

BETSY ROSS

Maker of the First American Flag

by Dr. Catherine Millard

The Betsy Ross House

At 239 Arch Street, Philadelphia, stands the quaint little Colonial home of Betsy Ross, maker of the first American flag. Upon entering her home, the visitor was welcomed by a beautiful model of the little seamstress seated in her front parlor, a replica of the first American flag – with 13 stars in a circle, representing the 13 original States – on her lap. Approximately 9 years ago, the flag was removed from Betsy Ross' lap. Shortly thereafter, the model was turned around, her back to history-loving visitors; while about a year later, the model was permanently removed from view.

Upon exiting her home, three new plaques on the exterior rear wall confronted visitors, informing students, faculty, homeschoolers, and national, as well as international guests, that it was a mere legend – Betsy Ross did not make the first American flag – their research indicated.

Three walls in the rear of the adjacent Betsy Ross bookstore displayed replicas of the famous great master painting of Betsy Ross seated in her front parlor, the first American flag with its 13 stars on her lap – the Committee from the Continental Congress comprising George Washington, Colonel George Ross and Robert Morris, requesting the seamstress to make the first flag. All four patriots were members of the congregation of Christ Church, called “the nation’s church,” being the founders’ place of worship – hence the most historic church in America. About 6 years ago, all these paintings disappeared. Upon enquiring from the new Curator of their whereabouts, I was

informed that they were “obsolete” and therefore had been permanently removed to storage. This was a great loss to the American people – particularly to the millions of students visiting her home each year.

Betsy Ross' Family Bible displayed in her Front Parlor. Photographer: John Wrigley.
© 1989. (Removed to storage)

I subsequently voiced this question to a group on our Christian Heritage Tour of Philadelphia, “birthplace of liberty” – “I wonder what they will do with Betsy Ross’ personal family Bible, on permanent display in the cabinet within her front parlor? It testifies to her Christianity and her love of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.” Approximately 5 years ago, it was permanently removed to storage, secular items replacing the Holy Bible - her guide to life.

Christ Church, Philadelphia

Our Christian Heritage Tour proceeded to **Christ Church**, visitors being thrilled to see the bronze markers designating the founding fathers’ pews, where these Christian patriots and their families worshipped Almighty God in Spirit and in Truth. The Betsy Ross pew, with its bronze marker and 13-star flag prominently designating her place of worship, is a highlight on our tour. The marker reads:

Here Worshipped Mrs. Elizabeth Ross
Who, Under the Direction of a
Committee of Continental Congress
Composed of:
George Washington
Robert Morris
and
George Ross
Was the Maker of the
First American Flag
1777

Three years ago, however, shortly after my interview at Christ Church, Philadelphia – with **Way of the Master Radio** which aired nationally (and internationally), the flag was removed! Her pew being next to a pillar on the side aisle, this beautiful little flag attracted the attention of visitors who read the famous marker beneath it. Our Christian Heritage Tour of Philadelphia, however, continues to highlight Betsy Ross’ pew, and the Continental Congress’ choice of a fellow-Christian to make the first American flag.

September 22, 2010: Conducting a Christian Heritage Tour of Philadelphia, “birthplace of liberty” for our State Coordinators, we proceeded to **Christ Church**, a gem of historic Truth. After viewing, reading and admiring the Betsy Ross Pew (minus, of course, the replica of the first American flag), and studying her Christian legacy, we moved on to William Penn’s original baptismal font, sent to Christ Church in 1697. It was here that we were abruptly interrupted by the Curator, who informed us that “interpretation is my job.” He further stated that there was no evidence of **Betsy Ross** ever worshipping at Christ Church. “All we have in the Records of Christ Church,” said he, “is that a Mr. Ross worshipped here once – but we don’t know for sure who he is.” I stated

The Betsy Ross Pew, from 1920 Christ Church Handbook. Christian Heritage Ministries’ Archives.

that in my possession were photocopies of two **Christ Church Handbooks**, dated 1920 and 1945 – both of which validated, in text, illustration and stained-glass window format that **Mrs. Elizabeth Ross**, maker of the first American flag, was a fellow-worshipper with the Founding Fathers at Christ Church, Philadelphia.

Revolutionary War Stained-glass Windows

We then asked the Curator why the three Revolutionary War stained-glass windows in Christ Church, (including **The Patriots' 1790 window** – featuring Betsy Ross worshipping in her pew) had been removed in September, 1986. His answer was – “to return

the church to its original look in 1727, when it was built.” I responded that the reason Christ Church, Philadelphia was placed on the National Register in 1970 was primarily due to its role in the American Revolution; that the Founders of the American Republic worshipped here; that 7 signers of the Declaration of Independence were

Christ Church Patriots 1790 Stained-glass window. Christian Heritage Ministries' Archives.

buried in **Christ Church Gravesite**, including Benjamin Franklin; and that the 3 stained-glass windows reflected God's cataclysmic intervention in the American Revolution – adding that the founders' strength and guidance had come from their worship of Almighty God and prayer at historic Christ Church. The 3 Revolutionary War windows, prior to their removal, vividly portrayed **the role of Christ Church** in the lives and deeds of the founders of the Republic, (to include Betsy Ross), whose God was Almighty God of the Bible, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

I thereupon set about proving, from original, prime source documents of American history, Betsy Ross' true historic identity. My research in national archives disclosed the following:

- 1) **Marriage Certificate** joining in the Holy Bands of Matrimony John Ross of the city of Philadelphia and Elizabeth Griscomb, of the same place, 4th November, 1773.
- 2) **Records at Christ Church**, 2nd Street above Market, Philadelphia, PA 19106. **Aneas Ross** (variously spelled – Oneas, Aeneas, etc.), Betsy Ross' father-in-law, was an assistant to the Rector of Christ Church. He was a Reverend, and is said to have also been the Rector of Old Trinity (Oxford) Church, above Frankford. The following records may be found at Christ Church: Burial Record 1709 – 1785. p. 3183. December 16, 1770. Sarah, wife of Reverend Oneas Ross, buried at C.C. (Christ Church, distinguished from St. P., or Saint Peters). **p. 3247. January 21, 1776. John Ross, upholsterer, buried at Christ Church.** Baptismal Record 1709 – 1768. p. 324. Mr. Ross, Aneas, baptized John Kollock on December 9, 1745. Marriage Record 1709 – 1800. p. 4120. Aneas Ross and Sarah Leech married January 3, 1744.
On pew No. 12 at Christ Church there is a plaque and a Betsy Ross Flag designating that pew as having belonged to Mrs. Elizabeth Ross.

The above Records of Christ Church prove that **Mr. John Ross, upholsterer, (husband of Betsy Ross)** died and was buried in **Christ Church Gravesite** on January 21, 1776; that John Ross' father, Reverend Oneas Ross (Betsy Ross' father-in-law) was an Assistant to the Rector of Christ Church – hence John and Betsy Ross' family ties to historic Christ Church. The latter refutes, from the original Christ Church Records, the present Curator's statement that “all we have in the Records of Christ Church is that a Mr. Ross worshipped here once – but we don't know for sure who he is.”

- 3) Further to the above, my research revealed the original, **“Program for the First Day of Issue - Three Cent - Betsy Ross Commemorative Stamp, honoring the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of the Maker of the First American Flag”** at the Betsy Ross House, Philadelphia, PA., January Second, Nineteen Fifty-two at Eleven A.M. Presiding was Postmaster, Hon. Raymond A. Thomas. After “America” came the Invocation given by The Reverend Ernest A. de Bordenave, Rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia. The Welcome was extended by Hon. Walter M. Phillips, City Representative Designate, an Address being given by A. Atwater Kent, Jr., President, Betsy Ross House; followed by another Address given by the Assistant Postmaster General, Hon. Osborne A. Pearson. After Presentation of Stamp Albums, the National Anthem was sung. The Program brochure reads:

“The Betsy Ross House is owned by the people of Philadelphia. In this house, the Stars and Stripes were first created by Betsy Ross, whose 200th Anniversary is memorialized in the issue of the three-cent commemorative stamp by the United States Post Office Department. In 1898, a group of citizens formed the American Flag House and Betsy Ross Memorial in order to preserve the house for American posterity. The house was restored to its original condition in 1937 by Mr. Atwater Kent, who also provided the park adjacent to the shrine itself. The building's interior is furnished in authentic material of the period by patriotic, civic, and cultural organizations.

The genesis of the first Stars and Stripes is found in Philadelphia. The main points of the Flag's origin are simple and logical: George Washington, Robert Morris and George Ross called, as a Committee, at the Arch Street home of Elizabeth Ross to discuss the making of the first flag. George Ross was a delegate to the Continental Congress and the uncle of John Ross, husband of Elizabeth Ross, who died in January, 1776, as a result of an accident while guarding military stores on the waterfront. Mrs. Ross was a seamstress and continued her late husband's business as upholsterer at their Arch Street home. Much documentary material surrounds the life and flag-making activities of Betsy Ross. You will find her signature listed in the Declaration of Principles of the Free Quakers, a group which expressly permitted military service in a defensive war. You will find, receipted in her own handwriting, a bill rendered to Stephen Girard for bunting. At her death in 1835, Betsy Ross was buried in the Free Quakers Burial Ground at South Fifth Street, and in 1847 her remains were transferred to the Mount Moriah Cemetery.

Betsy Ross was widely known for her skill as a seamstress and she enjoyed a prosperous livelihood at making flags while raising her four daughters, each of whom grew up to be a respected citizen. The circumstances of making the first flag are related in **four separate affidavits from co-workers** and many sworn statements of relatives who knew the story from her own lips. Here was the forthright and undisputed story by Philadelphia's most eminent flag-maker, told with honest Quaker simplicity, without any motive of gaining personal glory or profit. Everything averred in the affidavits agrees with the known circumstances and movements of the persons involved in the flag's origination. **Moreover, all the facts attested by the witnesses correspond to data that is verified in records relating to Betsy Ross.**

The 200th Anniversary of this famous American woman's birth is honored by the issue of the Betsy Ross Commemorative Stamp by the United States Post Office Department."

The above original records, both of Christ Church, Philadelphia and The Betsy Ross House, 239 Arch Street, Philadelphia, testify to Betsy Ross worshipping at Christ Church (pew no.12) and making the First American Flag. Both historic facts have been rewritten by revisionists who do not wish to teach America's

Betsy Ross 1952 Commemorative Stamp with Great Master painting of the four Christ Church patriots (painting removed from Betsy Ross Bookstore walls).

youth that the Maker of America's First Flag was a fellow-Christian with the founding fathers, three of whom visited her home, requesting that she make the first flag. Although the Betsy Ross House is no longer "owned by the people of Philadelphia," it still remains a national shrine of foremost significance, regardless of the present ownership rewriting her true history.

Moreover, "**The Patriots' Window**" postcard (permanently removed from Christ Church in 1986) testifies to her true identity as follows: "The Patriots' Window, Christ Church in Philadelphia, Second Street above Market. The Patriots' Window shows the Congregation worshipping in Christ Church in 1790. Front row: Robert Morris, White and Harrison children. **2nd row: President and Mrs. Washington, Alexander Hamilton, extreme right, Betsy Ross.** 3rd row: Dr. Benjamin Rush and Joseph Hopkinson. 4th row: John Penn and family. 5th row: Benjamin Franklin and his daughter, Sarah. In aisle: Francis Hopkinson and son. (This concurs with the 1920 and 1945 Christ Church Handbooks).

Marriage Certificate of John and Betsy Ross.