



Elizabeth Griscom (later known as Betsy Ross) was born in 1752, the eighth of seventeen children. When she was three, her family moved from New Jersey to Philadelphia. By the time she was a young woman, Betsy (a Quaker) was a trained upholsterer.

Her first husband, John Ross, was an Anglican (which meant that Betsy's family opposed the marriage). The young couple started their own upholstery business on Mulberry Street (now Arch Street) in today's Old City of Philadelphia.

A bit more than two years after their wedding, John was guarding munitions near the Delaware River. He was killed when gunpowder exploded. Betsy became a widow at 24.

In addition to running her upholstery business, which she continued to work after John's death, Betsy earned extra money by mending uniforms (and other similar items) for members of the Continental Army. She married again in June of 1777.

Joseph Ashburn, her second husband, was a mariner often away at sea. In 1780, when Betsy was expecting the couple's second child (a daughter, Eliza), the British captured Ashburn's ship and charged the whole crew with treason.

Jailed at the Old Mill Prison (in Plymouth, England), Joseph died before Britain released their American prisoners in 1782. So did Zilla Ashburn, the couple's older daughter. She had lived just nine months.

A widow again (this time at age 30), Betsy renewed her friendship with John Claypoole. They married, in May of 1783, and were together thirty-four years.

Betsy, herself, lived a long life. She died in her sleep, on the 30th of January, 1836. By that time, she was 84 years old and totally blind.

But here's something to think about when it comes to the famous flag-maker ... how do we really know, for sure, that Betsy Ross made America's first "Stars and Stripes?"



Hmmm ...

Where do we go to track-down *that* answer? We could check-in with Marc Leepson (who has studied the history of "Old Glory"). Here's what he said in an interview:

As far as the big question is concerned—Did she make the first American flag?—every historical study has come to the same conclusion. There's no good historical evidence that she did. But that doesn't mean she didn't. There's simply a lack of documentation. Most historians believe the story is apocryphal.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

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U. S. National Archives, image 148-GW-1210.

In-text image of Betsy Ross painting—"Betsy Ross Presenting The First American Flag To General Washington"—by Edward Percy Moran (1862-1935).

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