



the former colonies as a whole, retained individual state flags. Several states used the phrase “Dont Tread on Me,” always spelled without the apostrophe in “Dont.”

Somewhat later in 1776, but still before the Declaration of Independence, the Betsy Ross story emerged. The most often quoted version is that the Continental Congress appointed Washington, Robert Morris, and Colonel George Ross to select a design for a flag and take it to be sewn. The drawing showed a flag with thirteen stripes and 13 white stars on a blue field. The stars were six-pointed.

Whether they actually took the design to Betsy Ross will probably never be known with certainty. There was such a person; she was a seamstress; Washington knew her. Tradition says she changed the size somewhat to make it better proportioned, and arranged the stars in a full circle to show continuity, and showed how five-pointed stars could be made quicker, using one snip (*photo, above*). The legend, if such it is, will never die. Many visit Betsy Ross’s house in Philadelphia every year and the United States issued a stamp in her honor in 1952.

No matter who sewed it, the Continental Congress adopted the flag.

[*Ed. note:* The flag the Congress adopted on June 14th, 1777 did not have the stars in a circle, but in five rows alternating three and two stars each (*photo, below right*); this was the first official flag of the US, and not truly a *national* flag yet, as the “united States” of the Declaration were more an alliance or confederation of “thirteen free and independent states” (i.e., nations) than one single nation, which officially was created with the ratification of the federal Constitution by the ninth state (New Hampshire) on June 21, 1788, arguably the true “birthday” of the *national* United States.]

We are so accustomed to celebrating July 4th as the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence that we pay little attention to the fact that our own State of New York did not sign it on that day. Perhaps because of the surfeit of Tories, the New York delegates to the Continental Congress had been told they could express no opinion on the Declaration until they received instructions from home. It was not until July 9, 1776 that the New York delegates received permission to support the Declaration.

[*Ed. note:* Actually, Independence was technically *declared* on July 2nd by a vote in Congress on the Richard Henry Lee resolution, when the 12 colonies other than NY voted for it, independent of the Jefferson *et al* document; the parchment in the National Archives that we call *THE* Declaration of Independence was mostly signed *August 2nd* (some signed later, and at least two members of Congress NEVER signed it!). Yes, it was July 2nd that John Adams said should be celebrated as the big day, in a letter to Abigail dated July *THIRD!* The Jefferson Declaration hadn’t even been voted for, much less signed, when he wrote that! It was *adopted* by Congress on the *FOURTH*, and that is why it says so on the parchment, and why we celebrate *that* day. As the National Archives’ own site says: “(Timothy) Matlack set to work with pen, ink, parchment, and practiced hand, and finally, on

August 2, the journal of the Continental Congress records that ‘The declaration of independence being engrossed and compared at the table was signed.’ One of the most widely held misconceptions about the Declaration is that it was signed on July 4, 1776, by all the delegates in attendance... Eventually 56 delegates signed, although all were not present on August 2.” ...The famous “snapshot” of the signers (*previous page*) notwithstanding. To see more, go to: http://www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/charters/declaration_history.html]

The Town of Rochester had no large battles, but its people suffered greatly in the War, not just because the thoroughfare connecting the Hudson River with Pennsylvania passed through here, but because of the sneak attacks of Indians and Tories. They would creep up on a property, steal all they could, including animals, and often set fire to buildings. Three major raids in this area added to the daily fear.

The Stars-and-Stripes was not carried often, if at all, in battle during the Revolutionary War. When the war was over, states began to gradually use their own flags only occasionally and flying the official flag of the Union became more common.

When two more states joined the Union, the attempt was made to live with a fifteen-starred and fifteen-striped flag (this was the “Star Spangled Banner” Francis Scott Key kept watching to see if it was still there), but it was soon evident this could not go on. In 1818, Congress officially ordered our flag to have thirteen stripes and one star for each state.

In KT’s words, “I believe that for all of us there is magic in the flag. Nothing can so stab us awake as seeing the flag pass in a parade.” She closed her talk with reference to a song she sang as a child. The words were by Henry VanDyke, who pictures coming back to this country after an absence. “It’s home again and home again, America For Me, Where the air is full of sunshine And the flag is full of stars.”

Two years after Katharine T. Terwilliger gave the presentation intermittently quoted in this column, Ellenville and the Town of Wawarsing began what has become the tradition of a Fourth of July parade. Bob Mangels, local DJ, talk show host and then manager of Ellenville’s radio station *WELV*, had been very vocal about the lack of a local parade in celebration of the country’s Bicentennial. Instead of just talking about it, Bob organized a group of citizens into a committee that handled fundraising and the planning of an annual parade on July 4th. The committee makeup has changed, Bob Mangels moved away, but the Fourth of July parades continue. On that date each year, Ellenville streets are crowded with huge numbers of people and the air is filled with flags flying.

As we approach the *Town of Wawarsing Bicentennial* in 2006 and its varied celebrations, let’s make sure our flags are part of all the events. A Town of Wawarsing flag was designed in 1976 for our country’s two-hundredth birthday. Should it be adapted for the Town of Wawarsing’s birthday party? What flags will fly in the *2006 Fourth of July Parade*? Will yours? 

