



## Harry Truman and the 48-Star Flag



*A thoughtful mind when it sees a nation's flag, sees not the flag, but the nation itself.*

—Henry Ward Beecher

### The 48-star flag

No single object fosters a sense of patriotism as much as a nation's flag. For many people, respect for their flag equals respect for their country. During the Truman Administration (1945-1953), the flag that flew over the United States had 48 stars. The 48-star flag is the flag that soldiers and sailors fought for during World War II. It is the flag to which children, mothers, and wives pledged their allegiance at home while their loved ones went into battle overseas. It is the flag that the Marines raised over Iwo Jima in 1945. It is the flag that men died defending during the Korean War. It is the flag that Harry S Truman saluted when he was the President of the United States.

The number of stars on the American flag first grew to 48 in 1912 with the addition of New Mexico and Arizona. President William Howard Taft issued an Executive Order that year that formalized the appearance of the flag for the first time. The Order indicated that the stars were to be arranged in six horizontal rows of eight each. This flag was official for 47 years. During this time, the United States emerged from the Great Depression and World War II as one of the leading nations of the world. Eight Presidents served under the 48-star flag; William H. Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

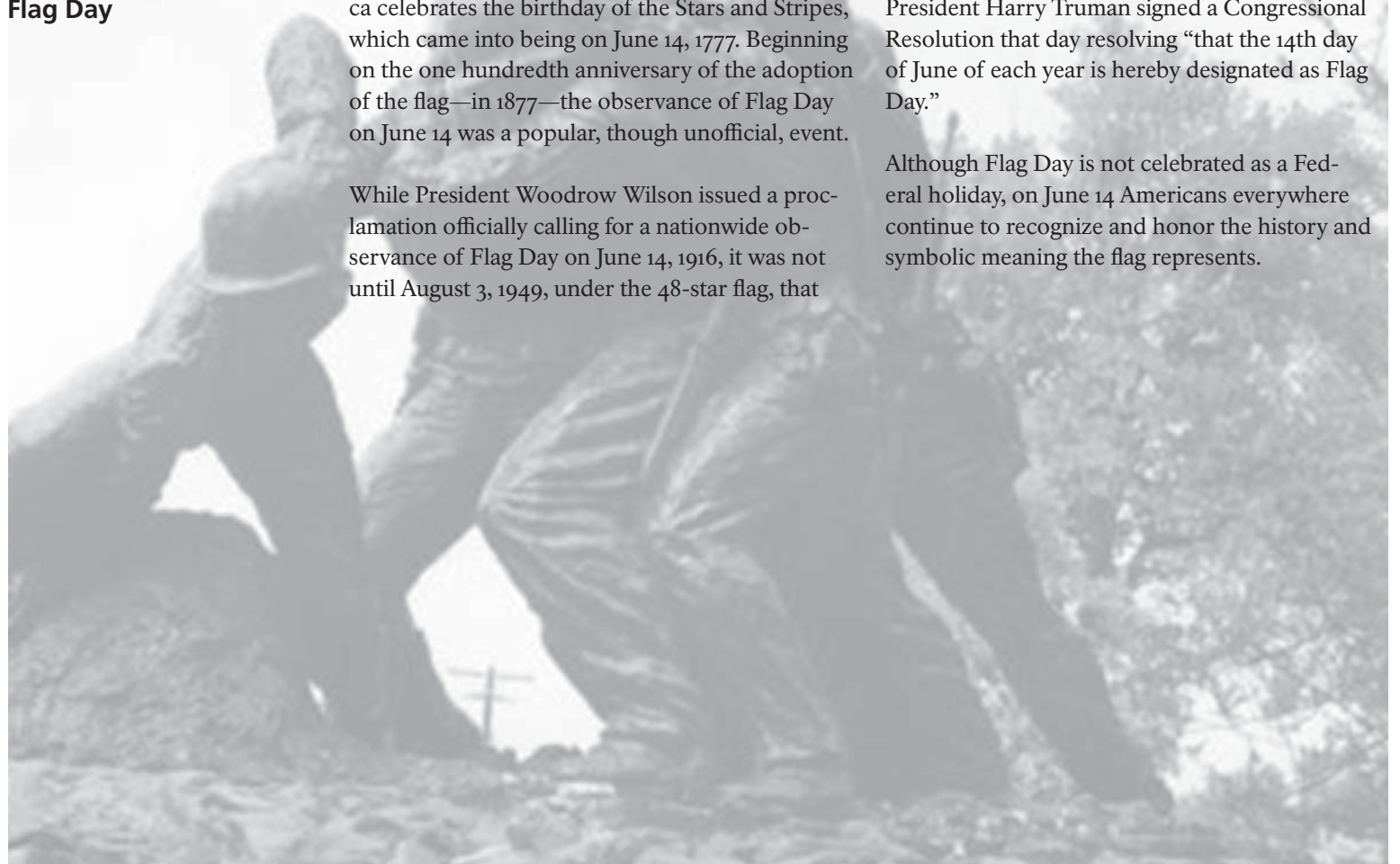
### President Truman and Flag Day

June 14 is Flag Day. Each year on this date, America celebrates the birthday of the Stars and Stripes, which came into being on June 14, 1777. Beginning on the one hundredth anniversary of the adoption of the flag—in 1877—the observance of Flag Day on June 14 was a popular, though unofficial, event.

While President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation officially calling for a nationwide observance of Flag Day on June 14, 1916, it was not until August 3, 1949, under the 48-star flag, that

Congress made this day a permanent observance. President Harry Truman signed a Congressional Resolution that day resolving “that the 14th day of June of each year is hereby designated as Flag Day.”

Although Flag Day is not celebrated as a Federal holiday, on June 14 Americans everywhere continue to recognize and honor the history and symbolic meaning the flag represents.



Replica of the Iwo Jima flag raising monument at the U. S. Marine Corps Training School at Quantico, Virginia, 1949. TRUMAN LIBRARY.

---

## The Flag of Liberation

Perhaps the most notable 48-star flag was the World War II “Flag of Liberation.” On July 20, 1945, President Truman stood at attention while the American flag was raised over the conquered city of Berlin. In fitting symbolism, this was the same flag that had flown over the United States Capitol on December 7, 1941—the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

In Berlin that day, President Truman made a short speech, characteristically to the point. He said, in part:

*We are here today to raise the flag of victory over the capital of our greatest adversary. In doing that, we must remember that in raising that flag we are raising it in the name of the people of the United States, who are looking forward to a better world, a world in which all the people will have an opportunity to enjoy the good things in life, and not just a few at the top.*

*Let us not forget that we are fighting for peace, and for the welfare of mankind. We are not fighting for conquest. There is not one piece of territory, or one thing of monetary nature that we want out of this war. We want peace and prosperity for the world as a whole. We want to see the time come when we can do the things in peace that we have been able to do in war.*

It was a moment “of lasting inspiration to all of us who were there,” wrote General Lucius D. Clay. “While the soldier is schooled against emotion, I have never forgotten that short ceremony as our flag rose to the staff.”

The Flag of Liberation was to fly again, this time from the mast of the battleship Missouri, anchored in Tokyo harbor on September 2, 1945, while the Japanese signed the surrender documents that brought World War II to an end.

---

## The Truman home flag

The flagpole that stands on the northwest corner of the Truman property was erected through the efforts of Independence citizens in honor of Harry Truman’s first visit home as President of the United States. First Lady Bess Truman and her mother, Mrs. Madge Wallace, approved the location in the northwest corner of the yard. People donated funds to cover the city’s cost for the standard.

The 48-star flag was first hoisted up the thirty-four foot staff on the morning of June 26, 1945, the day before the President arrived home.

The flagpole had a remarkable effect on the local citizens during the presidential years. Whenever the Secret Service agents raised the flag, “the town knows that the President is home again.”

---

## The changing flag

The nation’s symbol changes. The flag that flies over President Truman’s house today is a 50-star flag. It has flown over the United States since July 4, 1960, after the addition of Hawaii and Alaska. It is the twenty-seventh official flag that has flown over the country. As of 2008, it has flown longer

than the 48-star flag. If new states are admitted to the Union, the 50-star flag, too, will be superseded by another version. It is because this symbol changes that it will continue to have meaning to the people of the county and give them comfort during new trials.



Major General Floyd L. Parks presents the United States Flag of Liberation to President Harry S. Truman. TRUMAN LIBRARY.