

Stars on the Flag

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

"Stars on the Flag." *The Annals of Iowa* 27 (1946), 311-315.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.6470>

Hosted by Iowa Research Online

STARS ON THE FLAG

The United States flag now flies over the key positions on all the continents of the world, and many islands, as the emblem of independence and the assurance of freedom for all people. The general design of the flag has been familiar on all the seas for a century and more than a third of another. At the present time it consists of thirteen red and white stripes and a blue field displaying forty-eight white five-pointed stars arranged in parallel rows. It has not always been thus. Modifications have been made and changes due to national expansion. The stripes stand for the thirteen colonies that became independent nations and then combined as states; the stars designate the number of states in the federal union.

The Iowa star, if the stars may be assigned to states in order, is the twenty-ninth in number and near the center of the constellation.

When the land that is now Iowa was nominally transferred from the sovereignty of France and Spain to that of the United States, the flag that went up at the two capitals of Louisiana territory had fifteen stars, though there were seventeen states.

Iowa became a territory on its own in 1838 and the flag then had twenty-six stars. Iowa might have added the twenty-seventh star but preferred to hold back to get her borders straightened out. As it was, under the enabling act of March 3, 1845, Florida, the twin of the act, set another star, and for No. 28, the Republic of Texas joined up to add her lone star as the last for that year.

So Iowa came in as of date December 28, 1846; and on the following Independence day, 1847, the Iowa star appeared.

Iowa had the honor of being last to add a star to the flag for only one year, since on July 4, 1848, the Wisconsin star was added. The number remained at thirty until the California star was added on July 4, 1851.

The flag that flew over Independence hall in 1787, when the constitution makers were engaged in their history-making task, had thirteen stars and thirteen stripes and this had been the pattern for ten years. It was the original flag adopted by the Continental congress after the pattern approved by a committee headed by George Washington. It was the flag that led the American patriots to their final victories.

As the number of states increased, changes were made in the flag, and the one that inspired the "Star Spangled Banner" in the second war for independence had fifteen stars and fifteen stripes. Two states had been added to the original group and in 1795 the enlarged flag was adopted and this remained the flag for twenty-three years. The number of states had increased to twenty and the newer ones were clamoring for recognition on the flag. On April 4, 1818, Congress directed that thereafter the flag should have thirteen stripes and as many stars as there were states. This has been the rule ever since and it has resulted in many changes.

At the time Iowa organized as a state, the news had just been received that an American army carrying a flag of twenty-eight stars had just captured Chapultepec and American expansion by conquest had taken a long stride. Over Fort Sumpter the symbol of American nationality had thirty-three stars when it was fired upon; but another was added before the battle of Bull Run, and still another on the very day that the siege of Vicksburg was raised. Soon after Appomattox another state was authorized; so that when the Iowa soldiers who had gone forth to fight for a flag of thirty-three stars returned they might have carried one of thirty-six stars, all of equal brightness.

From time to time other stars were added and when an American task force went into Manilla bay the flag had forty-five stars. Later, on July 4, 1890, there were five stars added in a bunch, and in 1912 the last two stars were added. The flag of forty-eight stars has now been unchanged for thirty-four years.

The flags carried in the American Revolution during its first years were the flags of individual sovereign states lacking in uniformity. After the general pattern for the stars and stripes had been adopted the stars were set in a circle on the blue field. Now they are in parallel rows, though there has been no law fixing the precise grouping. The following table, showing the dates that the states became members of the union, shows also the changes in the flag and the procession of the stars as they were added to the constellation.

FLAG OF THE REVOLUTION, 1777-1795

The American flag of thirteen stars and thirteen stripes was the flag of the thirteen united colonies that became the first thirteen states of the union on the dates of approval of the Constitution as follows:

1	Delaware.....	Dec. 7, 1787
2	Pennsylvania.....	Dec. 12, 1787
3	New Jersey.....	Dec. 19, 1787
4	Georgia.....	Jan. 2, 1788
5	Connecticut.....	Jan. 9, 1788
6	Massachusetts.....	Feb. 6, 1788
7	Maryland.....	Apr. 28, 1788
8	South Carolina.....	May 23, 1788
9	New Hampshire.....	June 21, 1788
10	Virginia.....	June 25, 1788
11	New York.....	July 26, 1789
12	North Carolina.....	Nov. 21, 1789
13	Rhode Island.....	May 29, 1790

To these were added, while yet the flag was one of thirteen and thirteen, the two new states:

14	Vermont.....	Feb. 18, 1791
15	Kentucky.....	June 1, 1792

FLAG OF THE SECOND WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1795-1818

On May 1, 1795, congress ordered that the flag should thereafter have fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, and this continued as five new states were added to the list as follows:

16	Tennessee.....	June 1, 1796
17	Ohio.....	Nov. 29, 1802
18	Louisiana.....	Apr. 30, 1812
19	Indiana.....	Dec. 11, 1816
20	Mississippi.....	Dec. 10, 1817

FLAG OF THE GREATER AMERICA

New states desired to be represented on the flag and the number having increased to twenty, congress directed, that thereafter the flag should have only thirteen stripes and one star for each state, the star to be added on the fourth of July following the date of admission. The procession of the stars followed:

	State	Birth date	Star added
21	Illinois.....	Dec. 3, 1818.....	July 4, 1819
22	Alabama.....	Dec. 14, 1819.....	}..... July 4, 1820
23	Maine.....	Mar. 15, 1820.....	
24	Missouri.....	Aug. 10, 1821.....	July 4, 1822
25	Arkansas.....	June 15, 1836.....	July 4, 1836
26	Michigan.....	Jan. 26, 1837.....	July 4, 1837
27	Florida.....	Mar. 3, 1845.....	July 4, 1845
28	Texas.....	Dec. 29, 1845.....	July 4, 1846
29	IOWA.....	Dec. 28, 1846.....	July 4, 1847
30	Wisconsin.....	May 29, 1848.....	July 4, 1848
31	California.....	Sept. 9, 1850.....	July 4, 1851
32	Minnesota.....	May 11, 1858.....	July 4, 1858
33	Oregon.....	Feb. 14, 1859.....	July 4, 1859
34	Kansas.....	Jan. 29, 1861.....	July 4, 1861
35	West Virginia.....	June 19, 1863.....	July 4, 1863
36	Nevada.....	Oct. 31, 1864.....	July 4, 1865
37	Nebraska.....	Mar. 1, 1867.....	July 4, 1867
38	Colorado.....	Aug. 1, 1876.....	July 4, 1877
39	North Dakota.....	Nov. 2, 1889.....	}..... July 4, 1890
40	South Dakota.....	Nov. 2, 1889.....	
41	Montana.....	Nov. 8, 1889.....	
42	Washington.....	Nov. 11, 1889.....	
43	Idaho.....	July 3, 1890.....	
44	Wyoming.....	July 10, 1890.....	July 4, 1891

45	Utah.....	Jan. 4, 1896.....	July 4, 1896
46	Oklahoma.....	Nov. 16, 1907.....	July 4, 1908
47	New Mexico.....	Jan. 6, 1912....	}..... July 4, 1912
48	Arizona.....	Feb. 14, 1912}	

The customary arrangement of the stars now is in six rows of eight stars each.

These facts have been compiled after consultation with the Smithsonian Institution at Washington.

PIONEERS

By BADGER CLARK*

A broken wagon wheel that rots away beside the river,
 A sunken grave that dimples on the bluff above the trail;
 The larks call, the wind sweeps, the prairie grasses quiver,
 And sing a wistful roving song of hoof and wheel and sail.

Pioneers, pioneers, you trailed it on to glory,
 Across the circling deserts to the mountains blue and dim.
 New England was a night camp; old England was a story.
 The new home, the true home, lay out beyond the rim.

You fretted at the old hearth, the kettle and the cricket,
 The father's little acres, the wood lot and the pond.
 Ay, better storm and famine and the arrow from the thicket,
 Along the trail to wider lands that glimmered out beyond.

Pioneers, pioneers, the quicksands where you wallowed,
 The rocky hills and thirsty plains—they hardly won your heed.
 You snatched the thorny chance, broke the trail that others followed,
 For sheer joy, for dear joy of marching in the lead.

Your wagon track is laid with steel; your tired dust is sleeping;
 Your spirit stalks the valleys where a restive nation teems;
 Your soul has never left them in their sowing and their reaping,
 The children of the outward trail, their eyes are full of dreams.

Pioneers, pioneers, your children will not reckon
 The dangers on the dusky ways no man has ever gone.
 They look beyond the sunset where better countries beckon,
 With old faith, with bold faith, to find a wider dawn.

*Badger Clark is an Iowan, a son of Anna Morris Clark, and born in Albia, January 1, 1883, his father being a Methodist minister. That same year the family moved to South Dakota, which state has since been his home with the exception of four years spent on the Arizona cattle range, two years in Cuba, and shorter periods of travel in California and Florida. Besides poems, he writes short stories. A volume of these has been published.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.