal, and history, president's request for "lightning bolts."

- 28 August: memo from Elsey to DuBois requesting a new painting similar to the one of 22 August: circle of 48 stars, replace 13 stars and eagle as proposed by DuBois, adding lightning bolts.
- 14 September: full-size artist rendering of the automobile flag.
- 2 October: mechanical drawing of the new president's flag.
- 19 October: first president's silken color "1st HC, SP17170, Phila. Quartermaster Depot, Inspected by M. Ring, Oct 19 1945."
- 22 October: Elsey letter to DuBois re plaster cast of seal and request for executive order draft ASAP, reference to mimeographed pages for press.
- 23 October: *The Navy Yard Shipworker* article: "Navy Yard Flagmakers First to Make New President's Flag."
- 23 October: OQMG delivers new president's color and flags to White House and Elsey.
- 25 October: mimeographed press release distributed.
- 25 October: Truman's Executive Order 9646 coat of arms, seal, and flag of the president of the United States.
- 27 October: Navy's president's flag raised on the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* and other ships participating in New York's Navy Day.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1958–1959

Discussions about Alaskan and Hawaiian statehood were heating up during the Roosevelt and Truman administrations but stalled during World War II. By 1948, the popular belief was that Hawaii would be the 49th state followed by Alaska as the 50th. The 15 February 1948 issue of *Life* magazine featured Hawaii as the likely 49th state. Political wrangling and post-World War II defense of the Alaskan coast resulted in both states being admitted in 1959.

A "prototype" 49-star president's color appears to have been made by the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot in 1956 by cutting the circle of 48 stars out of a defective president's colors and embroidering in a 49-star circle to show the president and his staff. This "prototype" president's color is in the archives of the Quartermaster Museum in Fort Lee, Virginia, and shows numerous conditions, errors, and defects that would have prevented it from being used in the White House. Some of these are:

- The 49-star circle on a blue rayon background does not match the banner material.
- The leather tab inside the sleeve of the hoist shows no sign of being used to hang the flag: it was sewn inside the heading fabric.
- Highlights on the eagle's left leg are reversed (on the bottom) while the left highlight is on the top.
- A single gold and silver band of fringe is sewn only on the front of the banner materials versus a double band of fringe on the Oval Office versions.
- There are numerous embroidery quality issues.²³

3 January 1959

The Alaska Statehood Bill was signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on 3 January 1959. The new 49-star National color was displayed by Lt. Col. James Cook, Jr., of the Quartermaster Corps. During this signing ceremony the President reminded those in attendance in the White House Cabinet room that while the new 49-star National flag was impressive it would not be official until 4 July 1959, seven months away.²⁴

26 May 1959

President Eisenhower signed “Executive Order 10823, the Coat of Arms, Seal, and Flag of the President of the United States,” on 26 May 1959, superseding the Truman Executive Order (9646). The new 49-star President's flag shown in Figure 14 would not become official until 4 July 1959.²⁵



Figure 14. 49-star president's silken colors from the Eisenhower Oval Office (2-18-1957, Job 7058). Source: author's photograph, Ludwell B. Pruett collection, conservators Chuck and Donna Douglas.

Researching the Genealogy of the President’s Flag of the United States of America

What started with an examination of President Eisenhower’s 48- and 49-star president’s silken colors eventually led to a research bibliography of more than 200 source documents, many original source documents, and several hundred photographs, plus a dozen libraries and museums willing to open up their storage rooms and archives eager to share their part of the story. Fellow NAVA members and others also assisted with some of the dead ends and related mysteries. The following diagram summarizes the research process to date.

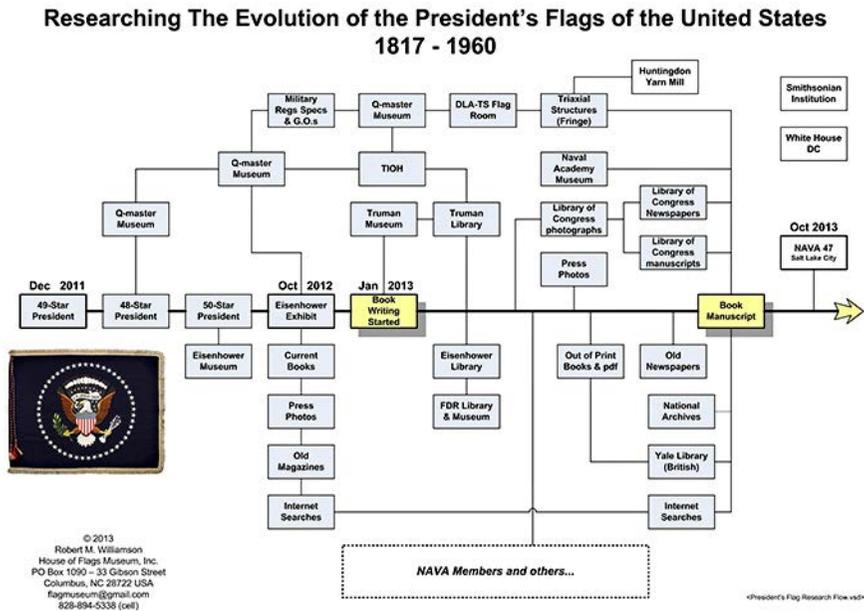


Figure 15. Process flow diagram for the author’s research into the Presidents’ Flags. Source: author.

Afterword

The quest for additional and unexplored sources of information of the president’s flags and colors continues. Readers are encouraged to offer insights and additional sources of information.

The author’s manuscript, *Hail to the Chief: The Evolution of the President’s Flag of the United States of America—1817 to 1960*, is nearing completion. More than 300 pages of text plus more than 200 photos and illustrations tell

the story of one of the most beautiful and little-known banners of modern times. The text of actual presidential, White House staff, and Office of the Quartermaster General correspondence; military specifications; press and news reports; and illustrations of the historical evolution of the President's flags will appear in a single volume for the first time.



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End Notes

1. Launching the research and preparation of this paper and the forthcoming book, *Hail to the Chief: The Evolution of the President's Flag of the United States of America—1817 to 1960*, would not have been possible without the unfettered access to the 48- and 49-star president's silken colors from the Ludwell B. Pruett flag collection, conservators Chuck and Donna Douglas, and the archives of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum (Luther Hanson, curator). Assembling the first-ever exhibit of the president's colors of the Eisenhower Oval Office at the House of Flags Museum in Columbus, North Carolina, provided an unparalleled experience working with the Douglas artifacts and the flag artifacts from the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum (William Snyder, curator).

Behind-the-scenes assistance from the curators and archivists of the Eisenhower, Truman, and Franklin D. Roosevelt presidential libraries and museums as well as the U.S. Naval Academy Museum provided artifact information and answers to many questions. The U.S. Army's Institute of Heraldry archivists provided access to Arthur E. DuBois's detailed documentation of presidential flag history. The Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support section in Philadelphia gave me an appreciation of the process and an admiration for those who stitch-by-stitch embroider and assemble the president's silken colors the same way they have for more than 100 years.

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3. Milo M. Quaife and Elmo Jones, *The History of the United States Flag: From the Revolution to the Present, including a Guide to its Use and Display* (New York: Harper, 1961), 126–27.
4. Papers of Harry H. Vaughn and George Elsey, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, Missouri.
5. President Woodrow Wilson, Executive Order 2930, 29 May 1916.
6. File 282-B, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library Archives, Hyde Park, N.Y.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Papers of Harry H. Vaughn and George Elsey, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum.
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13. Papers of Harry H. Vaughn and George Elsey, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum.
14. *Ibid.*
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16. George McKee Elsey, *An Unplanned Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 93–94.
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20. Archives, The Institute of Heraldry.
21. Inspection tag, artifact 75.71a, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum.
22. Elsey, *An Unplanned Life*, 93–94.
23. U.S. Army, Quartermaster Museum and Archives, Fort Lee, Virginia.
24. Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas.
25. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Executive Order 10823, 26 May 1959.