

Civic Center Plaza Flagpoles Historical Background

Preceding Events

The flagpoles were installed during a period of great nationalism, especially in San Francisco. The Charter of the United Nations was signed in 1945 in the War Memorial Hall Building (Herbst Theatre); while the War Memorial Opera House, and other local venues were host to the two-month-long gathering of global unity. There were some 3500 delegation attendees from 50 nations, and more than 2500 press, radio and newsreel representatives also in attendance. (United Nations Plaza was dedicated later, in 1975, on the east side of the plaza as the symbolic legacy of that event.) World War II was still in the minds of many, but a more recent event was the statehood of both Alaska and Hawaii during 1959, which brought thoughts of the newly designed flag to the fore, especially to school children who saluted the flag each morning. With two new stars, it looked different. And finally, John F. Kennedy was elected president in November 1960; he was the youngest president ever elected bringing a new optimism and energy to the country.

The Pavilion of American Flags

Although all of the flagpoles seen today were in the original design, there does not seem to have been a specific theme for what the many staffs would display. The central two parallel rows containing a total of 18 flagpoles, known as The Pavilion of American Flags, flank the east-facing view of the Civic Center Plaza from the mayor's office. An idea was presented that would feature flags which played an important role in the nation's history. It was the brainchild of a group known as the Sertoma Club, an international service organization; member Stanley A. Bergman is credited for the idea. The first raising of the historic flags took place on Flag Day, June 14, 1964. The notion was that each flag would be sponsored by a non-profit service organization; for example the Bennington Flag was sponsored by Post 818, Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The curatorial selection of the flags was a process carried out by representatives of nineteen civic, service, fraternal, veteran, and business clubs under the direction of Stanley Bergman. A booklet authored by Bergman in 1965 titled "Historic Flags of the United States" described that "some of the selections aroused considerable controversy. The inclusion of those temporary banners proclaiming the Republic of Texas and the Republic of California, for instance, was questioned. Because both of those flags came into being as an integral part of our dynamic westward expansion, a significant part of our heritage, the Committee voted to retain them."

Historically both California and Texas have their roots as being territories of Spain and then Mexico, before being ceded to the United States. Also the 1836 California Lone Star Flag has a visual similarity to the Texas flag, they both shared the element of a large red star.

Today one of the flags selected by the committee no longer flies. It is the Confederate Battle Standard approved on July 21, 1861. Its inclusion, again explained in Bergman's booklet text, stated that "the Confederate Battle Standard reflects an important segment of our history and so was included in the collection." A rucus occurred just a few days after all the flags were originally hoisted, which quickly became a situation. James Herndon, a member of the Negro American Labor Council and past president of the Negro Historical and Cultural Society felt the flag "a badge of slavery." There were many other detractors as well, and eventually the flag and its bronze explanation plaque were removed from the staff.

Eighteen Medium Height Flagpoles

There are 18 poles, in two parallel rows flanking the east-to-west axis. They are round, painted white and at the base of each is a broad angled flange plate. Every other flagpole appears to have a yardarm, which are light fixtures. All the poles originally had curved bronze plaques, with raised lettering, mounted at eye height, which give information about the flag flying; two plaques are missing. The positions of the flags as flown in 2017, may be different from when the display was first flown, as the two sub-plaques, mounted below the larger plaques stating the donor, do not seemingly match the flag flown today.

Text from the Flagpole Plaques

There are two rows of central poles, going clockwise, starting on the north row of poles, on the northwest end and moving east:

1 "**Bennington Flag**, August 16, 1777, Historic fact, even legend, credits the historic Bennington Flag with being the first Stars and Stripes banner of the United States. General Burgoyne hearing that military supplies were stored at Bennington, Vermont sent an expedition of one thousand men to capture them.



Colonel Stark, hero of Bunker Hill, led the Green Mountain Boys against this army delivering a stunning defeat to the British, giving Washington a major victory. In this battle the Bennington Flag was first flown."

Separate sub-plaque below: "Nocona Rotary Club, Nocona, Texas"

2 "**Betsy Ross Flag**, June 14, 1777,

With simple dignity, the Congress of the United States created the American flag on June 14, 1777. By resolving: "That the flag of the Thirteen States be thirteen stripes alternate red and white, that the Union be thirteen stars, white on blue field representing a new constellation". Of the white stripes, Washington said: "They shall go down to posterity representing liberty." Both legend and history give credit for its design to Betsy Ross of Philadelphia."



3 "**The Grand Union Flag**, January

2, 1776, By its thirteen stripes, the American colonists let it be known they were free men seeking only justice from England. By its Cross of St. Andrew and St. George they signified their loyalty and willingness to seek reconciliation. The Continental Congress in late 1775 appointed Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Harrison, and Thomas



Lynch as a committee to select a national flag. After consulting with General George Washington the decision to use the Grand Union Flag was approved."

4 **State of California Flag**, February

3, 1911, plaque missing. The bear, star, and stripe symbols were taken from the 1846 Bear Flag. This flag probably replaces the Confederate Battle Standard that was originally selected for the Pavilion exhibit, but removed shortly thereafter.

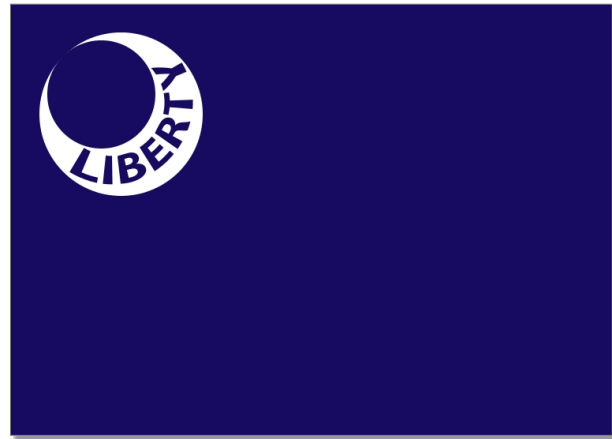


5 **"Gadsden Flag**, December 3, 1775, Benjamin Franklin's paper *The Pennsylvania Gazette* printed an article first suggesting the use of a rattlesnake as a means of symbolizing retribution. Colonel Christopher Gadsden who had urged American independence as early as 1764 adopted the rattlesnake emblem for a flag presented to Commodore Hopkins,

Chief of America's newly activated fleet on December 3, 1775. The Gadsden flag was hoisted at the main mast of the *Alfred* to become the Navy's first official flag."



6 **"The Moultrie Flag**, September 13, 1775, The colonial army first used this flag in the South, sometimes embellishing it with word liberty. Its design was patterned after the uniforms worn by the colonial Moultrie's men. On June 28, 1776 while Charlestone (*sic*) was under siege by the British, a shot destroyed the flagstaff and the banner fell outside the parapet. Under heavy fire Sergeant William Jasper recovered the flag, fastened it to a sponge staff (*a pole device to load a cannon*) and shouted: "We cannot fight without a flag".



7 **"Liberty Tree Flag**, 1775, The Sons of Liberty held their meetings under the spreading limbs of an old elm tree in, Hanover Square, Boston. This tree rapidly became a symbol of American independence and under its branches the colonists planned the Boston Tea Party. General Gage in reprisal ordered the tree cut down. Instead of extinguishing the



independence movement, this act enraged the colonists. To honor the tree's destruction, the sons of liberty designated the Liberty Tree Flag."

8 **"The Continental Flag**, June 17, 1775, Flying from the top of Bunker Hill, it became the symbol of a united people determined to establish a new concept of government. Sympathy for this cause would foreshadow a magnificent alliance between France and the United States. At sea it would be d'Estaing of the French Navy; John Paul Jones of the Ranger. On land, Lafayette and Washington years later in World War I France would resound with American soldiers shouting "Lafayette we are here".
Note: the flag being flown in 2017 has a red field, rather than a blue one



9 **"The Taunton Flag**, 1774, With a deep religious consciousness and a desire to become more independent the people of Taunton, Massachusetts raised a flag inscribed with the watchword of America – "Liberty". For years this pennant, flown as the Meteor Flag, had been used by the English Navy. Its red field flying over England's victorious sea battles gave the colonists a great sense of pride. To express their feelings, the Taunton Flag, became a symbol of their loyalty to the homeland."



And continuing with the south row of flagpoles, starting at southeast end and moving west:

10 **"Official Flag of the United States**, July 4, 1960, The inevitable chain of freedom, justice, and the pursuit of happiness linked first in thirteen encircled stars has finally become fifty United States. From its



inception when a flag was first raised at Taunton, Massachusetts, these united people stand ready to send their symbol to the stars. For after nearly two hundred years it can now be truly said, "that that these, the United States are one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all"."

11 **"Forty Eight Star Flag**, July 4, 1912, From as far away as Flanders Field these forty eight stars would reflect forty seven years of American history. Its battle honors would cover such places as Chateau-Thierry, Guadalcanal, Inchon. This ensign flew from the mast of the Arizona on December 7, 1941. Four years later

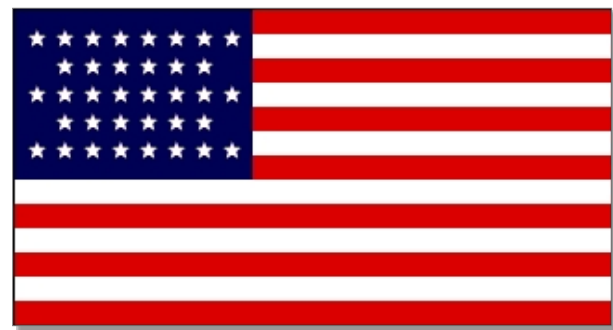


it climaxed the glory of America on top of Mt. Suribachi. Under this flag Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill gave the world a right live as free men."

12 **Lake Erie Flag**, September 10, 1813 (Missing plaque) The last words of Captain James Lawrence, a naval hero of the War of 1812, were "Don't give up the ship!" Commander Oliver Hazard Perry named his flagship *Lawrence* in honor of the dead hero and flew from her mast a special flag bearing the dying man's heroic words. On September 10, 1813, Commander Perry, fighting under that special flag, won a great victory over the British fleet.



13 **"Civil War Flag**, July 4, 1861, through four years of civil war only West Virginia added its star, the thirty-sixth to the flag. Congress considered changing the design to more accurately represent the conflict. But at Appomattox on April 9, 1865 It was still the same stars and stripes which had represented this nation since 1818. To bring the thirteen stars of the confederacy back into the

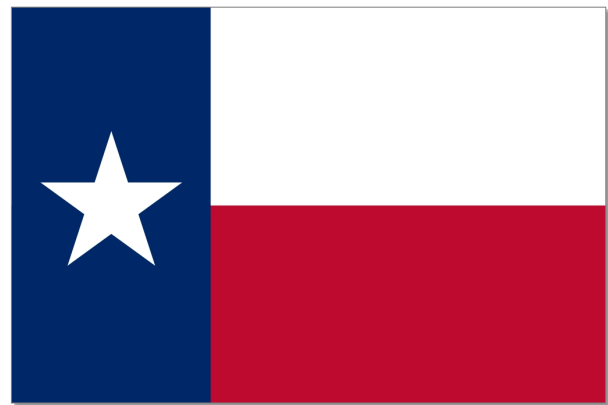


union Abraham Lincoln concluded the bitterness “with malice towards none, with charity for all”.

14 **“The California Flag**, June 14, 1846, Under the leadership of William Ide the California Republic was first established in Sonoma on June 14, 1846. Thirty three Americans had resisted Mexican authority leading the way to statehood four years later. Since all American settlers were called “Los Osos” (the bears) it was with pride they raised a flag at Sonoma as a symbol of their independence. In 1911 the State of California adopted the Bear Flag as its state flag.”



15 **“Lone Star Flag of Texas**, January 25, 1839, Colonel James W. Fannin gave Texas the Alamo, and Stephen Austin a flag heritage in February 19, 1856 with his statement, “give us a flag to fight under”. Three years later Dr. Charles B. Stewart submitted to the Third Texas Congress his famous design for the Lone Star flag. For seven years it represented the pride of Texas giving way to becoming the 28th star in the flag of the United States on February 19, 1846.



Separate sub-plaque below: “San Francisco County Council Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States”

16 **“First Official Flag**, July 4, 1818, Congress had given America its first official flag one five pointed star for each state could now be added, but from July 4, 1818 the thirteen stripes would remain the same. William Driver of Salem, Massachusetts was to give it a lasting heritage on March



17, 1824. Captain Driver was presented this flag by a group of Salem girls. Turning to those assembled and in response to their greetings he said "I name her old glory".

17 Pine Tree Flag, 1775 (missing plaque) After the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts adopted a resolution which ended with: "Appealing to Heaven for the justice of our cause, we determine to die or be free." When, in 1775, General Washington sent out his first half-dozen ships, they had to have a flag by which to recognize one another.

A member of Washington's staff suggested a flag with a white ground, a tree, and the words: "Appeal to Heaven."



18 "Fifteen Stars & Stripes, May 1, 1795, For twenty-three years this ensigne reigned over an era of epic American history. On September 14, 1814 Francis Scott Key immortalized this flag flying over Fort McHenry by writing the "Star Spangled Banner". Lieutenant O'Bannon of the Marines and Midshipman Mann raised it over



Tripoli on April 27, 1805 General Jackson flew it at the Battle of New Orleans. By its fifteen stars and stripes, the United States established itself as a defender of freedom."

Singular Tallest Flagpole

Another flagpole in the plaza is a very tall staff that is located in the southwest corner. That flagpole was dedicated on November 9, 2007 (in a symbolic remembrance of Veterans Day on November 11), at a cost of \$70,000; it is 100-feet-high and made of fiberglass. This replaces a similarly scaled tapered wood flagpole, which perhaps came from the previous incarnation of the plaza that was demolished in 1958 for the underground garage and exhibition hall project. It originally stood at the dead center of the plaza but was moved to the southwest

corner around 1920. The text on a bronze plaque at its base reads “This flagpole is dedicated to all San Franciscans who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America, Dedication Date, November 11, 2007, by The Honorable Mayor Gavin Newsom”.

Sixteen Short Flagpoles

And finally there are the two individual rows of the shortest flagpoles, which flank the Pavilion of American Flags, there are eight on the north and the same number on the south. These are used to display a variety of flags depending on the occasion.

February 5, 2017