



Origin Of The Missouri State Flag

by Gary Knehans

Most every school child knows that Betsy Ross designed and made the first American flag. Even many adults remember the story of this from their own school days. But how many students and adults know of the origin of the Missouri State Flag? The story is interesting.

How many people know, for example, that Missourians had to wait for over 90 years from statehood to have their own flag? And, the successful campaign for adoption of our state flag was initiated by private citizens and not by any state government official!

This campaign began in October, 1908, when members of the Missouri Society of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, who were attending the organization's annual conference in Columbia, decided the time was well past due for an official state flag. The D-A-R's State Regent, Marie Elizabeth Watkins Oliver, who was the wife of a former state senator from Cape Girardeau, established and led a select committee to prepare a design for a state flag and to secure passage of a bill that would make

that design official.

Mrs. Oliver quickly organized a study of state flags, corresponded with secretaries of state throughout the country, and contacted a Cape Girardeau artist, Mary Kochtitsky, to assist in the painting of a flag design. After months of study and research, the tireless D-A-R State Regent decided the flag should contain three elements: the national colors, the state seal, and 24 stars representing Missouri's status as the 24th state admitted to the Union. Many combinations of these were tried before Miss Kochtitsky settled on the final design of three horizontal stripes of red, white, and blue, which served as a background to the Missouri coat of arms, which was centered in the white area. A blue band with 24 stars encircled the coat of arms.

Mrs. Oliver then enlisted the help of her nephew, State Senator Arthur L. Oliver of Caruthersville, who promptly introduced a bill in the Senate on April 21, 1909, that would have established the Kochtitsky creation as Missouri's official state flag. Oliver's bill did win approval in the Senate, but failed to pass in the House.

Senator Oliver reintroduced the bill in the Senate in 1911, but events intervened to thwart that effort. This was the year of the great State Capitol fire and lawmakers were too preoccupied with the consequences of this to pay much attention to the matter of establishing a state flag. State senators did get around to approving Oliver's bill, but state representatives again failed to stamp their approval to the measure.

Another victim of the fire was the original Kochtitsky flag design. This prompted Mrs. Oliver to contact Mrs. Stanley D. McFarland of Cape Girardeau to craft an identical silk flag to submit for future consideration by state lawmakers. It was at this time that the Missouri Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Society of Colonial Dames of Missouri formally approved the Oliver McFarland design and urged the General Assembly to adopt it as the official state flag of Missouri.

The Missouri House's opposition to the "Oliver flag bill" came as the result of an effort by Dr. N. R. Holcomb, a state representative from Jackson County, who wanted a different

design adopted as the official state flag. Holcomb introduced legislation to this effect in the House in 1909 and again in 1911. His bill passed the House on January 19, 1911, but failed to pass the Senate, which favored the Oliver legislation.

Against this backdrop, another one of Mrs. Oliver's nephews, Representative Charles C. Oliver from Cape Girardeau County, introduced the "Oliver flag bill" in the House of Representatives on January 21, 1913. This time, the assemblymen almost unanimously approved the measure and sent it on to the Senate, which stamped its approval as well. Governor Elliott Wolfolk Major signed the bill on March 22nd of that year, thereby establishing the Oliver McFarland design as the state's official flag.

As Missouri's own "Betsy Ross", Mrs. Oliver kept the original silk Missouri state flag in her home in Cape Girardeau until her death in October, 1944. Possession then went to one of her surviving sons, Allen L. Oliver, who kept it for several years. Then, on June 14, 1961, Oliver presented this flag to Warren E. Hearnes and the

state of Missouri for public display in the secretary of state's office.

By the 1970's, however, the flag had begun to split and deteriorate. This prompted its removal from public display and placement in a storage vault. Happily, this flag again is on public display in the secre-

tary of state's office, as a result of successful restoration work last year. The restoration came through the combined efforts of Secretary of State Roy Blunt, The Missouri Heritage Foundation, and many Missouri school children, who participated in a flag restoration fund raising drive.



KJPW

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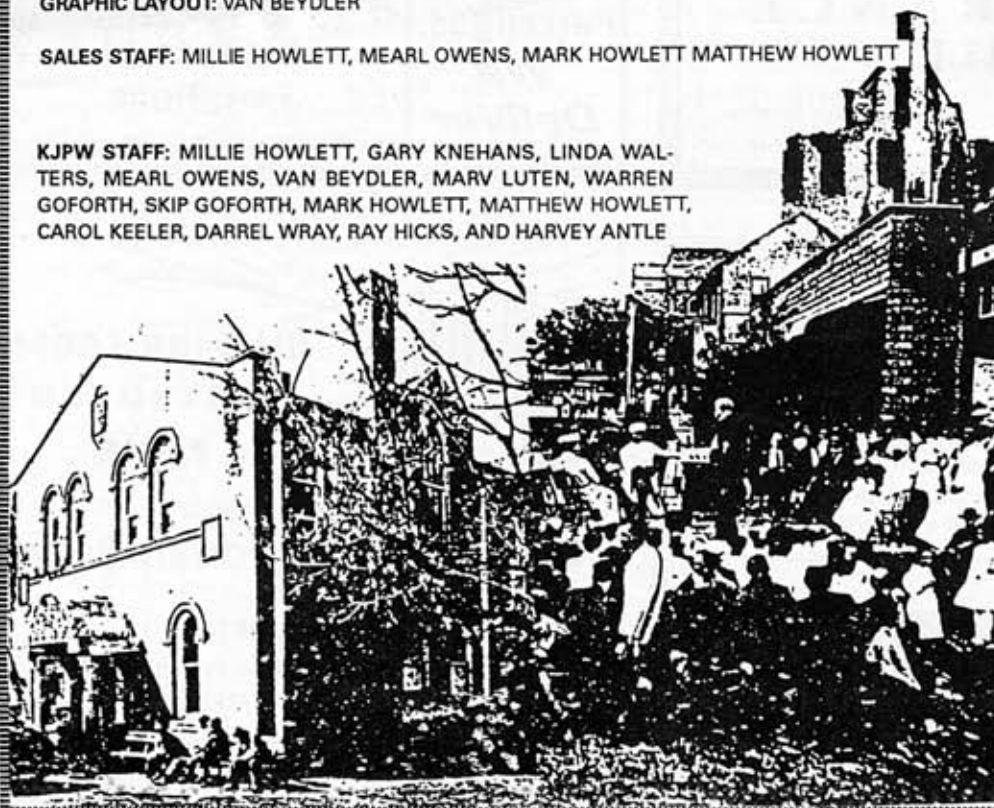
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