## **Today in History - June 14**

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Flag Day

On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress approved the design of a national flag.

## Since 1916, when President Woodrow Wilson issued a presidential proclamation establishing a national Flag Day on June 14, Americans have commemorated the adoption of the Stars and Stripes in many ways-displaying the flag in the front of their homes, parades, and other

was signed into law by President Harry Truman in 1949; the legislation also called upon the president to issue a flag day proclamation every year.

patriotic observances. Prior to 1916, many localities and a few states had been celebrating

the day for years. Congressional legislation designating that date as the national Flag Day

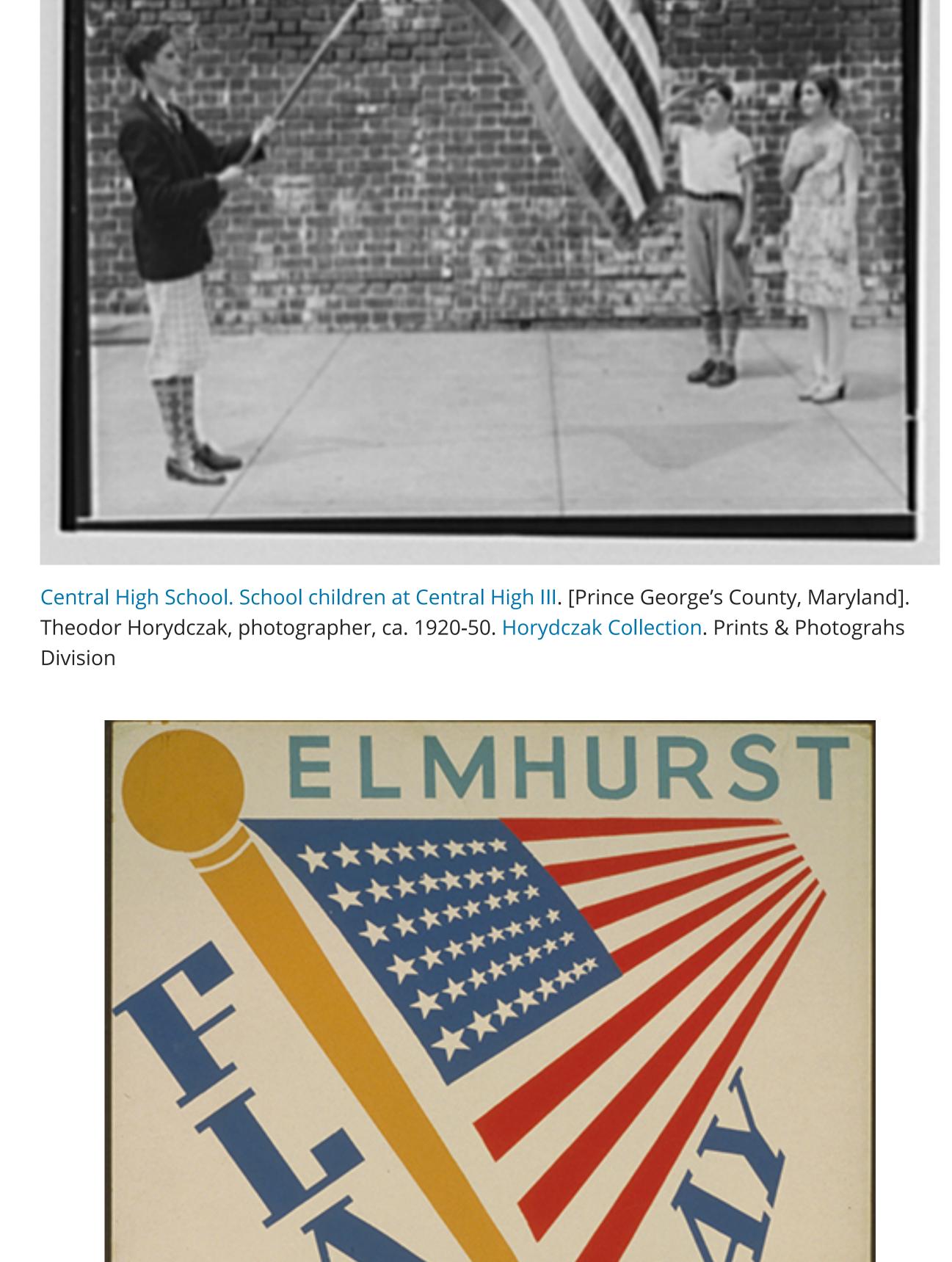


so, Ross most likely met Washington and certainly sewed early American flags in her family's Philadelphia upholstery shop. To date, there have been twenty-seven official versions of the flag, but the arrangement of the stars varied according to the flag-makers' preferences until

1912 when President Taft standardized the then-new flag's forty-eight stars into six rows of

eight. The forty-nine-star flag (1959-60), as well as the fifty-star flag, also have standardized

star patterns. The current version of the flag dates to July 4, 1960, after Hawaii became the fiftieth state on August 21, 1959.



JUNE 18

Elmhurst flag day, June 18, 1939, Du Page County centennial / Beauparlant. Chicago, III.: WPA Federal Art Project, 1939. Posters: WPA Posters. Prints & Photographs Division

Interviews in American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940 contain entertaining examples of Flag Day in the American vernacular. For example, a search on *Flag Day* retrieves the following conversation between Mr. Richmond and Mr. Davis: "Why ain't you got your flag out?" says Mr. Richmond, entering the gas station in which he spends much of his time these days. "You know today is flag day, don't you?" "I guess the boss forgot to buy a flag, George," says Mr. Davis, the station attendant. "And even if we had one, we ain't got no place to put it." Mr. Richmond: "That's a fine state of affairs, that is. Here they are tryin' to bring home to you people the fact that you're livin' in one of the few countries where you can draw a free breath and you don't even know it. You're supposed to have flags out all this week. Don't you know that? This is flag day and this is flag week. Where's your patriotism?" Mr. Davis: "What the hell are you hollerin' about, George? You're always runnin' the country down. They can't do anything to suit you. You're worryin' about taxes and future generations and all like that. Where's your patriotism?" Mr. Richmond: "Well, that's different. A man got a right to criticize. That's free speech. Don't mean I ain't patriotic." "Richmond." George Richmond, interviewee; Connecticut, ca. 1936-39. American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940. Manuscript Division lo not love myeround

and pledge allegiance to the flag daily. His refusal to do so touched off one of several constitutional battles over the authority of the state to require respect for national symbols and the right of individuals to freedom of speech. Both the United States district court and the court of appeals ruled in favor of the right to

Letter, Billy Gobitas to Minersville, Pennsylvania School Directors..., November 5, 1935. [detail]

"I do not salute the flag because I have promised to do the will of God," wrote ten-year-old

District in 1935. Like most public school students at the time, Gobitas was required to salute

refuse to salute the flag. In 1940, however, the U.S. Supreme Court decided the government

Just three years later, on **June 14**, 1943, the Supreme Court reconsidered its earlier decision,

government the authority to compel individuals to salute the American flag or to recite the

Billy Gobitas' letter is also displayed (in color) in the online exhibition, American Treasures of

the Library of Congress. Other related treasures include Francis Scott Key's "Star-Spangled

Banner" and John Philip Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

did have the authority to compel respect for the flag as a central symbol of national unity.

holding that the right of free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment denies the

Billy Gobitas, a Jehovah's Witness, to the board of the Minersville (Pennsylvania) School

William Gobitas Papers, 1935-1989. Manuscript Division

pledge of allegiance.

• Search Congress.gov on the word *flag* to find recent legislation introduced in Congress related to the flag. • Visit the Today in History feature of September 13 to learn the story of The Star Spangled Banner • Listen to "True to the Flag March," by F. von Blon; performed by the United States Marine Band on April 1, 1922 in the collection, Inventing Entertainment: the Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies • View Congress of Nations, a patriotic film from 1900 by the Thomas Edison Co. featuring a magician who makes the flags of different countries appear. The dissolve effect was

used for the first time in this motion picture, also featured in the collection, Inventing

American Variety Stage: Vaudeville and Popular Entertainment, 1870-1920. The piece

experiences of war veterans who served under the U.S. flag. The VHP Field Kit includes

all the information and forms you need to participate by interviewing veterans in your

Entertainment: the Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison

• Just for fun, look at the script Flags of the World, by Frank Tannehill, Jr., from The

culminates in a chorus line composed of women dressed as an American flag.

• Learn more about the Veterans History Project(VHP), which collects the stories and

• The Patriotic Melodies collection includes historical information, sheet music, and sound recordings for a variety of patriotic songs, including some about the American flag. Search by song title or scroll down on the collection's home page and select a featured song to read essays, download sheet music, and play sound recordings of that song.

• For many other images and songs about the American flag, search on *flag* across the

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Flag Day, Ft. Sam Houston, Tex., 1918. M.F. Weaver, cJune 14, 1918. Panoramic Photographs. Prints & Photographs Division **Learn More** 

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story behind Betsy Ross and the first flag on the Sidedoor podcast Broad Stripes, Bright Stars, and White Lies.

Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1870 to 1885

America Singing: Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets

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