

The BETSY ROSS HOUSE

239 ARCH STREET • PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106



The image of Betsy Ross

sewing the first American flag has been imprinted in the minds of Americans since the late 1800s, when the legend of Ross making the flag was first taught as a true historic event.

The *Stars and Stripes* remain one of our nation's most prominent symbols of national unity and common purpose, and the desire to know—with certainty—who made the first flag continues to this day. Although no official records exist to authenticate the story of Betsy Ross and the making of the flag, this patriotic story has become a colorful thread in the complex tapestry of colonial American history during the founding days of our nation.

This 1740 Philadelphia rowhouse is restored to about the year 1777, when Ross, as the story tells it, is said to have created the first flag. The Betsy Ross House commemorates both the legendary event and the historical Betsy Ross. In addition, the House is an important urban example of an artisan's dwelling, a place to live and work, in 18th century Philadelphia.

Scroll down to find out more about Betsy Ross and the Betsy Ross House! ▼

with alternate glazed bricks, situated on the North

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Donation: \$2.00 adults
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The American Flag House &
Betsy Ross Memorial
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ABOUT THE BETSY ROSS HOUSE

Historic records tell us that Betsy Ross rented and lived in a house on Arch Street, just a few doors east of Third Street. Over the past two centuries, street numbering systems have varied, making it difficult for historians to know with total accuracy which of the two houses (see photo at left) was the Ross house.

Originally built in 1740, with a somewhat later rear addition, the Betsy Ross House is restored to the period from 1773 to 1785 when Ross lived here. The House is furnished with period antiques and some reproduction furniture. Highlights of the collection include several objects known to have belonged to Betsy Ross, including her eyeglasses and a family Bible. Perhaps one of the most important pieces belonging to Ross is an American Chippendale walnut chest-on-chest, circa 1745, in the rear first floor parlor.


The two and a half story, eight-room brick rowhouse design was influenced by the English Quakers who settled the city after 1682. With memories of the devastating Great Fire of London in 1661, the founding Quakers decreed that all houses built in Philadelphia would be made of brick, rather than wood. The front of the house was constructed using a Flemish bond pattern of alternating bricks of black “headers” and red “runners.”

Along with the houses on historic Elfreth's Alley, just two blocks away, the Betsy Ross House is a fine example of a small Philadelphia house of the type where the “middling” class of the 18th century would have lived. A combination of public work space and private family spaces, the house brings to life the working and living conditions of Philadelphia tradespeople during the period of the Revolution. The Betsy Ross House was restored in the 1930s.



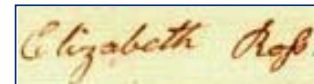
The oldest known photo of the Betsy Ross House, circa 1859.

WHO WAS BETSY ROSS?



Elizabeth Griscom Ross Ashburn Claypoole was an industrious Quaker seamstress, upholsterer, wife and mother, who ran a successful workshop in Philadelphia's bustling commercial district. Her shop, situated in an area just north of Independence Hall (then the Pennsylvania State House), was a few blocks from the Delaware River wharves. Ships from around the world docked here, bringing to the city goods from the four corners of the globe.

In one way especially, Betsy Ross' life is representative of many Revolutionary era working-class women in Philadelphia and elsewhere in the colonies. Many women, like Ross, were left behind by husbands away in battle, fighting for our country's independence, some of whom were seriously injured, even killed, in the cause of freedom. These brave women became heads of the family—required to manage workshops and businesses, while simultaneously caring for large and extended families.



- 1752 born Jan. 1
- 1773 married John Ross
- 1776 John Ross died in a gunpowder explosion
- 1777 married Joseph Ashburn
- 1779–1780 daughters Zilla and Eliza born
- 1782 Joseph Ashburn died in a British prison
- 1783 married John Claypoole
- 1785–1795, Clarissa, Susannah, Rachel, Jane, and Harriet born (Zilla and Harriet died as children.)
- 1817 John Claypoole died
- 1836 Betsy Ross died Jan. 30, age 84

Betsy Ross was especially successful in managing these dual roles—not all single or widowed women of the period fared as well. Through an apprenticeship begun when she was a teenager, she learned the trade of furniture upholstery, a lucrative skill in Philadelphia, then the acknowledged furniture-making capital of the colonies. Excellent at her trade and industrious by nature, Ross was able to keep her family together—and prosper—despite the tragic deaths of three husbands, two in the cause of Independence.

As a colonial businesswoman, she was entrepreneurial and operated a diverse sewing business. In addition to upholstery work, Ross made bed hangings, linens, ship pennants during and after the Revolutionary War, and, of course, flags. With the help of her oldest daughter Clarissa, she continued running her business well into her seventies.

Born into a Philadelphia Quaker family, the Griscoms, Betsy Ross was the eighth of 17 children.

with alternate glazed bricks, situated on the North side of Arch Street a few doors East of Third Street,

