

Fig. 1: 20-star pattern United States Flag. Unknown. c. 1818. Museum of Mississippi History Collection.

EARLY FLAGS OVER THE PURCHASE

by Hugh L. Brady

Flags are wonderful things. They express the collective identity of a nation, a Commonwealth, a county, a school, or a private association. Practically every human culture—save those of prehistoric man or wandering tribes—has created flags to mark their territory and advance their battles. "So strong is the tradition of flags, we may not be far from the truth in surmising that there is a law—not of nature, but of human society—which impels man to make and use flags" (Smith, *Flags Through the Ages* 32).

The tradition of flags is especially strong in the United States. "Americans, more than most other peoples, are a flag-conscious nation" (Smith, *Flag Book of the U.S.* v). Our strong flag tradition dates

mostly from the War Between the States. After its adoption on June 14, 1777, by the Continental Congress, the Stars and Stripes was used primarily for military and government purposes. There was practically no commercial manufacturing of flags; although many artisans—primarily upholsterers and painters—made flags before the War, those flags were hand-fabricated and custom-made for the customer (Leepson 84; Miller 159-164). The War accelerated the growing popular use of flags as decorations and campaign material that began around the 1840s, which is about the time the first commercial flag manufacturer formed in New York City (Leepson 86-89).

Once secession threatened the very future of a relatively young country, flags became ready symbols of individual and regional political sympathies. Once hostilities commenced, the War quickly "became a fight for the flag, and it was expressed in those terms;" the U.S. flag was viewed by the North as "widely held symbol of the Union and the fight to keep it whole" (Leepson 91). For the Purchase, Confederate and secession flags signified a belief that the South's path lay elsewhere, and were to be suppressed; resistance to the majority—the Union—was to be quelled. For both Unionists and Confederates, then, flags "both reflect[ed] and affect[ed] cultural beliefs and behaviors" that marked each side's political and moral vision of their collective and separate futures (Guenter).

Vexillology is the scholarly study of flags to understand these cultural beliefs and behaviors. (Smith, *Flags Through the Ages* 30; Guenter). While

many flags have flown over the Purchase from national flags to city flags, a full examination of all of those flags is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, this is a vexillological sketch of early flags that flew over the Jackson Purchase, with special attention to flag usage during the Late Unpleasantness in everyday life to see what the flag usage tells us about the Purchase view of its role in the larger struggle.

Flags from 1818-1860

Before discussing the flags that did fly over the Purchase in this period, I briefly discuss flags that did not fly over the region: the flags of the Chickasaw Nation and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Flags for these polities simply did not exist during this period. I do this to ensure that readers are not confused because of the absence of flags they think should be included in this discussion.

Before the Purchase became part of the United States in 1818, the area was inhabited by the Chickasaws (Loughridge 94). The Chickasaws, a slaveholding tribe, did not formally organize as a nation until 1856, after its separation from the Choctaws and then removal to present-day Oklahoma (Champagne 176-177). At the time of the territory's sale, Indian tribes in the U.S. did not have flags, and the Chickasaws were no exception (Healy, viii; Wright, "Official Seals" 357). The tribe adopted a seal in 1856, which features "a native warrior of ancient times, standing with two arrows in

his right hand, a long bow in his left and a buckskin shield on his left shoulder" (Wright, "Great Seal" 388)

Flag usage by the Chickasaws likely dates to no earlier than 1940, when the State of Alabama dedicated its new historical building, complete with a Hall of Flags, in Montgomery. Since the "Five Civilized Tribes, of which the Chickasaw is one, claimed or inhabited portions of Alabama, that state "invited [tribe] members," through the Oklahoma Historical Society, "to present the flags of their governments during the dedication exercises." Muriel Wright, a public school teacher who was a member of the Choctaw Nation, suggested that white banners with each tribe's seal embroidered in color be used instead of flags; the suggestion was adopted and after Wright researched the seals of the five tribes, the banners were made and sent to Alabama. (Wright, "Official Seals" 357-359; "Wright, Muriel Hazel"). The current flag features the current variant of the 1856 tribal seal in color as the central emblem on a field of indigo, or dark blue (Healy 26).

The Kentucky flag was not adopted by the General Assembly until 1915, and it is based on the state seal first used in 1793 depicting "two friends embracing with the name of the state of their heads; and around them, the following motto 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall'." The motto is not a reference to the War, but is most likely a paraphrase of the refrain of the popular "Liberty Song" (1768): "Then join in hand, brave Americans all, / by uniting we stand, by dividing we fall." The Union pattern for state military colors during and after the War features the state's seal on a dark blue

field; and the state flag follows the pattern of the colors. The seal on the Commonwealth on the flag is encircled by a wreath of goldenrod, the state flower. Any pole flying the flag should be topped by a Kentucky cardinal "in an alert but restful pose, cast in bronze, brass, or other suitable material" (Smith, *Flag Book of the U.S.* 145-146).

The first flag, then, to fly over the Purchase was the 20-star U.S. flag (Fig. 1), which was used after July 4, 1818. It replaced the "Star-Spangled Banner," the flag of 15 stars and 15 stripes that was adopted in 1795 after the admission of Vermont (1791) and Kentucky (1792) into the Union. The 20-star flag was the result of a suggestion by a House of Representatives committee that studied how the flag should change when new states were admitted; adding a new stripe for each new state would soon make the flag unusable. The stripes were fixed permanently at 13, "representing the number of States then contending for, and happily achieving, their independence" and a new star would be added for each new state on the July 4th after the date the state was admitted. Although the stars were arranged in rows on government-issued flags, those made by others arranged the stars in any number of patterns (Fig. 1) (Smith, *Flag Book of the U.S.* 71-75).

With few government facilities in the Purchase, it is hard to determine how widely the U.S. flag flew before 1860. A 31-star flag likely flew from the Marine Hospital in Paducah after its completion in 1852 (Lee 9); there was a U.S. flag flying there when it was rechristened as Fort Anderson in 1861 (Fig. 2).

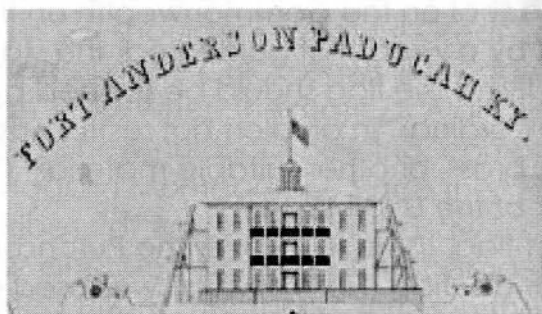


Fig. 2: Detail from "Fort Anderson, Paducah, Ky." John Rziha. 1861. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

The 33-star flag was in use when the secession crisis began after Lincoln's election in November 1860, marking the recent admission of Oregon in 1859. The 34-star flag was used after July 4, 1861, to mark the admission of Kansas. And the 35-star flag, marking West Virginia's admission, was used from July 4, 1863, to the War's end. Understandably, the North never officially removed any stars for the seceding states, reinforcing the flag's symbolism of the unbreakable Union. Some abolitionists flew 19-star flags that showed they "sought to separate their national identity from the slave-holding states" (Iasso).

Confederate flags most likely flew more over the Purchase than any other part of Kentucky. As the most Southern of Kentucky's regions, Abraham Lincoln won few votes here in 1860; Graves County did not return a single vote for the Republican born in Hopkinsville (Lee 55). As others have expertly chronicled, the "South Carolina of Kentucky" sided with the Confederacy from the beginning of the Secession Crisis and through the war, with the initial

exception of Paducah, historically aligned with the Whigs.

As the question of whether Kentucky would remain neutral or secede loomed large during spring 1861, sightings of the U.S. flag in the Purchase were rare, especially after Fort Sumter. Lincoln's call for volunteers in April 1861 brought Paducah along with the rest of the Purchase. The call for soldiers to bear arms against their Southern cousins "spread like leaping flames over our city," wrote Quintus Quincy Quigley, "and the same day saw us no longer divided but all united in rejecting [Lincoln] and his government and for support of the South" (Hoskins 84-85). Marking this shift in support, "flags with 15 stars were raised" over the new "Charleston" of the Purchase. And a Paducah correspondent to the *Louisville Daily Journal* writing as "UNION MAN" observed in the May 18, 1861, edition that he "was indeed sorry to know that in this region, our flag, the flag of our country, is at the present not allowed to unfurl to the breeze the stars and stripes" (Craig, *Kentucky Confederates* 75-76).

The design of the "flag with 15 stars" referred to by Quigley is unknown. The flag could have been a red- and white-striped flag with 15 stars in the blue canton to represent the 15 slaveholding states (lasso). Or it could have had a white canton with blue stars (Keim & Keim 116). Or it could have been a variant of the first flag of the Confederacy that flew over the Purchase: the First National Flag (Fig. 3, top left).

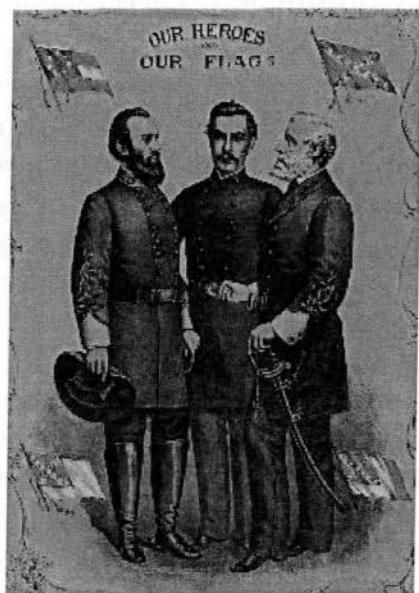


Fig. 3: Detail from "Our Heroes and Our Flag." Southern Lithograph Co. c. 1896. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. This detail shows full-length portraits of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and P.G.T. Beauregard with four versions of the Confederate flag. The larger print shows the men surrounded by bust portraits of Jefferson Davis and Confederate Army officers.

This flag is more colloquially known as the "Stars and Bars." Adopted by the Confederate Congress on March 4, 1861, it evoked the Union from which the Southern States were departing. Just as with the U.S. flag, each star in the canton represented a state admitted to the Confederacy. Its visual similarity to the U.S. flag was intentional; many of the public submissions to the committee considering a new flag drew on the Stars and Stripes (Cannon, "The Genesis of the Stars and Bars" 2-6). Early public debate on the new nation's symbols suggested that the Confederacy should simply appropriate the U.S. flag and the "Star-Spangled Banner" anthem

because Southerners founded the nation and fought in the wars to preserve it up until secession (Bonner 299-300).

For the Confederate Congress's first round of flag-designing, there was little stomach for too much change (Cannon, "The Genesis of the Stars and Bars" 3). Because of hopes that all slaveholding states would join together, some early Confederate flags had 15 stars in the canton ("15-Star Confederate Flag, ca. 1861"). The Stars and Bars had anywhere from 9 to 13 stars over the course of 1861, as various states were admitted, ending with the "provisional admission" of Kentucky on December 10 (Cannon, *Flags of the Confederacy* 13).

In late May 1861, a company of Illinois secessionist volunteers came through Paducah on their way to Camp Boone (near Clarksville), Tennessee. "Hailed as heroes," they were boarded by Augustine Shields at his St. Francis Hotel (Lee 28). For all of the next day and into their second morning in town, Southern-sympathizing citizens of Paducah streamed through the hotel bearing gifts of clothing and provisions for the men (Gleeson 12). Clare Shields, Augustine's wife, presented the company's captain with a Confederate flag, which the volunteers then paraded through the streets (Gleeson 12; Lee 28). They carried the flag onto a New Orleans and Ohio train headed for Mayfield, where "they came marching up with the secession flag flying" (Lee 28). Presumably the flag was with them when they arrived at Camp Boone.

Later, in September 1861, Union soldiers confiscated a Confederate flag they spotted flying

town waved a U.S. flag as Lee's men came through the town after she heard a Confederate officer damn the "stars and stripes to the dust, with all who advocate them." Another officer ordered her to turn over the flag, which she refused and then tied to her porch railing. A Confederate soldier cut the flag off and chopped it into pieces; Quantrill tied another flag to her railing, which was also cut off by the soldier (Leepson 115).

Quantrill's display of courage came a year after an equally impressive showing on the Confederate side in Paducah. When Grant entered the town on September 6, 1861, Confederate flags were flying all over town; as he advanced, citizens took them down to avoid notice and capture by the Union troops. One belonged to Emily Gant Jarrett, who sent a young black boy to take it down; Grant noticed and ordered the troops to confiscate Jarrett's flag. Soldiers came to the house and searched in vain for the flag. "After much questioning and intimidation the soldiers reported a fruitless assignment. It is thought she was wearing it as a petticoat" (Lee 45).

Women were central figures in flag usage during the War. Not only did they sew most of the flags used, they became central figures in dedicating the flags to what was perceived as a sacred purpose. The widespread ritual of presentation ceremonies, where the women presented their handcraft to departing volunteers, both symbolically released the men from the normal obligations of manhood and consecrated their march to war "to battle for your civilization and your homes; . . . the rights of your

wives and your children; . . . the glorious heritage left you by your ancestors; . . . to leave a noble inheritance to your posterity" (Durrill 1111-1112).

The flag presented by Mrs. Shields in Paducah was an ad hoc form of presentation, yet the men were delighted nonetheless as they paraded through the streets of Paducah. A month earlier, Moscow was the site of a more traditional ceremony, where Miss Nannie Wilson presented Edward Crossland's Company E, First Kentucky Infantry Regiment, with a Confederate flag "on behalf of the women of Fulton County." Crossland accepted the flag "[a]fter delivering a patriotic speech" (Craig, "Jackson Purchase Confederate Troops" 4).

In recommending the Stars and Bars to the full Congress, the committee noted that a flag "should be readily distinguishable at a distance" and assured the Congress that "[n]aval men assure us it can be recognized and distinguished at a great distance (Cannon, "The Genesis of the Stars and Bars" 4-5). Perhaps at sea; not so on land in the smoke and heat of battle.

During the First Battle of Manassas, the Confederates mistook the Stars and Bars for the U.S. flag several times. "[I]t was exceedingly difficult," Col. Jubal A. Early, 24th Virginia Infantry, later said, "to distinguish the 'Stars and Bars' from the 'Stars and Stripes,' when both hung down around the staff." Throughout the battle, "Confederate commands had opened fire on what they believed to have been enemy forces only to discover that they were not." No lives were lost because of the confusion, and the Confederates won the battle.

However, in its first test as a battle flag, the Stars and Bars failed (Brown & Keim 29-39).

Because of the confusion at Manassas, Generals Joseph E. Johnston and P.G.T. Beauregard discussed the need for a distinctive Confederate battle flag. Congressman William Porcher Miles was the chairman of the committee that recommended the Stars and Bars; he had objected to the design, favoring his own: a square flag with "a red field with a blue cross, edged in white, with white (or gold) stars" (Fig. 3, top right). Miles attempted to change the national flag after the battle, but was unsuccessful. Johnston and Beauregard were unwilling to wait on the political process, and in the fall of 1861 ordered production of Miles's design for use as a battle flag in Northern Virginia (Brown & Keim 43-54).

This "Southern Cross" design proved popular with Confederate soldiers and the pattern was quickly adopted westward (Maberry 68). It used 13 stars, to include Kentucky and Missouri. As more and more soldiers took the Southern Cross into battle, "The baptism of blood and fire has made the battle-flag of General Johnston our national ensign," proclaimed the *Southern Illustrated News* (Bonner 318, 320). What Miles had been unable to do earlier, he could do now: change the flag. In May 1863, the Congress adopted the Second National Flag: a field of white with the Southern Cross in the canton (fig 3, bottom left). Known as the "Stainless Banner" because of its white field and that color's association with purity, one of its first duties was to

cover the coffin of General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson (Bonner 319, Maberry 68).

The Stainless Banner saw "only limited service as a battle flag;" the Southern Cross remaining popular (Maberry 68). Interestingly, Gen. Lloyd Tilghman carried a 15-star Southern Cross battle flag, which refers to all slaveholding states; only one other existing battle flag, from a Georgia unit, used 15 stars (Bridgman). The Stainless Banner was also deficient when "hung down around the staff;" the predominant white field made it look like a flag of truce; at sea, it "resembled the famous White Ensign of . . . Great Britain's Royal Navy." Four years to the day after it adopted the Stars and Bars, the Confederate Congress adopted the Third National Flag: the Stainless Banner with a thick band of red on the fly (fig. 3, bottom right) (Cannon 22-23; Maberry 69).

By Appomattox, "[t]he Jackson Purchase had given her sons, her treasure, and her heart to the Confederacy, and it had lost all" (Lee 209). But it did not forget. At Emily Jarrett's funeral over 30 years later, the flag that Grant's soldier could not find "was draped on her funeral casket and buried with her" (Davidson 6). The flags flown over the Purchase during the War became "emblems of memory rather than destiny," tying the people with their past rather than their future, a future in which "the fate of a South securely within the Union has been almost uniformly accepted" (Bonner 330-331).

Flag usage during the War confirms the Purchase's role as the "South Carolina of Kentucky." Purchase residents did not hesitate to make and fly

the Confederate flag as outward expression of their views; Tilghman's battle flag unequivocally shouts that he fought for the rights of all slaveholding states, regardless of whether they had formally seceded from the Union. Just as the War did with other sections of the country, it solidified the Purchase's identification with the South that continues to the day.

About the Author:

HUGH L. BRADY is a clinical professor of law at The University of Texas, currently on leave to serve as the general counsel for the White House Office of Administration in Washington, D.C. The views presented in this article are solely his and do not represent the views of the United States Government. He is a former president of the North American Vexillological Association / Association nord-américaine de vexillologie and is, among other things, a member of the Board of Overseers of the Trust for Vexillology. Brady's maternal grandparents were born and raised in Graves County, KY

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