

Design of the American Flag

From: *The Secret Destiny of America* by Manly P. Hall

THE UNKNOWN MAN WHO DESIGNED OUR FLAG

Our flag was worked out in elements of design that provided for gradual modification in the future as the national destiny increased. It was a learned stranger, added by seeming accident to the committee appointed by the Colonial Congress in 1775, who had the foresight to provide the area for the stars in subsequent substitution for the British Union Jack. The design was adopted by General Washington; there is no record that the committee ever made a report to Congress According to the rules laid down by Francis Bacon for works published under the authority of the society of unknown philosophers, each book must be so marked as to be readily recognizable. The book that tells of the presence of the unknown designer ends with a quotation from Bacon.

Robert Allen Campbell in 1890 published a little book *Our Flag, or The Evolution of the Stars and Stripes*. Diligent research fails to uncover any data about Mr. Campbell. He states in his preface that the work is "a compilation of facts and dates from official sources, larger works, occasional pamphlets and addresses upon this and collateral subjects; and is meant, therefore, for the perusal of those who have not the time, opportunity or disposition for a more extended study in this line of research."

Then he refers specifically to the chapter of interest to our present consideration: "That part of this sketch which treats of the proceedings of the Congressional Committee in relation to the Colonial Flag, and of the unofficial consideration, by a few of our Revolutionary statesmen and heroes, in regard to the Flag of the 'Thirteen United States,' immediately preceding its adoption by Congress, has not heretofore been published."

This last statement makes it extremely difficult to trace Mr. Campbell's source of information. We are forced to the conclusion that the story must have been given to him by word of mouth. The book itself must have been printed in a very small edition, for it has become exceedingly scarce and is seldom if ever offered for sale. On those rare occasions when copies have changed hands, the book commands a price far in excess of usual works in this field.

According to the rules laid down by Sir Francis Bacon for works published under the authority of the society of unknown philosophers, each book must be marked in some peculiar way, easily recognizable by the informed, but not conspicuous to those who are not a party to the plan. All of the older writings are so marked, either with ciphers, curious headpieces, vignettes, colophons, designs, symbols, figures, or signatures. It is possible that the book, *Our Flag* carries such a signature; for it ends with the following quotation, "Out of monuments, names, words, proverbs, private records and evidences, fragments of stories, passages in books, and the like, we save and recover some-what from the deluge of time." - Bacon.

One thing is certain, Robert Allen Campbell has concluded his treatise with a curiously meaningful passage from the writings of the man responsible for the broad program of colonization in the west-ern world that made possible the creation of the United States of America. The selection of Ba-con's words to conclude the book may be accident, and it may be intent; but in the light of the text and the air of mystery which covers the history of the writing and the life of the author, it appears more than possible that intent is the answer.

Chapter 2 of Our Flag is entitled, "The Colonial Flag" This in substance is what it says:

In the fall of 1775, the Colonial Congress in ses-sion at Philadelphia appointed Messrs. Franklin, Lynch, and Harrison as a committee to consider and recommend a design for a Colonial Flag. Gen-eral Washington was then in camp at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Committee went there to consult with him.

While at Cambridge the committee men were entertained by a patriotic and well-to-do citizen. At that time the best room in this gentleman's residence was temporarily occupied by a peculiar old gentleman. As there was only one other guest room, Messrs. Lynch and Harrison were given the unoccupied room, and Dr. Franklin shared apartments with the old gentleman.

Nothing is known about the mysterious old man except that he was referred to as the "Professor"; his name is not preserved. He was beyond seventy years of age but apparently in the prime of his life. He ate no flesh, fish, nor fowl, or any green things, and drank no liquor, wine, or ale. His diet con-sisted of cereals, well ripened fruit, nuts, tea, and such sweets as honey and molasses. He was well educated, highly cultured, of extensive as well as varied information, and very studious. He spent most of his time pondering over rare books and ancient manuscripts, which he seemed to be de-ciphering, translating, or rewriting. These he kept carefully locked up in a heavy iron-bound chest and never showed them to any person.

He was liberal but in no ways lavish with his money, but was well supplied with all that he needed. The Professor was a staunch advocate of demo-cracy and his favorite statement was, "We demand no more than our just due; we will accept and be satisfied with nothing less than we demand."

On the eve of their arrival, December 13, the committee men dined with their host and hostess, also General Washington and the Professor. The Professor was introduced to the visitors without his name being given, and his ease, grace, and dignity during the introduction is especially noted. When Benjamin Franklin was presented, he stepped forward and extended his hand, which the Pro-fessor heartily accepted. As their eyes met there was an instantaneous, a very apparent, and a mutually gratified recognition.

After dinner, Washington and the committee men exchanged a few words in undertone, and then Dr. Franklin arose, saying, in substance, "As the Chairman of this committee, speaking for my associates, and with their consent, and with the approval of General Washington, I respectfully in-vite the Professor to meet with the committee as one of its members; and we, each one, personally and urgently, request him to accept the responsibil-ity, and to give us, and the American Colonies, the benefit of his presence and his counsel."

After graciously accepting the invitation, the Professor made his first recommendation. He pointed out that the Committee now consisted of six persons, General Washington and the host being honorary members. Six was not an auspicious number, and as none of the members could be spared, let the hostess be included so that the number could be increased to seven. This suggestion was unanimously accepted and the hostess became the secretary of the committee.

The committee met the following evening in the Professor's room. General Washington opened the proceedings by asking Dr. Franklin for his recommendations. Franklin replied by requesting that the entire committee listen to the words of his new found and abundantly honored friend, the Professor, who had definite suggestions to make.

After a preamble, the Professor made the following extraordinary remarks:

"The sun of our political air, like the sun in the heavens, is very low in the horizon-just now approaching the winter solstice, which it will reach very soon. But, as the sun rises from his grave in Capricorn, mounts toward his resurrection in Aries, and passes onward and upward to his glorious culmination in Cancer, so will our political sun rise and continue to increase in power, in light, and in glory; and the exalted sun of summer will not have gained his full strength of heat and power in the starry Lion until our Colonial Sun will be, in its glorious exaltation, demanding a place in the governmental firmaments alongside of, coordinate with, and in no wise subordinate to, any other sun of any other nation upon earth."

The Professor went on to point out that the flag which he recommended would be subject to change in the future as the national destiny increased. This change, however, should not require a complete redesigning but a process of gradual modification: "To make it announce and represent the new nation which is already gestating in the womb of time; and which will come to birth-and that not prematurely, but fully developed and ready for the change into independent life-before the sun in its next summer's strength ripens our next harvest."

The design finally submitted consisted of a field of thirteen alternate red and white stripes, and in the area which now contains the stars was the British Union Jack. The area containing the Union Jack was the one suitable for modification. The design was formally and unanimously accepted, and the flag was adopted by General Washington as the recognized standard of the Colonial Army and Navy. There is no record of any report being made by this committee to Congress.

On January 2, 1776, at Cambridge, in the presence of the Army, General Washington with his own hands raised the newly made flag on a tall and specially prepared pine tree liberty pole. The British army at Charleston Heights could see the flag clearly. After inspecting it with their field glasses, the British officers ordered a salute of thirteen cheers, followed by a regular official salute of thirteen guns in honor of the new standard. It appears therefore, that the Colonial Flag was as pleasing to the British as it was to the Colonies.

It is easy to see why Mr. Campbell's story has received very little recorded recognition. It belongs among those shadowy and mysterious happenings which influence or change the course of empire but will ever find little favor with prosaic and unimaginative historians.