

The History of the Confederate National Flag

In Honor of Mr. Lindon Lindsey, Historian, Veteran, Family Man, Good Friend.

Flag Selection

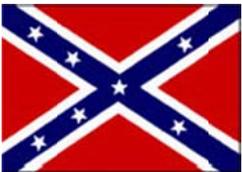
The Provisional Congress appointed a “Committee on the Flag and Seal”, Chaired by William Porcher Miles of South Carolina, to come up with a National Flag by March 4, 1861 (the day Lincoln would be inaugurated). They solicited ideas, no fewer than 92 are shown on this chart of flags considered, and 4 were chosen as finalists.



The flags were divided into three categories

- 1) Modifications of the US Flag -- 2 of which were finalists
- 2) Other Simple Designs – 2 of which were finalists
- 3) Elaborate Designs – too difficult to make, especially in the quantities needed

In February of 1861 sentiment ran high for the old US flag. Some felt it belonged to the south as much as the north, so they were looking for something similar. Mile’s committee selected 4 finalists. These were made and hung in the Capitol in Montgomery, pending a vote. The four were:

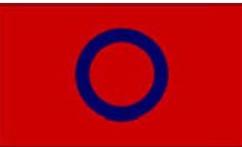


1) Interesting enough, a flag was proposed by Chairman Miles that would eventually form the basis of the Army of Northern Virginia battle flag. Miles, from South Carolina, was probably influenced by their Soverienty flag.  He may have changed it to a St. Andrew’s cross because of the large Jewish population in South Carolina which may have objected to a “Christian” cross.



Miles referred to the St. Andrew’s cross as a Saltire which is a symbol of bravery and self government. But, the seven stars for the states at the time made it appear lopsided. At least one congressman referred to it as a “pair of suspenders”.

2) A variation of the Federal Flag, with 7 red and blue stripes, probably for the seven states.



3) A blue circle on a red background, presumed to represent solidary of the Southern States.



4) “Stars and Bars” reportedly designed by Nicola Marschall of Alabama. He was born in Germany. This flag resembles the Austrian flag, which is 3 bars of red and white. It seemed to satisfy those that were wanting something resembling the “old flag”.

1st National Flag

Selection of the “Stars and Bars” was approved by the Provisional Congress and the first flag was hoisted over the Capitol in Montgomery on March 4, 1861 by former President Tyler’s grand-daughter, Letitia Tyler. The flag was not specified in an act of congress but simply described as 3 equal stripes, a canton extending over two stripes with a circle of stars representing the number of states. Therefore many sizes and arrangements of stars were created over the life of this flag. Initially there were 7 stars, then 11, expanding to 13 stars which included Missouri and Kentucky by the end of 1861. There were also versions that had various arrangements of stars and even 15 and 17 star versions.



One interesting version is Robert E. Lee’s HQ flag, made by Mrs. Lee. It is said to represent the Arc of the Covenant and was “symbolic of the Bread of Life which is the symbol of spiritual nourishment”

Proposed Modification April 1862

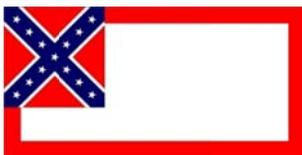


A permanent Confederate Congress came in on February 18, 1862. By that time there was concern about the confusion with the Federal Flag on the battlefield, and some simply wanted something completely different from the US flag. An idea was proposed to replace the current flag with a Sun with rays for each state. Eliminate the stars, which were part of the US flag, and add the Sun which symbolizes agricultural wealth, warmth and kindness. The joint committee proposed the Sun Flag on April 19, 1862 as an “absolute severance from the United States and complete annihilation of every sentiment indicating the flawed hope of reconciliation”. It was stalled in congress with no action.

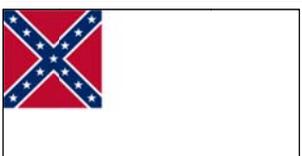
2nd National Flag



By April of 1863 the “Committee on the Flag and Seal” proposed a change to the National Flag, a white flag with the ANV (Army of Northern Virginia) battle flag as the canton with a blue stripe in the center. The ANV Battle flag was also proposed as the National Flag.

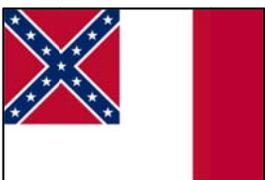


The House wanted it to resemble the U.S. even less and proposed eliminate anything resembling a stripe and added a red border. Many considered this “unusual” for a national flag”.



They finally went with the one we know as the 2nd National Flag. This one had a Congressional act signed that specified its dimensions. The bill was signed and went into law on May 1, 1863. Its first use was on General Stonewall Jackson’s casket when it laid in state in the Capitol in Richmond on May 12. This original flag is currently on display in Richmond.

3rd National



By late in the war there were complaints that when the wind was not blowing, the flag resembled a flag of truce. There was a new proposal for a similar flag, with a red strip covering half of the space on the fly from the canton. This was adopted by the Flag Act of 1865 on March 4, 1865, and became the 3rd national flag. Because of the lateness in the war not many were made. The Richmond supplier simply added a red stripe to 2nd National Flags.