

# In Praise of Old Glory

by Granville K. Frisbie

Just as our National Ensign is the Soul of the United States because it symbolizes the ideals, aspirations, and hopes of the millions of its citizens, and because the Backbone may be said to be that imperishable and noble document of the ages, the U.S. Constitution, so, then, the Declaration of Independence may be said to be its Heart.

Born of hardship, oppression, and slavery, the real cast of mind of our forefathers, their determination to be forever free men, is forcefully demonstrated in the Magna Charta of our freedom, the Declaration of Independence.

The most far-reaching pronouncement of the Declaration stated that "all men are created equal." It means that we are equal in the eyes of the law, equal in opportunity to grow in usefulness to our very best stature without let or hindrance. It does not mean equal in wealth, social status, or other condition of life where men vastly differ. Above all, it does not mean that those of superior ability-an ability created by years of work and striving-should be denied the fruit of their efficiency and labor by coercion and force to share against their will with others. Voluntary love of one's fellowman brings voluntary sharing. Being ourselves born in God's image, we love to share as a natural consequence of whom we are. "I am that I am, hath sent me," the Great Light, the Bible, has said.

All have the same political and civil rights under the Declaration of Independence as American citizens, and the Flag permits us to feast our eyes on the visible symbol of our determination to be free men. It is here, in our first heartwarming document, that the matrix of our Constitutional Republic was born and the flag developed along with its sons and defenders.

From the Grand Union Cambridge Flag of General Washington, on through the dark days of the eight years of our Revolutionary fervor, throughout the even darker days of Lincoln's prayerful supplications, to the latest starry banner of fifty Sovereign States of this great Nation; our flag has ever been the visible symbol of God's voice speaking to men of His Freedom. Says the Captain of our Salvation, Jesus Christ, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

The Backbone of our Banner of Independence is the mainstay and support of our Federal Constitution. That illustrious document evolved after much prayer and mental anguish, culminating in 1787 with the Convention in the City of Brotherly Love. The fruit of the labors of these gifted and inspired forefathers the basic document which orders and governs our lives-has been suggested as a parallel to that other Great Light upon our altars. In fact, prayer and a ready reference to that

first Great Light made our Constitution proof against all sinful dissenters and those who lust after selfish ways and undeserved power to control the lives of others.

It is not redundant again to mention that Gladstone, the great Englishman and lawyer said, "The American Constitution is the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man." It is the beacon which sheds its light and guides us through troublous times. Let us look up, Sir Knights, to the benignant folds of that bright starry banner, knowing that the fundamental principles never change: Emanuel.

What are these vaunted unchanging principles? They are three. First, the protection of the people from any danger from the Legislature, the Courts, or the Executive accomplished by the separation of powers expressed in the basic document and the Bill of Rights. Second, and a most powerful one, is local self-government whereby the people control their own affairs. Third is the creation of the Supreme Court of the United States by which we safeguard personal freedom, accomplished by establishing this high guardian of the Constitution so no law will be made in violation of that Constitution.

When we look up upon the Stars and Stripes we should seriously reflect upon just what rights specifically are guaranteed by our Constitution. They are: The free exercise of religious belief; freedom of the press; peaceable assembly; to petition government for redress of grievances; to keep and bear arms; security from unreasonable searches and seizures of persons' houses, papers and effects; trial by jury; no jeopardy twice for same offense; no compulsion to testify against oneself; private property not taken for public use without compensation; a speedy trial in public by impartial jury; assistance of counsel and witnesses for defense; no excessive bail, no excessive fines, no cruel or unusual punishment; no form of slavery may exist, no denial of vote for race, color or previous condition; citizens of each State shall enjoy privileges of every other State; no religious test shall ever be applied.

If these Constitutional rights guaranteed by our basic law are valid, how do we restore our Republic today to its former and pristine glory? One of the first efforts in this direction would be to understand more clearly the principles undergirding a constitutional Republic, as opposed to a "representative democracy."

Can any of my Fratres find the word "Democracy" in our basic documents, the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution of the United States? In sober truth, our forefathers, in founding this nation, Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Franklin, Adams, worked mightily to avoid the dangers inherent in a democracy. What are the dangers of a democracy? This word and the idea behind it began to invade our body politic about the beginning of the second decade of this century. From the considered wisdom of one who is a doctor of philosophy earned in American History at Harvard University I quote: "The ideal of a democracy is universal equality. The ideal of a constitutional Republic is individual liberty. These two ideals are mutually exclusive. Equality of all men in the eyes of God and

before the law is a condition essential to individual liberty; but no other kind of equality is possible.

"Sustained governmental effort to achieve material equality for all, inevitably fails, always ends in tyranny of one kind or another-one-man dictatorship, legislative dictatorship, or that of all uncontrollable bureaucracy, or a judicial oligarchy." In a representative democracy people select their rulers at the polls; those elected vote among themselves by majority and have absolute power to make whatever laws they please. In a constitutional Republic people elect their rulers at the polls, vote by majority among themselves, but have only limited power and cannot make whatever laws they please because a written constitution restricts them, changeable only by the people who elect them.

This God-given concept carried out over a century in our great nation produced the most productive nation under free enterprise with its natural laws of cause and effect, supply and demand, better and better products at lower and lower prices, that the people of this planet have ever seen.

The flag is the Soul of our free nation, no more and no less than the countless heartstrings touched by every reference to its smiling face across the years. The real greatness of a nation is not measured by its size, its material wealth, or how many times its scientists have sent our sons successfully to the moon. It is, rather, measured by those timeless virtues of wisdom, fortitude, humanity, charity, temperance, integrity, truth, and righteousness-and the nation that cultivates them shall not perish.

Our flag has always been associated with our country's great leaders, and the one leader who has, since our country's founding, been known as first in the hearts of his countrymen has in particular been more closely associated with our flag than almost any other.

One day in 1787, after a meeting of the new country's government, a certain man set out from Philadelphia with his servant. Soon they were passing a field where a farmer plowed the black soil in great long furrows. Dismounting from his horse he strode into the field and, after a few words with the farmer, was seen with the reins of the plow horses around his body, his hands guiding the plow. The gentleman was General George Washington, new President of the United States. His boyhood as a farm owner and planter simply asserted itself in again seeking Nature's solace given to men of the soil who seem to absorb an indefinable strength from the living loam. The position of Washington throughout the years when our national banner evolved from the struggles of the Colonies to free themselves from their mother country, and the position of the Continental Congress, was without precedent. An illegal body, its delegates had no authority to raise money, purchase arms, or direct the actions of these English Colonies, yet it made possible the development of the stars and stripes. This evolution has taken many forms, and the legends and stories, the fictions and myths that have grown up around its spreading folds are sufficient to satisfy the most garrulous gossip, the most colorful narrator of the spinning of

yarns. The real truth of each one of these apocryphal stories will never be known for, in battle, who saw the youngest sailor die, who snatched the musket from the embattled farmer on Bunker Hill, who carried the flag to the ramparts in which engagement through the years?

The early poets of America have added their talents. We receive a welcome emotional surge when we recall the reference of Oliver Wendell Holmes in "Old Ironsides" to Old Glory: Ay, tear her tattered ensign down: Long has it waved on high, And many an eye has danced to see That banner in the sky; Beneath it rung the battle shout, And burst the cannon's roar; The meteor of the ocean air Shall sweep the clouds no more.

We only know for a fact Congress did adopt the flag. On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress in Philadelphia adopted the following resolution: "Resolved, That the Flag of the united states be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field representing a new constellation." In entering this resolution in the records of Congress it is noteworthy that the Secretary of the Continental Congress, Charles Thomson, in his own handwriting capitalized the word "Flag" but that the two words "United States" are spelled with a small "u" and a small "s" and that the designation is "the Flag of the United States" and not the "United States Flag."

The most meaningful words are the last, thirteen stars, white in a blue field representing a new constellation, for in them is the very soul and significance and spirit of our Banner on High.

These words signaled to the world the birth of a new nation apart from all others. The next law Congress passed relating to Old Glory was on January 13, 1794. It read, "That from and after the first day of May, 1795, the Flag of the United States, be fifteen stripes, alternate red and white; and that the union be fifteen stars, white, in a blue field." This came about after Vermont and Kentucky were admitted to the Union.

Afer the admission of Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana, and Mississippi; Congress passed the final act relating to the size and shape and character of the flag. Mter 1818 there would again be 13 horizontal stripes and one star would be added for each state on July Fourth following its admission. Those authors who delight in exposing errors and discrediting stories should realize the soul of America does not depend upon scientific material facts for its strength but in the wonderful world of the heroism of paintings like the "Spirit of 76," in America's conquering ardor, her elan, as we glory in Joaquin Miller's inspiring poem "Columbus," a verse of which goes: Behind him lay the great Azores, Behind the Gates of Hercules; Before him not the ghost of shores; Before him only shoreless seas.

The good mate said, "Now we must pray," For 10' the very stars are gone. Brave admiral speak; what shall I say? Why, say, Sail on! Sail on! and on! What better words for our own Old Glory than to wave on and on and on!

Reprinted from Masonic Americana, 1976, pages 159-160 Where the Spirit of the  
Lord is,  
There is Liberty (II Corinthians 3:17)

Published 080514 Updated: August 5, 2014

[Top](#)