

The Betsy Ross Story

By Carol Montgomery ©2010

(Based on three sworn historical affidavits from Betsy's daughter, granddaughter, and niece.)

Readability: Grade 5.2 (4.9 substituting the word Nar for Narrator)

Time = about 10 minutes

CAST (6):

Narrator 1	Betsy Ross
Narrator 2	Colonel Ross
George Washington	Robert Morris

Vocabulary:

ammunition	another	anything	apparently	applauded
applause	apprentice	apprenticed	approved	believing
brilliant	Britain	business	bystanders	certainly
Colonel	committee	company	considering	continued
creative	daughter	detailed	diligently	discussing
Elizabeth	embroidered	employers	enjoyed	exploded
Francis	generous	George	government	grandchildren
happened	honored	Hopkinson	imagine	importantly
impressed	independence	interesting	laughing	managed
marrying	militia	Narrators	official	patriot
perfectly	Philadelphia	proportions	reached	received
refreshments	related	relieved	returned	revolution
revolutionary	ruffles	scattered	scissors	seamstress
seventeen	spangled	successful	suggested	surrender
surveyor	terribly	tickled	unanimously	unfortunately
upholsterer	upholstering	upholstery	Washington	Willing
wondered	wondering	worthwhile		

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Narrator 1: Can you imagine being one of seventeen children in the same family, born right in the middle as number eight? That was Elizabeth. We know her as Betsy Ross.

Narrator 2: Betsy finished school at age twelve. She was apprenticed out to an upholsterer where she learned the trade. She also met another apprentice there, John, who became her good friend and later her husband.

Narrator 1: John and Betsy started an upholstery business. But, like many others, John joined the Philadelphia militia as a patriot to stand up against the British before the Revolution reached Philadelphia. Unfortunately, while John was guarding the supplies the ammunition caught fire and exploded, hurting John terribly.

Narrator 2: Betsy tried to nurse John back to health, but he died, January 21, 1776. Since she was a strong woman, she managed to keep the business going. Years later, after losing a second husband to the Revolutionary War and marrying for the third time, Betsy told stories from her life to her children and grandchildren. This is one of those stories when Betsy gets company.

Betsy: Well, what do you know, George Washington! I thought you were on a trip!

George W: (*smiling*) We're glad you're here today, Betsy!

Betsy: (*smiling*) And, look who is with you—Uncle George, or should I say Colonel Ross!

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Colonel Ross: (*smiling*) Hello, Betsy!

George W: And this is our friend Robert Morris. He co-owns Willing, Morris and Company—a shipping-banking business. But, more importantly he’s a brilliant man and a generous patriot.

Robert: (*smiling*) It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.

Betsy: Thank you. The pleasure is mine. (*smiles broadly*) Come into the parlor behind the store here and I’ll get you some refreshments!

George W: Thank you, Betsy.

Narrator 1: So Betsy took care of her guests, then asked...

Betsy: You all look very official today. Is there something on your minds?

George W: I was just telling Robert here about how you embroidered ruffles for my shirt not long ago and what a fine patriot your husband John was before he passed away. But, that’s not why we came.

Betsy: I see. So, am I to guess why you’re here?

Colonel Ross: (*laughs*) Certainly not! We’re the new flag committee.

Betsy: New flag committee?

George W: Well, I’ve told people that ever since I met you at Christ Church and found out you had an upholstery business and that you could sew anything...chair cushions, shirt ruffles, (*pause*) even turkeys!

Robert: (*smiles*) That’s right.

Betsy: (*shaking head and smiling*) Oh, George.

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George: So, we were wondering....would you be willing to sew a new flag?

Betsy: Is there a problem with the Grand Union flag?

Colonel Ross: *(laughs)* Is there a problem? Robert, tell her our problem, please.

Robert: As you know the Grand Union flag has a small British Union Jack in the upper left hand corner, so to some it looks like it's related to Britain. Unfortunately, when we began to fly that flag many of our people thought it meant George Washington was going to surrender to the British!

Colonel Ross: *(laughs)* I can't tell that story without laughing—even though I know it's not funny. I just get so tickled thinking about people BELIEVING that George Washington could ever surrender! They sure don't know George!

George W: Thank you *(pause)*—I think.

Colonel Ross: You're welcome, my friend.

Robert: So we knew we needed a new flag and we needed it soon. George suggested you might sew us a new flag.

Betsy: *(inhales deeply)* I've never made a flag before, but it can't be much harder than some of the upholstering or other sewing I've done. Maybe it will be more interesting. What did you have in mind?

George W: I have a suggested drawing here from Francis Hopkinson. Mr. Hopkinson is from New Jersey; he's a very detailed man with a creative mind. *(removes drawing from coat pocket and places it on the table)*

Narrator 2: George Washington removed the drawing from his coat pocket and placed it on the table for Betsy to see.

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Colonel Ross: (*laughs*) What do you think about the drawing Mrs. Sew and Sew?

Betsy: (*smiles*) Mrs. Sew and Sew? To be perfectly honest, I think it needs some help. First of all the proportions are wrong.

George: I wondered about that. How do you mean?

Betsy: This drawing is of a square flag. A flag really should be one third longer than its width.

George W: (*draws on the paper*) More like this?

Betsy: Yes, that's right. You're very good at drawing flags, George. Maybe you should make it?

George W: (*laughs*) I used to be a surveyor, but I'm not a seamstress.

Colonel Ross: (*laughs*) I'll never tell!

Betsy: And, I suppose you don't want to sew a new flag either, Colonel Sew and Sew?

Colonel Ross: Who me? (*laughs*) Ask Robert!

Betsy: (*smiles*) Mr. Morris?

Robert: (*smiles broadly*) No thank you! I'll pay for it, but I won't sew it!

Betsy: Well, it would look much better if we cleaned up the design a bit, too.

George W: You mean the stars or the stripes?

Betsy: The stars. First, they're scattered about all over the blue field ...It will look like a more unified design if the stars are in lines or in a circle.

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George W: I like the idea of being unified. What if we put the stars in a circle? Like this? (*draws*)

Betsy: That's very good, George. But, the drawing by Mr. Hopkinson shows six-pointed stars and you've done the same thing. If you'll change the shape to a five-pointed star I'll show you how one can be made with just one snip of the scissors; that way you can have your flag sooner.

Narrator 2: So Betsy showed them how to make a five-pointed star by folding the paper a special way and making just one cut with the scissors.

Narrator 1: The men were impressed.

George W: (*smiles*) I told you Betsy was the right one for the job! That's a perfect star! Very clean. Nice lines. I don't think I can draw it that perfectly, but a five-pointed star somehow looks stronger.

Betsy: I never thought of that. I learned how to make these when I was a girl...I see you have the design now, George. Good proportions, five-pointed stars in a circle. What do we do now?

Colonel Ross: Robert and I were discussing that while you two were working on the design. Robert has a successful shipping business with a ship docked at the Port of Philadelphia.

Robert: That's right. And if you think it could help, I have a flag in the sea chest that you may borrow to see how it is sewn. We will also have a painted drawing for you to see the colors and proportions.

Betsy: That would be very helpful, Mr. Morris.

Robert: And, of course, I'll pay for all your supplies as well as your time. I can see you're a very gifted woman.

Betsy: Thank you, sir. I'm honored to be able to use my skills for such a worthwhile cause.

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Colonel Ross: You're a real patriot, Betsy! (*smiles broadly*) And, at least THIS flag won't make people think George Washington is considering surrender.

George W: Not when the stars and stripes are waving independence!

Narrator 1: The stars and stripes did wave independence proudly. Betsy's daughter Rachel wrote,

Narrator 2: "...mother went diligently to work upon the flag and soon finished it, and returned it, the first star-spangled banner that was ever made, to her employers..."

Narrator 1: The new flag apparently did a test run up the peak of one of Mr. Morris' ships. Betsy's daughter Rachel also writes,

Narrator 2: "[It] was received with shouts of applause by the few bystanders who happened to be looking on."

Narrator 1: The New Flag Committee carried the Betsy Ross flag into Congress.

George W: (*proudly*) Where it was unanimously approved.

Narrator 2: The next day Colonel Ross called upon Betsy Ross to tell her the good news.

Colonel Ross: (*smiles broadly*) They loved it, Betsy! Did you enjoy making the new flag?

Betsy: I surely did. I can't think of a better use of my sewing skills. And I still can't believe people applauded the first time they saw the stars and stripes.

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Colonel Ross: They did. And, I'm relieved you enjoyed the work.; we need you to keep making flags—as many as you can Mrs. Sew and Sew. (*laughs*) Sew one flag and sew another and another—just sew and sew! Please, don't stop sewing flags.

Betsy: (*smiles*) It's my honor and my joy. Imagine, I get paid to make five pointed stars with one snip!

Narrator 1: So Betsy continued to make flags for the United States Government...

Narrator 2: For over fifty years!

Narrators 1 & 2: The End.

(*all bow*)



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Curriculum Links:

(Links valid as of March, 2021):

- www.ushistory.org/betsy/index.html

Betsy Ross homepage including virtual tour of Betsy's house, symbolism of colors, FAQs, historic analysis on whether or not Betsy sewed the first flag (NOTE: USHistory.org is run by the Independence Hall Association.)

- www.ushistory.org/betsy/flagstar.html

How to cut a five-pointed star in one snip!

- <http://www.manyfacesofoldglory.com/>

The testimonials of this program on the history of our flag look really exciting! Perhaps a school or homeschool support group would be interested in the \$30 Dvd or \$18 book with Cd?

- www.atozteacherstuff.com/Themes/Flag_Day/

Too many links to list—flag art projects, flag poems...