

Name _____

Date _____

Betsy Ross

Betsy Ross had sixteen brothers and sisters! She was born Elizabeth Griscom in 1752 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her family was Quakers, and Betsy learned to read, write, keep house and sew in Quaker Schools. While she was an apprentice to an upholsterer, Betsy met John Ross, the son of an Episcopal minister. Though her family disapproved of marriages between Quakers and members of other religions, Betsy and John eloped in 1773. They went to New Jersey, where Benjamin Franklin's son William married them. John opened an upholstery shop, but business was slow because of the Revolutionary War. John then joined the Pennsylvania militia and was killed in a gunpowder explosion in 1776. Betsy took over the upholstery business and is said to have sewn the first official flag of the United States, which was used from 1777 to 1795.

No one is sure what the true story is, but after Betsy Ross died, members of her family told the story of a visit that Betsy received in 1776 from George Washington, George Ross and Robert Morris, members of the Continental Congress. Betsy knew George Washington because they attended the same church, and she had sewn buttons for him in the past. The men are said to have shown Betsy a design for a flag that they wanted her to sew. The design had six-pointed stars, but the story goes that Betsy suggested five-pointed stars instead because she could sew them much faster.

Although there is no official record of the meeting between George Washington and Betsy Ross, Betsy Ross has gone down in history as the seamstress that made the first flag. The truth is that while Betsy Ross did make flags, there were a number of other official flag makers that made American flags around the same time. It was probably Betsy Ross' daughter who made her mother famous by repeatedly telling the story of how her mother came to sew the first United States flag.

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Betsy Ross (cont'd)

After John Ross died, Betsy joined the "Fighting Quakers." Unlike other members of the Quaker religion, the Fighting Quakers supported the Revolutionary War. In 1777, Betsy Ross married Joseph Ashburn, a sea captain. They were married for five years until Ashburn was captured by the British and sent to a prison where he died in 1782. Betsy Ross married for a third time in 1783. Her third husband was an old friend named John Claypoole. When Claypoole died in 1817, Betsy Ross continued to run her upholstery business for another ten years. She then retired and went to live with one of her married daughters, Susan Satterthwaite. Susan took over the business for her mother.

Betsy Ross died in Philadelphia at the age of 84. Today her remains are buried in the courtyard of the Betsy Ross House, which may or may not be a house that she actually lived in. Still, the Betsy Ross House is one of the most visited places in Philadelphia.

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Betsy Ross Questions

1. Betsy Ross was born
 - a. in 1752 in New Jersey.
 - b. in 1752 in Philadelphia.
 - c. in 1776 in Philadelphia.
 - d. during the American Revolution.

2. Betsy Ross was
 - a. a Quaker.
 - b. a Baptist.
 - c. an Episcopalian.
 - d. a Mennonite.

3. Whose son performed the ceremony that married Betsy and John Ross?

4. 4. Betsy Ross was
 - a. a businesswoman.
 - b. a seamstress.
 - c. a mother.
 - d. All of these

5. Who is said to have asked Betsy Ross to sew the first official United States flag?

6. What change did Betsy Ross supposedly suggest to the design for the flag?

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Betsy Ross Questions (cont'd)

7. Who is most likely responsible for telling the story of how Betsy Ross came to make the first United States flag?

8. Did Betsy Ross actually sew a United States flag?
 - a. Yes, but it may not have been the first.
 - b. Yes, but there were other flag makers at the time.
 - c. We don't know for sure.
 - d. a and b

9. What happened to Betsy Ross' upholstery business after she died?
 - a. It was sold.
 - b. Her daughter took over.
 - c. The shop was closed down.
 - d. It became a museum.

10. The Betsy Ross House
 - a. is a tourist attraction in Philadelphia.
 - b. is the house in which Betsy Ross was born.
 - c. Both of these
 - d. Neither of these