

This Day in History... March 17, 1824

Old Glory

On March 17, 1824, William Driver received a US flag that was the first to be called "Old Glory."

William Driver was born on March 17, 1803, in Salem, Massachusetts. When he was 13, Driver ran away from home to become a cabin boy on a ship.

Driver had a love for the sea and just before his 21st birthday was made commander of his own ship, the *Charles Doggett*. In honor of this great achievement, Driver's mother and several ladies from Salem presented him with a special gift on his 21st birthday. It was a 24-star flag that measured 17- by 10-feet. According to some accounts, after seeing the flag hoisted for the first time on his ship, Driver declared, "My ship, my country, and my flag, Old Glory." However, some other sources believe it may have been a few years later that he began calling the flag Old Glory.

In the coming years, Driver sailed around the world twice as a merchant seaman, stopping in China, India, Gibraltar, and the South Pacific. In 1831, his ship "was the sole surviving vessel of six that departed Salem the same day." He would later pick up 65 descendants of survivors from the HMS *Bounty* and return them to Pitcairn Island. Driver said he thought God saved his ship for that purpose.

Through all his travels, Driver still held his flag in high regard, writing, "It has ever been my staunch companion and protection. Savages and heathens, lowly and oppressed, hailed and welcomed it at the far end of the wide world. Then, why should it not be called Old Glory?"

At the age of 34, Driver retired following the death of his wife. With three small children to raise, he moved to Nashville, where three of his brothers ran a store. In 1838, Driver married a young Southern girl, who would bear nine children.

Deeply patriotic, Driver flew Old Glory on holidays by stretching a rope from his attic window to a tree across the street. In 1860, the family sewed ten additional stars and a small white anchor to the flag.

Civil War divided the Driver family. William remained loyal to the Union, but the rest of his family sided with the Confederates, with one son dying at Perryville. Nashville residents were also sympathetic to the South, and seizing Driver's famous flag became an obsession. Although rebels threatened to kill him and burn his house down, Driver refused to surrender it, "over my dead body." Instead, he had it sewn between the layers of a blanket, to keep it safe.

Old Glory G-rate change stamp



When the Union Army retook Nashville in February 1862, Driver approached the 6th Ohio Regiment with his blanket, looking for their commander. Once Driver found him, he tore open the blanket to reveal Old Glory. With tears in his eyes, Driver asked that they tear down the Confederate flag from atop the state capitol building and replace it with his Old Glory. The event was widely reported in newspapers, and "Old Glory" became a national symbol. The 6th Ohio would also adopt the motto, "Old Glory."

Then in December 1864, the Battle of Nashville brought John Bell Hood and Confederate troops back to the city. Driver hung his flag with pride and then joined in the defense of the city. He also became provost marshal of Nashville for the rest of the war.

In 1873, Driver gave Old Glory to one of his daughters, saying, "I love it as a mother loves her child; take it and cherish it as I have always cherished it; for it has been my steadfast friend and protector in all parts of the world." Driver died on March 3, 1886. After his death, a feud broke out among his family, as it appeared he had passed on two flags, both of which were claimed to be Old Glory. Eventually, both flags were given to the Smithsonian.



The first stamp to use the US Flag as the central design.



Old Glory stamps from the second US prestige booklet
Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316

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