

The Flag Center Presents

# The American Flag: Two Centuries of Concord & Conflict



Flag Exhibit from the  
Zaricor, Veninga, and Hinrichs Collections  
Officers' Club, Presidio of San Francisco  
Open Memorial Day, May 26 – July 31  
Daily 10AM – 5PM, Wednesday 10AM – 8PM  
Closed Monday & Tuesday, Free to the public

## The Flag Center

Yorktown, the defense of Fort McHenry, the attack on Fort Sumter, Iwo Jima, the funeral of John F. Kennedy, the first men on the Moon, the coming together of the country following 9/11. When Americans think of the great moments in their national life, there is a common thread that runs from the Revolution to the present. *That thread is the American flag.*

The Stars and Stripes has been a vital part of our lives from the struggle with Britain for independence to our struggle with ourselves over slavery, secession, and territorial expansion. It was also there with us when the nation faced the challenges of female suffrage, the Depression, and the civil rights movement. That flag today is the most recognizable symbol not just in America but worldwide. Yet what do we really know of its history and the changes it has gone through? How has an 18th century symbol remained relevant into the 21st century?

We notice the current 50-star flag every day, but few have heard the fascinating stories or seen the great variety of flag designs, fabrics, symbol variations, sizes, etcetera in use from America's earliest years to the present. The unique collections of Ben Zaricor, Louise Veninga, and Kit Hinrichs presented in this exhibit, provide a first-time view of important flags and of flag-related memorabilia which bring alive the spirit and the growth of our land.

It is extraordinary, in a country which loves its flag as much as the United States does, that no permanent display (and collection) of historic and modern flags is available anywhere. Building on the present exhibit, its organizers are now at work to create a professional-quality Flag Center where, at last, the full story of the flag will be permanently available. Your ideas, suggestions, and support will be most welcome. Please contact us at [info@flagcenter.org](mailto:info@flagcenter.org).

## Gallery I

A New Constellation:  
13 Stars and 13 Stripes for a New Nation



13-Star United States Merchant Ship's Ensign, ca. 1800 – 1805 (ZFC0419)

On June 14th, 1777, the Continental Congress established the first official flag for the United States, whose independence it had proclaimed eleven months previously. This flag, the original Stars and Stripes, was composed of 13 alternating red and white stripes augmented by a blue "union" bearing 13 white stars for the original 13 states. According to the Congressional resolution, the stars were to represent "a new constellation" in the firmament of nations.

While nothing in the resolution specified how those 13 stars should be arranged, it is suspected that the designers intended them to be in a circle. However, practical seamstresses quickly found it far more convenient to arrange the stars in rows. That practice was to give birth to a host of design variations, and it set a precedent for unofficial modifications of the flag, which continue today.

The flags in the first gallery depict popular versions of the 13-star flag during its first century. While this flag enjoyed special prominence at the time of the celebration of the Centennial of the United States in 1876, in fact it has been made and used by Americans continuously since 1777.

## Gallery II

A New Star for Every State

In 1791 and 1792 Vermont and Kentucky were admitted into the American Union as states, raising the total from 13 to 15. To acknowledge these new states as equals, in 1794 Congress created a new flag with 15 red and white stripes and 15 stars in its union. For 24 years, Congress never authorized further changes, although five new states were admitted to the Union — Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana, and Mississippi. On the other hand many flag makers did add new stars — and often made a corresponding increase in the number of stripes.



21-Star United States National Flag "Great Luminary" Pattern, ca. 1818 – 1819 (ZFC0422)

By 1817, when Mississippi became the twentieth state, Congress took note of the new states that lacked official recognition in the design of the national flag. During its debates in 1818, some wanted the addition of one star and one stripe for every new state to be legalized. Others suggested a permanent return to the old 13-star, 13-stripe U.S. flag from the Revolution. Finally a compromise was reached. The number of stripes was set permanently at 13, but on the 4th of July following the recognition of any new state, its star was to be added to those already on the flag.

The flags presented in the second gallery are representative of the popular (but unofficial) designs in actual use before 1818 as well as the "official" changes that took place in the U.S. flag through 1848.

## Gallery III

The End of Compromise:  
Stars Excluded, Stars Defended



13-Star Commercial Merchant "Jack" Eagle, ca. 1820 – 1850 (ZFC0621)

Between 1816 and 1848, Congress maintained a balance (first known as the Missouri Compromise) in the number of states entering the Union that recognized slavery and those where it was prohibited. Indiana had been balanced by Mississippi; Illinois was admitted to statehood along with Alabama. They were followed by Missouri and Maine, and then by Arkansas and Michigan. Finally, the new states of Florida and Texas were matched by Iowa and Wisconsin. Thus by 1850 there were 15 "slave states" and 15 "free states" composing the Union.

In 1850 the Missouri Compromise was abrogated and a new "compromise" replaced it by which concessions to the slave states' interests permitted California, Minnesota, and Oregon to be admitted as free states. However, Northern abolitionists became

## Exhibition Events (Free to the public)

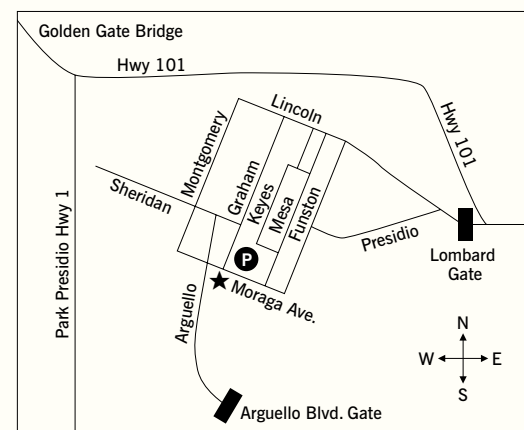
Grand Opening Memorial Day, May 26, 8:30AM – 5PM  
Reception & Guided Tours  
Officers' Club, Presidio of San Francisco

Flag Day, June 14, 11AM – 2PM  
Book & Poster Signing, Family Activities  
Presidio's Main Post Flag Pole & Parade Grounds

“Whose Flag Is It Anyway?”, July 2, 7PM  
A Roundtable Discussion with Special Guest Speakers  
Moraga Rm, Officers' Club, Presidio of San Francisco

## Officers' Club, Presidio of San Francisco

50 Moraga Ave. at Arguello, Main Post  
415.561.5500



### Enter Lombard Gate

Turn right onto Presidio Blvd. which becomes Lincoln Blvd. Turn left on Graham.  
The Officers' Club ★ is at the end on Moraga Ave.

### Enter Arguello Gate

Continue on Arguello Blvd. Turn right on Moraga Ave.  
The Officers' Club ★ is on the right side.

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incensed over the federal “Fugitive Slave Law” as well as the extension of slavery into western territories. Some expressed their hatred for slavery by refusing to acknowledge the 15 slave states represented in the United States flag. Stars for these Southern states were sometimes excluded, resulting in flags that bore only 16, 17, or 18 stars. Supporters of slavery countered by making flags with only 15 stars. The Stars and Stripes, like the nation, was beginning to tear asunder.

The flags in the third gallery feature Stars and Stripes with the official star-counts of this period and examples of the “exclusionary flags” with fewer stars.

## Gallery IV

### Guide on the Colors: American Flags in Conflict



General Custer's Personal Guidon, ca. 1864 (ZFC0489)

The 33-star United States flag flying over Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor was fired upon by South Carolina troops in April of 1861. Southern determination to defend “States' Rights” and Northern commitment to maintain the Union were to result in a bloody four year Civil War.

Initially, the United States Army and the Confederate States Army carried very similar flags into the fray. U.S. troops fought under versions of the Stars and Stripes bearing (successively) 33, 34, and 35 stars. Confederate forces at first used the “Stars and Bars” which reduced the stripes to three bars. The stars

in the blue canton initially numbering seven but eventually increasing to 13.

The similarity of the two flags led to a replacement of the “Stars and Bars” by the Confederate Battle Flag (the “Southern Cross”) early in the conflict. In addition to these flags, there were numerous other standards, colors, and guidons borne into combat by North and South. They served as functional battlefield tools upon which the units guided their movements, but they also provided deep inspiration to the soldiers who carried them.

This fourth gallery suggests the wide array of flags utilized by the Union forces during the Civil War — including national unit flags, blue regimental colors with national or state coats of arms, smaller swallowtail guidons for mounted units, and special headquarters flags that permitted ready identification of commanders on the smoke-filled field of battle. They are a reminder that the number and variety of flags flown during the American Civil War exceeded those flown in combat in any other period of American military history.

## Gallery V

### “Manifest Destiny”: New Stars for a New Land

Since the earliest days of the republic, a large segment of the American public had believed it had a divinely ordained “manifest destiny” whereby their descendants would eventually rule the North American continent “from sea to shining sea.” The initial thrust toward the Pacific had been fueled by the Louisiana Purchase, and the “manifest destiny” concept seemingly found justification in America's victory in its war with Mexico. Following the Civil War, which temporarily delayed the impetus, Americans streamed westward in search of new (and free) land on which to settle. The telegraph and transcontinental railroad helped promote this “spread of civilization.”



Centennial Flag with 10-point stars, 1876

As territories west of the Mississippi progressively were filled with settlers, the new inhabitants clamored for statehood. Yet, between the close of the Civil War and the nation's centennial celebration in 1876, only three states were admitted to the Union. The star for Nevada became official in July of 1865 (although it had officially been admitted in October 1864); Nebraska followed in 1867 and finally in 1876 Colorado became the “Centennial State.” For the next 12 years the flag remained unchanged. Then in 1889, the barriers that had withheld statehood from the western territories were breached, with seven new states in the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains being added to the Union. The process moved so fast that flag manufacturers were kept guessing about how many stars to include on the flags that would become legal on the succeeding 4th of July.

The fifth gallery shows some of the official and unofficial flags that the country's flag makers produced in the three decades that followed the Civil War.

## Gallery VI

### A Symbol of World Power: The Stars and Stripes at Home and Abroad

By 1896, when Utah joined the Union as its 45th state, there seemed to be no new frontiers ahead. Two years later, an incident in the harbor of Havana, Cuba prompted

the United States to flex the naval power that had been accruing. Within a few months America wrested from Spain island territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific, including the Philippines. The Stars and Stripes thereby joined the pantheon of flags of World Powers.

With international respect for the United States came the cost of an empire and, eventually, the burdens of active participation in world affairs. In the relatively peaceful years before World War I broke out, three new stars were added to the flag — Oklahoma's in 1907, followed by two more (New Mexico and Arizona) in 1912. The same year two presidential orders at last formalized the star arrangement for official government flags.



48-Star United States Flag created from stamps and envelopes, 1943

Under the 48-star flag, the United States engaged in three major international conflicts — World War I (1917 – 1918 for U.S. participation), World War II (1941 – 1945), and the Korean War (1950 – 1953).

The sixth gallery exhibits some of the many flags from those years. In 1959 and 1960, two non-contiguous states were admitted to the Union — Alaska and Hawaii. Since that time the American flag has remained unaltered, at least officially. As has been the practice since its earliest years, however, the United States flag has continued to serve as a symbol expressing a wide spectrum of principles and perspectives. The Stars and Stripes is cherished by most Americans and, like the Constitution, serves as a living symbol of the whole nation.