

0. Betsy's Early Life - Story Preface

**1. Betsy's Early Life**

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Betsy Ross was born Elizabeth Griscom, one of seventeen children. Her father, Samuel, was a house carpenter. When she was a young teen, she went to work in a Philadelphia shop that crafted curtains, slipcovers, bed hangings, and mattresses—all with fringes and tassels that were fashionable in that day for the well-to-do citizens of the city. While working here, she fell in love with another apprentice in the shop named John Ross and they were married in November, 1773. Soon afterward, they opened their own shop.

To fully understand Betsy's story, one must also understand the city in which Betsy and John lived and worked. Philadelphia was the center of the colonial revolution against England in a quest to become a free nation. In 1775, Thomas Paine published his famous pamphlet "Common Sense" and transformed a protest movement into a full-on revolt. The crisis hit artisans like Betsy and John especially hard. Their clientele was asking for luxury goods, and the specialty fabrics they used in their shop were almost all imported. The tax policy imposed by England made these fabrics extremely expensive; Betsy and John had to charge so much for their goods, most Americans found it difficult to buy them. Betsy's husband, John became active in the protest against these taxes and joined the new American militia. One night, as he was guarding a stockpile of munitions, there was an explosion and he was killed.

Betsy became a widow at the age of 24.

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Media Stream



Betsy Ross

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