

E  
171  
S664  
SI-Ref  
C, 2

# Thirteen-Star Flags

KEYS TO IDENTIFICATION

*Grace Rogers Cooper*

ISSUED

NOV 6 1973



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION PRESS

City of Washington

1973

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
LIBRARY

been made during that period. It may have been carried during the War of 1812. If it was, it would have been old by 1854 and if Micajah Bullock was 81, an understandable confusion of history could have resulted.

**FLAG OF COWPENS.** This thirteen-star flag, twelve in a circle with one in the center, was reportedly

carried by Color Sergeant William Batchelor of the Maryland Light Infantry, . . . at the battle of Cowpens, S.C., January 17, 1781. Wounded in the engagement, Batchelor returned with the flag to his Baltimore home; and in the War of 1812 his son, Ensign Joshua F. Batchelor of the 27th Maryland Militia, carried it in the North Point phase of the Battle of Baltimore, September 12, 1814. For years, the younger Batchelor carried the flag on commemorative occasions; but in August, 1843, he deposited it with the Old Defenders' association, a veterans organization formed shortly after the successful defense of Baltimore. On moving to New Jersey, however, he reclaimed the flag and kept it until his death in Newark about 1855. Years later it was returned to Dr. Albert Kimberly Hadel of Baltimore, a member of the Old Defenders group and an officer in its successor organization, the Society of the War of 1812. On October 19, 1907, that group presented it to the State.<sup>58</sup>

The earliest date of record for this flag is 1843. A technical examination provided the following information:

**Size:** It is approximately 30 inches by 61 inches (width and length vary from one area to another).

**Fabric:** The union is a blue bunting field of single-ply worsted yarns. Cotton, five-pointed stars are appliquéd to both sides of the flag, twelve in a circle, one in the center. There are thirteen bunting stripes, seven red and six white of single-ply worsted yarns.

**Heading:** There is none; however, a rope support with loops at top and bottom are whipped into a bunting hem in place of a heading.

**Sewing thread:** The 2-ply linen thread was used to stitch bunting. Plied cotton thread was used to stitch stars, and although the number of ply cannot be determined, it is not a cabled thread.

**Stitching:** It is by hand and with flat-fell seams.

**Grommets:** There are none.

**Date:** The cotton stars and the cotton thread used to stitch the stars would date this flag from

the nineteenth century rather than the Revolutionary War. There is no reason to doubt that it was in existence in 1843. The flag is very similar to one in the collection of the Division of Military History in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology, which dates from the period of the Mexican War and is described with the twenty-nine star flags—the period in which it was made (Figure 12).

The Smithsonian Institution received two requests for the dating of other flags with twelve stars in a circle and the thirteenth in the center. One, in a private collection in Indiana, was not submitted for examination. The other is described as a hand-stitched thirteen-star flag ("A-12" on page 47). It should be noted for comparison.

The Flag of Cowpens, originally deposited with the Old Defender's Association in 1843, may have been a Revolutionary War flag; however, the flag turned over to the state of Maryland in 1907 is not the same flag. The circle of stars with one in the center does not date earlier than the nineteenth century. The earliest illustration found thus far is that of a fourteen-star flag in a canvas dating about 1815. The painting, the *United States Frigate Washington*, is in the Bertram K. and Nina Fletcher Little collection and was exhibited at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1969. This painting is attributed to John Samuel Blunt (1798-1835) and dated about 1815. The flag pictured on the shiphouse appears to be one with thirteen stars in a circle and a fourteenth in the center. The flag has only twelve stripes. Irregularity in the number of stripes at any given time apparently was not uncommon. In their history of the United States flag, Quaife, Weig, and Appleman quote an 1817 report to Congress which states that flags flying at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., and over the buildings in which Congress sat had as few as nine stripes on one and as many as eighteen on the other. In the Blunt painting, the frigate *Washington* flies a flag with fourteen stripes, and there are fourteen stars in a circle with an eagle in the center. The second vessel in the painting is the *Congress*, which also has a circle of stars, but the number of stars is not discernable. Another painting in the Williamsburg folk art collection is of the *Pilot Boat in New York Bay* painted by Thomas Chambers (1808-?) credited as being painted about



Figure 12. Flag carried by the Maryland and District of Columbia Battalion of Volunteers in the Mexican War, 1846-1848, exhibited in the National Museum of History and Technology, gift of the National Society Dames of 1846.

1835. The flag in this painting shows the stars arranged in a square with one in the center, but an illusion of a circle appears at the top of the canton as the flag droops slightly with the fluttering breeze.

**BENNINGTON BATTLE FLAG, or FILLMORE FLAG** as it is sometimes called. This thirteen-star flag has eleven stars arranged in a generous semicircle with the numerals "76" in the center and two stars in the upper corners of the union. The history of this flag was first recorded by John Spargo.<sup>60</sup> It was reported to have been used by the Bennington militia and first raised by Nathaniel Fillmore, grandfather of President Millard Fillmore, at the Battle of Bennington in August 1777. Septa Fillmore, the nephew of Nathaniel, is alleged to have acquired the flag in 1812. The Spargo report continued that the flag then passed to Philetus P. Fillmore, nephew of Septa. This information cannot be documented beyond the ownership by Philetus P. Fillmore, the third owner.

As Spargo records it:

As a boy [born 1803] Philetus had been tremendously stirred by the War of 1812 and as a result of it had acquired a passion for collecting relics of that struggle. A somewhat eccentric man in later life he was the one Fillmore who devoted himself seriously to the collection and preservation of family records and relics. He had long desired to possess the flag and after receiving it from his uncle cherished it for many years . . . during the last years of his life when his mental powers were weakened and the eccentricities which he had long manifested were intensified, Mr. Fillmore insisted that the flag had been carried by his father. . . .<sup>61</sup>

From the donor, or some other source, Spargo also states that the flag from Fillmore "was displayed on the front of a house on the corner of Central Avenue and Grand Street, Aurora, Illinois" in 1877.<sup>62</sup> The flag was later exhibited in the Grand Army of the Republic's Room of the Chicago Public Library and in 1926 was presented to the Bennington Battle Monument and Historical Association by the last Fillmore owner, Mrs. Henry G. Wilson. Spargo concludes: "Obviously, therefore, we have to do with a relic which does not