



Above: *Model of Betsy Ross with the First American Flag in her Front Parlor.* Photographer: John Wrigley. (Model removed to storage). Left: *Betsy Ross' Family Bible displayed in her Front Parlor.* Photographer: John Wrigley. (Bible removed to storage). Right: *Christ Church Patriots 1790 Stained-glass window.* Betsy Ross, second row, to the right.

**Christ Church  
and  
Betsy Ross and the Stars and Stripes**

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

Upon exiting her home, three new plaques on the exterior rear wall now greet visitors, informing them that it was a mere legend that Betsy Ross made the first American flag – their research indicated.

Adjacent to her house is the **Betsy Ross Bookstore**, which displayed on three walls, replicas of the great master painting, “Birth of our Nation’s Flag” by Charles H. Weisgerber depicting Betsy Ross seated in her front parlor, the first American flag on her lap - the Committee from the Continental Congress to her left: George Washington, Colonel George Ross and Robert Morris, who requested her to make the first flag. The four patriots were members of Christ Church, “the nation’s church,” the founders’ place of worship. About six years ago these paintings disappeared. Enquiring as to their whereabouts, I was informed by the Curator that “being obsolete, they had been placed in storage.” This is a great loss to the American people – particularly to the millions of students-in-training visiting her home annually.

Approximately five years ago, Betsy Ross’ personal Bible, displayed in her front parlor, was removed to storage. Secular items replaced the Holy Bible – “The Good Book” as she called her guide to life.

## Christ Church

Visitors are thrilled to see the bronze marker designating Betsy Ross' pew, a replica of the thirteen-star flag prominently displayed above it. It 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

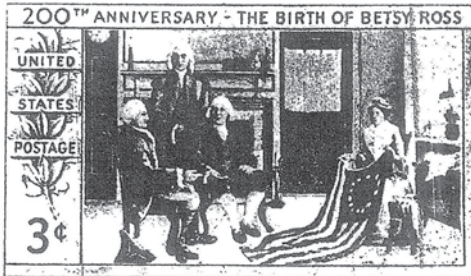
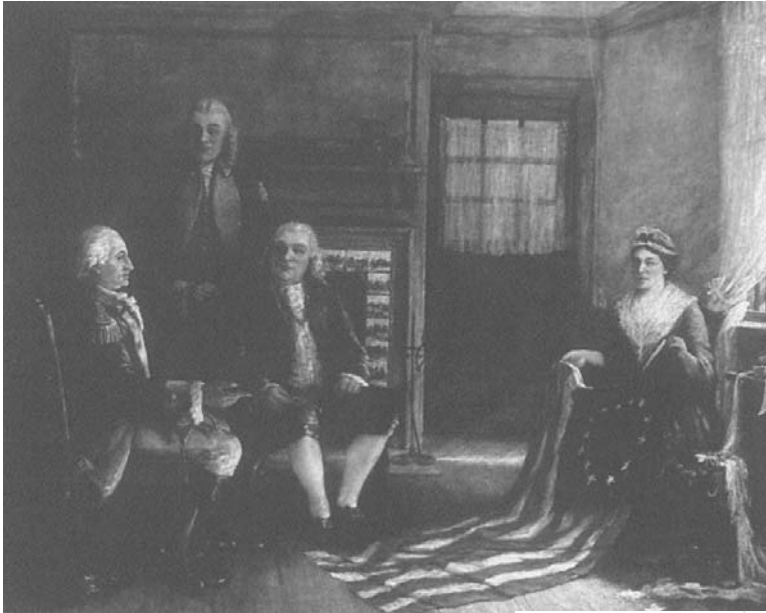
Three years ago, however, the flag was removed! This beautiful little flag attracted the attention of visitors who read the famous marker beneath it, designating the Continental Congress' choice of a fellow-worshipper at Christ Church, to make the first American flag.

On September 22, 2010, while conducting a *Christian Heritage Tour* of Philadelphia – studying **Betsy Ross'** legacy, we were interrupted by a curator with the words, “interpretation is my job.” To which he added that there was no evidence of Betsy Ross having worshipped at Christ Church, as “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.”

### Accuracy vs. Revisionism

Original documents of American history however, reveal to the contrary:

- 1) The 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,



BETSY ROSS PEW

Above: "Birth of the Nation's Flag," by Charles H. Weisgerber. Betsy Ross and the Committee from the Continental Congress – George Washington, Colonel George Ross and Robert Morris. Left: *Betsy Ross 1952 Commemorative Stamp with Great Master painting of the four Christ Church patriots* (painting removed from Betsy Ross Bookstore walls.) Right: *The Betsy Ross Pew*, from 1920 Christ Church Handbook.

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 show 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.<sup>6</sup>

- 3) "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, Pennsylvania., January Second, Nineteen Fifty-two: <sup>7</sup>

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. 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."<sup>8</sup>

Of the fourteen affidavits which I have consulted, **William J. Canby's, "My own Recollections of my Grandmother, Elizabeth Claypoole"** is hereunder excerpted:

I can remember Grandmother Claypoole very well, for I was eleven years old when she died.

I recalled her as a bustling, active woman, yet full of sweet womanly dignity and grace. We children all loved and respected her.

I remember her illness there at Uncle Abel's, with dysentery, and father's driving out in haste from town to see her, fearing she was going to die. I remember how still we all had to be in the house for several days, and how, finally, she recovered, and came to our house in town to live.

I remember how quiet she seemed after that. She was too feeble to move about much, and sat all day long in her arm-chair by the fire-grate in our back parlor. So much serenity I never saw

in any other person. If she had any pains or troubles, she did not speak of them. Her sight slowly left her about this time. She could see to read **the large Bible** upon her lap without glasses in the middle of the day, for she had her second sight, but as the light began to fail, she would close the book and sit quietly musing. After a while she never opened it. "It is of no use," she would say, "I cannot see to read any more, but I like to have it near me," and the great, heavy Bible would lie for hours un-opened upon her lap. She called it "The Good Book," and loving and intimate acquaintance with its pages was a feature of her character and life.

We were a house full of noisy children and must have annoyed her at times, but she never indicated it in any way. She often had us to read to her; and I well remember sitting on a stool at her feet with the Bible or the spelling book, stumbling over the most difficult words, and she correcting me in her old-fashioned pronunciation. She would make me say "gain-ed" for "gained," and the like, wherever a word ended in "ed," insisting on my pronouncing it so, though in talking she did not do it herself.

It must have been about this time that I heard her tell us children of her having made the first flag. I was a little boy, but I well remember it. We were familiar with the story, having heard it spoken of in the family, but I do not remember hearing her speak of it more than once. She was not a talkative old woman, seeking to glorify herself by telling of her deeds, but was reticent to a degree, silent and contemplative, and, withal, kind, gentle and loving, winning all, repelling none. Often when tears flowed, as amongst children tears will flow, she would call up the weeper and bestow comfort and caresses, wiping the bedewed face with her ample handkerchief, soft and sweet-scented, and bringing back the sunshine to the little heart. We often called her handkerchief 'Grandmother's flag,' and on one occasion one of us elicited her story by a question. She held up her silk handkerchief in her hands, higher than usual, running her fingers and thumb along the margin to the two corners, and then waved it to show how her flag was flung to the breeze.

**"Yes, boys, I made the first star-spangled banner with these old hands!** My fingers were not so crooked then as they are now. I sewed it well, and they were all delighted with it. **It was a beautiful flag!**" "Did they go to battle with it,

Grandmother,” one of us asked. “Yes, my dear, it was war time then, and a great many battles were fought after that.” “What battle did they take that flag to, Grandmother?” “I do not know. It was made for Congress, and they hung it to the mast of one of the ships at the wharf, and then took it into their meeting and adopted it; that is, they said it should be the flag of this nation.” “And what did they do with thy flag after that, Grandmother?” “That I cannot tell, my dear. I made a great many flags after that one. I made pretty much all the flags then, and I never knew what became of them; but I could tell one of my flags well enough whenever it came back to me to be mended, if it was years after, but they did not often come back.” “Did they get shot to pieces?” “Yes, some were riddled with bullet holes, and some were burnt up or sunk in the ships which carried them.”

The conversation then turned as it did on other occasions, to the various battles by sea and land, and we listened with interest to all that she told us of the incidents of those times. It was in one of these conversations, though I cannot place it in direct connection with the story of the flag, but it probably was at this very time, that I remember **General Washington’s** name being mentioned. One of us asked her the meaning of the inscription placed in a large framed engraving in our third story, representing a statue of Washington upon a square pedestal, upon the front panel of which were the well-known words, “First in war...etc.” “Was he first in war and first in peace?” asked one. “Yes, and where else was he first?” she asked. My memory supplied the answer, “First in the hearts of his countrymen,” I said proudly. “Yes, my dear,” said she, stroking my head, “he was truly first in the hearts of his countrymen. We all loved him as we shall never love another. We loved him as a father, and he was the father of his country,” she said with emphasis upon the last assertion...<sup>9</sup>

The above dispels the recent revisionist fables, casting doubt as to Betsy Ross’ true identity: a worshipper at Christ Church, and maker of the first American flag.





Plaque on the *Betsy Ross House*, 239, Arch Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, designating the famed house where she was visited by George Washington, Colonel George Ross and Robert Morris, Committee appointed by the Continental Congress to request that she make the first U.S. Flag. Photograph: © Christian Heritage Ministries.