

Flags of the State Navies in the Revolutionary War: A Critical Overview

Peter Ansoff

Introduction

During the American Revolution, eleven of the thirteen American states operated state navies of one sort or another.¹ Over the years, there has been considerable discussion in the vexillological literature about the flags used by the state navies. This paper summarizes the known evidence related to those flags and suggests some avenues for further research.

The first part provides a very brief overview of the state navies themselves, including their composition, the nature of their operations and their chronologies. The second part presents a series of “case studies” documenting what we know (or don’t know) concerning the flags used by several of the navies.

The State Navies

The state navies were separate and distinct organizations from the Continental Navy organized by Congress. Unlike the Continental Army, which was initially formed by merging troops raised by the individual states into a national force, the Continental Navy and the state navies were formed separately and in parallel. In several cases (Massachusetts, for example), the state navy was not even established until several months after the creation of the Continental Navy. There were, of course, a few ships that served in both state and Continental navies (the Rhode Island sloop *Katy*, which

became the *Providence* in the Continental Navy, is a famous example), but the organizations were separate and distinct.²

For discussion purposes, the state navies can be conveniently divided into three groups. First were the “blue water” navies, which included those of Massachusetts, Connecticut and South Carolina. These fleets were made up of seagoing warships that made extended voyages in the Atlantic and the Caribbean to capture enemy vessels and carry out other missions in support of their states. The Massachusetts Navy, in particular, also included a substantial number of armed merchant vessels that carried diplomats, essential correspondence, and supplies to and from Europe and other points overseas. The Connecticut Navy was numerically small but quite active.³

The second group comprised the “brown water” navies—Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland. These were made up primarily of smaller vessels intended to protect the coastal areas of their respective states—the Delaware Bay and the approaches to Philadelphia for Pennsylvania, and the Chesapeake Bay and the rivers that flowed into it for Maryland and Virginia. The Virginia Navy was arguably the largest of all the state navies in terms of numbers—it even had its own state shipyard on the Rappahannock for maintenance and repair of its vessels.

The blue water and brown water navies were relatively formal organizations, with their own administrative structures, regulations, pay scales, uniforms, and so on. This was less true of the third category, the “minor” navies, comprising New Hampshire, Rhode Island, North Carolina, and Georgia. These states built or employed small numbers of vessels for individual missions and for limited periods. The extreme case was New Hampshire. Its navy consisted of one ship, the schooner *Hampden*, which was chartered for the Penobscot Expedition in 1779 and promptly lost. The North Carolina Navy consisted of three small vessels acquired to protect the approaches to the coastal sounds of that state. It may seem surprising to see Rhode Island on this list, as it has always been a maritime state and has an anchor on its modern state flag. There were several reasons why Rhode Island did not field a substantial navy; one of them was probably that the British occupied Newport for much of the war and blocked access to the sea.

New York was a special case, for two reasons. When the New York Provincial Congress began its maritime preparations in the spring of 1776, the Continental Army under George Washington was occupying the city. Its ships were commissioned under a mixture of state and Continental authority. Second, the British invaded New York City in the summer of 1776, and occupied it for the rest of the war, depriving New York of its main seaport. The New York government had ambitious naval plans—at one time it discussed building a 74-gun ship of the line⁴—but without a major base those plans came to naught.

The history of the state navies can be divided into four periods. The first period consisted of *ad hoc* operations conducted by the emerging revolutionary authorities in late 1775 and early 1776. The second involved establishment of formal naval organizations by the state governments, the construction, or acquisition of substantial naval forces, and extensive military operations. The third phase reflected a precipitous decline in the size of the forces and tempo of operations, caused by enemy operations (for example, the occupation of major ports by the enemy) and/or by financial and logistic constraints. The final phase involved commissioning of small numbers of vessels late in the war, to carry out essential defense and logistics functions.

The exact chronology of these phases differed among the various state navies. For example, the decline of the Pennsylvania Navy was triggered by the occupation of Philadelphia by the British in 1777, while the Massachusetts Navy was virtually eliminated by the failure of the Penobscot Expedition in 1779, and the South Carolina Navy by the fall of Charleston in 1780. The Virginia Navy did not suffer any single catastrophic event, but was worn down by losses and financial problems.

The Flags of the State Navies: A Summary of the Evidence

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Navy was established in February 1776, while Boston was still occupied by the British. Its first ships were not ready until July, after the British evacuation. However, Massachusetts patriots seized the British schooner *Margaretta* in June 1775, an action subsequently approved by the Provincial Congress.⁵ A British eyewitness reported that “The Rebels took Possession of the Schooner, & carried her up to Mechais [sic], in great triumph, with their Colours flying,”⁶ however, the appearance of the colors is unknown.

Massachusetts was the only state to formally adopt a flag for its navy (Figure 1).⁷ The General Court decided on 27 April 1776 that “the Colours [shall] be a white Flag, with a green Pine Tree and an Inscription, ‘Appeal to Heaven.’”⁸ An analysis of references to flags procured for Massachusetts Navy ships in 1776–77, however, indicates that they generally used the Continental Colors rather than a state flag (Table 1).



Figure 1. Flag of the Massachusetts Navy, adopted 27 April 1776 (conjectural). General arrangement based on the Blaskowitz sketch of Washington’s “floating battery”; pine tree image adapted from a 1776 Massachusetts bank note by Dr. Peter Orenski.

Ship	Date	Quotation
<i>Massachusetts</i>	14 Aug. 1776	“40 yd Bunting . . . Making a Contentl Flagg”
<i>Tyrraniside</i> [sic]	24 Oct. 1776	“8 y[d] of Linen . . . Making a Continentle Coller”
<i>Penet</i>	20 Jan. 1777	“making a Continental Ensign, 24 yds Bunting”
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	22 Jan. 1777	“making a Continental Ensign, 16 yds Bunting”
<i>Freedom</i>	21 Feb. 1777	“1 20 Yd Continental pendant [and] an Ensign alter’d into a Continental one”
<i>Tyrannicide</i>	13 Mar. 1777	“To an Ensign, 21 yds white Say . . . 2 yds Linen . . . Paintg . . . Ticklinbdng . . . sewing the Linen”
<i>Massachusetts</i>	13 Mar. 1777	“To an Ensign, 21 yds Shalloon . . . 3 yds Linen, paintg, Ticklinbdng . . . sewing the Linen”
<i>Freedom</i>	20 Aug. 1777	“To making a Suit Colors . . . Painting Pine Tree’s &c. . . To 22 yd narrow Crimson Bunting added”

Table 1. Selected References to Flags Provided to Massachusetts Navy Ships 1776–77.

Source: *Massachusetts Archives*.⁹

The entries through February 1777 all refer to Continental Colors, presumably the striped ensign with the British crosses in the canton. The final three entries refer to “painting”, which might indicated that those flags contained a complex figure like a pine tree. The 20 August 1777 entry for the *Freedom* refers to “Painting Pine Tree’s”, but also to the use of “narrow Crimson Bunting”. This suggests that the flag in question had stripes as well as a pine tree. The stars and stripes had been adopted by the Continental Congress on 14 June, but its existence was not widely

known. Possibly the *Freedom's* flag was some variation of a striped ensign with the pine tree in the canton, similar to one of the flags shown in John Paul Jones' coat of arms.¹⁰ In any case, it does not appear to have been the flag adopted by the General Court in the previous year.

Table 2 displays selected descriptions of flags used in action by the Massachusetts Navy. Again, it appears that they were generally "American" or "Continental" flags rather than the flag adopted by the General Court.

Ship	Date	Quotation
<i>Tyrannicide</i>	17 July 1776	"... after an engagement of one-and-a-half hour, she struck to the American arms."
<i>Independence</i>	? Aug. 1776	"Captain Sampson ordered her to strike to the standard of the United States of America..."
<i>Massachusetts</i>	19 Aug. 1777	"she wore British Colours; we gave her a Broadside [and] she struck to the American Arms"
<i>Tyrannicide</i>	25 Sep. 1778	"I then hoisted an American Jack & ordered her to strike to the United States"
<i>Protector</i>	9 June 1779	"The Capt. Ordered a broadside given, and colors changed at the first flash, and the thirteen stripes took the place of the English ensign"

*Table 2. Selected Operational References to the Flags of Massachusetts Navy Ships.
Source: various.¹¹*

In summary, the Massachusetts was the only state to officially adopt a naval ensign, but it appears that most of its ships actually used American rather than Massachusetts colors.

South Carolina

As in Massachusetts, South Carolina's naval activity predated the official establishment of the state navy. In July 1775, a joint force of South Carolina and Georgia patriots captured a British merchant ship carrying powder and ammunition; the patriot vessel carried a white flag with the words "American Liberty" in large red letters within a red border.¹² The South Carolina Navy officially came into existence in early October 1775, when the Council of Safety commissioned the schooner *Defence* and fixed the pay of her officers and crew. On 11–12 November the *Defence* exchanged shots with HM ships *Tamar* and *Cherokee*, which represented the first naval engagement of the South Carolina Navy.¹³

The flag usually associated with the South Carolina revolutionary government was blue with a white crescent in the canton (Figure 2). This flag was created by Col. William Moultrie shortly after the rebel forces occupied Fort Johnston in September 1775, and it flew over the fort on Sullivan's Island during the British attack in June 1776.¹⁴



Figure 2. Crescent flag of South Carolina, 1775, as described by Colonel William Moultrie.

It is reasonable to assume that the crescent flag was also flown by the ships of the South Carolina Navy, but there is little actual evidence that this was the case.¹⁵ A South Carolina bank note dated 23 December 1776 (Figure 3) shows a ship flying crescent flags as its ensign and jack. This is often cited as evidence that this flag was actually flown by the South Carolina Navy, but this is unconvincing. The ship shown on the note is a large, heavily-armed warship, although South Carolina did not possess any ship

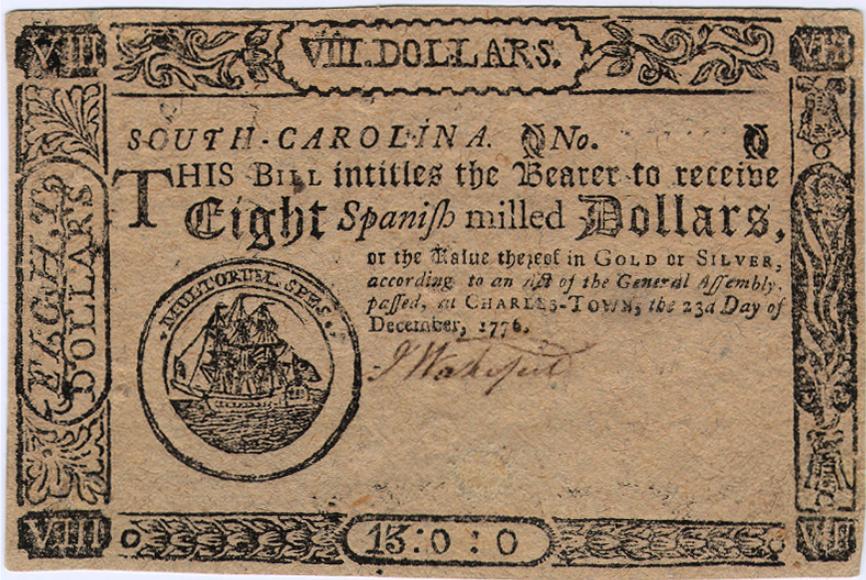


Figure 3. South Carolina \$8 bank note, 23 December 1776. Reproduced with permission from the original held by the Department of Special Collections of the University Libraries of Notre Dame.

like this until the frigate *South Carolina* was acquired in Europe in 1780. It is more likely that the engraver of the note copied an existing image of a British warship, and altered the ensign and jack to show the crescent flags. Close examination of the ensign on the ship (Figure 4) reveals that it has the crescent in a dark-colored canton, and a light-colored field bisected by a horizontal stripe. The original image probably displayed a British white ensign, with the horizontal stripe being part of the St. George's cross.¹⁶



Figure 4. Detail of the South Carolina \$8 bank note, showing the crescent ensign.

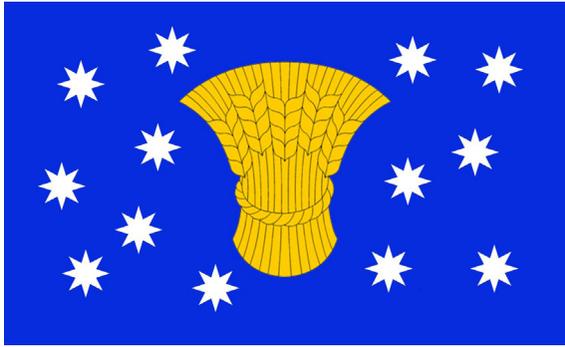


Figure 5. Design for a South Carolina “Rice Sheaf” flag, as described by President Rawlin Lowndes, 19 July 1778 (conjectural).

Evidence is scant concerning the use of the crescent flag after 1776. The Continental troops that fought in the siege of Charleston in 1780 flew the stars and stripes.¹⁷ Both Continental and state navy ships were present during the siege; it is not known what flags the state vessels flew.

Two other flags have been associated with the South Carolina Navy in the vexillological literature. One is a variation of the so-called “First Navy Jack”, with a rattlesnake and “Don’t Tread On Me” motto on 13 red and blue horizontal stripes. There is no evidence that such a flag was ever used by the South Carolina Navy, and it appears to be legendary.¹⁸ Rawlin Lowndes, President of South Carolina, described another flag (Figure 5) in a letter on 19 July 1778. Lowndes was writing to Commodore Alexander Gillon of the South Carolina Navy, who was preparing to embark on a trip to Europe to obtain a ship for the navy:

. . . the Flag which you are to wear and which is the flag by which the Navy of this State is in the future to be distinguished, is a rich Blue field, a Rice Sheaf Worked with Gold (or Yellow) in the Center, and 13 Stars Silver (or White) Scattered over the field.¹⁹

Commodore Gillon departed for Europe in August, where he eventually acquired the large frigate *South Carolina*. The *South Carolina* was fitted out in the Netherlands, and did not sail until August 1781. By this time, all of the other ships of the South Carolina Navy had been lost when Charleston fell to the British in 1780. There is no known evidence that the

South Carolina, or any other state ship, actually flew the flag described by President Lowndes. The only known contemporary picture of the *South Carolina* shows her flying the stars and stripes.²⁰

In summary, there is no direct evidence regarding flags flown by the South Carolina Navy. The crescent flag was generally recognized as the state's flag in the early years of the war, and is known to have flown on the fortifications of Charleston in 1775–76. While it is possible that state ships also flew it during this period, no known pictures or descriptions confirm this.

Connecticut

Unique among the thirteen states, Connecticut did not replace its colonial government at the beginning of the Revolution. Governor Trumbull and the colonial General Assembly continued in office, and eventually declared their colony a state. For this reason, among others, Connecticut's naval organization was established quite early in the war. The first ship of the state navy, the schooner *Spy*, was cruising as early as October 1775, and the brigantine *Defence* was purchased in December 1775 and ready for sea in April 1776.²¹

A 23 February 1776 voucher records payment to Anthony Perit for "11 yards blue Tammie, 26 yards white Tammie for the colors of ye brig Defence".²² The design of the *Defence's* colors is not known, but from the quantities of cloth one might guess that it was white with a blue canton. It is also possible that the cloth was used to modify the vessel's existing red ensign (she was a former merchant ship, the *Lilly Ann*), by substituting a blue and white design for the union crosses in the canton.

Middlebrook's *Maritime Connecticut During the Revolution* contains a black and white sketch (Figure 6) of what appears to be a Connecticut-related maritime flag. Middlebrook describes it:

. . . with the papers of the British schooner *True Love* (Captain Moulton) captured by Capt. Asa Fuller of the [Connecticut priva-

teer] *Retaliation*, is found a small piece of old hand-laid paper of the period, containing a black ink sketch of a flag—evidently meant to indicate blue from the horizontal lines drawn closely together upon it—in the corner of which is a white canton containing one grape-vine only, indicating clearly a Connecticut flag. Careful search of Maritime Court Interrogatories reveals no reference to this important matter . . . In one case an answer was given stating that a Connecticut privateer showed a “white jack with a red cross”, but mentions no other device . . .²³

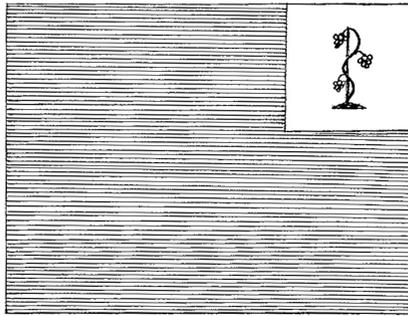


Figure 6. “Sketch found in the papers of the Connecticut privateer Schooner ‘Retaliation,’ Captain Asa Fuller, 1778.”
Source: *Middlebrook*, Vol. 2, opposite page 16.

Several writers have equated the sketch found in the *True Love* papers with the flag of the *Defence*; however, this assumption is tenuous at best. The quantities of cloth procured for the *Defence* suggest a field of white rather than blue and, in any case, it is by no means certain that the flag in Middlebrook’s illustration was actually intended to be blue (using heraldic hatchings).²⁴ The Connecticut “blue ensign” depicted in the *True Love* sketch is an attractive flag, but there is no real evidence that the Connecticut Navy ever used it.

Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Navy commissioned its first ships in the fall of 1775. A receipt was issued by the State Government to Cornelia Bridges on 25 May 1776 “for making colors” for a floating battery and two galleys.²⁵ It is

not known what these colors looked like; they could have been Continental Colors or another design. Apparently, the design was no longer considered suitable by the following August, when Captain William Richards wrote to the Council of Safety, "I hope you have agreed what sort of colors I am to have made for the galleys, etc., as they are much wanted." In mid-October, he wrote again: "The commodore was with me this morning, and says the fleet has not any colors to hoist if they should be called to duty. It is not in my power to get them until there is a design fixed on to make the colors by."²⁶

The need for colors for the fleet was critical in the spring of 1777, when it became clear that the British intended to attack Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Navy Board paid Elizabeth Ross (on 29 May) "for making ship's colors, etc. put into William Richards store" and Ann King (on 24 September) "for making sundry Colours for the fleet".²⁷ Again, it is not known what these colors looked like. The Continental Congress officially adopted the stars and stripes as the flag of the United States on 14 June, and it is likely that its resolution ratified a decision made earlier by the Continental Navy Board. It is therefore possible that the flags made by Ross and King were stars and stripes—it was clear to all participants that the upcoming battle for Philadelphia would involve both Continental and Pennsylvania naval vessels, and it would have made sense for all defenders to fly a common ensign.²⁸ Forts Mifflin and Mercer, which guarded the Delaware River approaches to Philadelphia, are both believed to have flown striped flags.²⁹

The fall of Philadelphia, and the defeat of the defending naval forces in the fall of 1777, were a tremendous blow to the Pennsylvania Navy. In April 1778, General Washington advised the Navy Board to dismantle and sink most of the remaining Pennsylvania ships (which had retreated upriver) to prevent their falling into British hands, and the Board complied. Thereafter, the Pennsylvania Navy consisted only of a few small vessels. In March 1779, the state fitted out the 14-gun ship *General Greene* to protect shipping in the lower Delaware, and she operated until October of that year, when she was sold.³⁰

A recent article in *NAVA News* by Dr. Henry Moeller³¹ proposed that the flag of the Pennsylvania Navy was blue with a red and white striped

canton. The basis for this proposal was a rendition of the Pennsylvania state coat of arms, painted by George Rutter in about 1785, and currently displayed in the Supreme Court Chamber at Independence Hall in Philadelphia (Figure 7).³² Dr. Moeller's hypothesis was based on the assumption that the ship in the arms was intended to depict the *General Greene*, the only Pennsylvania Navy ship to resemble the image in the arms. While not impossible, this assumption does not seem to be well supported. There is no reason to suppose that the ship in the arms represented any particular vessel. The other symbols in the arms, the plow and the wheat sheaves, are symbols of commerce, and it is likely that the ship was meant to be a merchant vessel rather than a warship.



Figure 7. Independence National Historical Park. Pennsylvania State Coat of Arms, painted by George Rutter, ca. 1785 (detail). Independence National Historical Park.

As Dr. Moeller's article points out, George Rutter served in the militia throughout the Revolution. Several army and militia colors had stripes in the canton.³³ It seems more likely that Rutter painted the ship in his rendition of the arms with a generic flag based on ones that he was familiar with from his own military service. There seems to be no reason to assume either his ship or his flag were intended to be associated with the Pennsylvania Navy.

In his history of the U.S. flag, George Preble states that "the floating batteries of Pennsylvania . . . carried the pine-tree flag in the autumn of 1775". He does not cite a source for this statement, and it probably resulted

from confusion with references to the floating batteries operated by Washington's army in Boston in the fall of 1775. The latter did fly a flag similar to the pine-tree flag; however, there is no known evidence that such a flag was ever flown by the Pennsylvania Navy.³⁴

New York

The New York Provincial Congress commissioned the first state ship, the sloop *General Schuyler*, in March 1776; two more ships, the *General Putnam* and the *Montgomery*, were ready for service by mid-April. Paullin describes the organization of the New York Navy:

The naval establishment of New York was a mixed one. Her fleet was governed by the Continental naval rules and regulations. The enlisting contract of the "Montgomery" read at points as if the vessel belonged to the Continental Congress . . . On the other hand, the three vessels were owned, fitted out, officered, and manned by New York, which state directed their cruises, and paid their officers and seamen. This mixed establishment may in part be explained by the fact that at first New York's intention was to have Congress take her vessels into the Continental service.³⁵

The New York Committee of Safety contacted its delegates to the Continental Congress on 22 January 1776 to obtain copies of the Continental articles of war and a description of the Continental flag. The ensuing exchange was somewhat comical because the Congressional delegates did not yet know of the existence of the Continental Colors, even though they had been hoisted aboard the *Alfred* in Philadelphia the previous December. John Jay stated on 23 March 1776, "As to Continental Colors, the Congress have made no order as yet concerning them; and I believe the Captains of their armed vessels have, in that particular, been directed by their own fancies and inclinations."³⁶

In his 1830 biography of John Paul Jones, Robert Sands made the following comment about the flags used by the Americans at the beginning of the Revolution:

In the early part of the Revolutionary war, the maritime flag seems to have been, either the coat of arms of the respective colonies under whose authority the vessels were equipped, or to have depended on the whim or fancy of the commanding officer . . . several [ships] fitted out from New York bore a black beaver.³⁷

Sands does not cite any reference for this information. However, his father, Comfort Sands, was a New York merchant and a member of the Committee of Safety that fitted out the New York Navy's vessels. It is possible that Robert Sands obtained the information about the beaver flag from his father. If so, perhaps the New York Committee created the beaver flag when its delegates in Congress were unable to ascertain the design of the Continental Colors. New York also granted a few privateering commissions during the war,³⁸ and Sands' description of the beaver flag may also refer to the ensigns of those vessels.

Virginia / Maryland

In September 1780, a small squadron under Commodore Barron of the Virginia Navy was dispatched on a joint cruise with two Maryland Navy ships to patrol the Chesapeake Bay. The orders issued by Governor Jefferson of Virginia included the following set of recognition signals to be employed by the joint force:

He who first makes the signal is to take in his [fore] top gallant sail and hoist the continental ensign at the fore top gallant mast head. The other to answer by letting fly his main top gallant sheets, and hoisting a continental Jack at the main top gallant mast head.³⁹

Apparently the Virginia and Maryland Navy vessels flew the U.S. ensign and jack, or at least carried them on board.

Conclusions

Several flags were created ad hoc by state naval forces at the beginning of the war, in response to specific situations. Examples are the “American Liberty” flag of the joint South Carolina / Georgia force, the flag flown on the captured *Margaretta* by the Massachusetts “rebels”, and possibly the beaver flag in New York. However, only two states, Massachusetts and South Carolina, appear to have had flags generally recognized as state colors. Other flags that are commonly presented as state naval ensigns in the vexillological literature, such as the grapevine flag for Connecticut and the striped canton flag for Pennsylvania, are based on weak evidence and questionable assumptions.

The Massachusetts pine tree flag was adopted officially, but analysis of outfitting and battle reports of the Massachusetts Navy suggests that its vessels generally used the Continental Colors and the Stars and Stripes instead. The South Carolina crescent flag flew over Forts Johnson and Sullivan during the British attack in 1776, and appeared on a state bank note, but it was never adopted formally and there is no direct evidence that it actually flew on state ships. The President of South Carolina endorsed the “Rice Sheaf” flag, but this occurred late in the war and there is no evidence that such a flag ever flew on a South Carolina ship. The red-and-blue-striped rattlesnake flag, often associated with the South Carolina navy, appears to be legendary.

Additional research may help determine if other states, like Massachusetts, tended to fly the American flag (Continental Colors or Stars and Stripes) on their ships instead of a state ensign. In particular, it would be useful to examine cases when state navies operated in conjunction with each other or with the Continental Navy. In these cases, a common recognition symbol would obviously have been desirable. Examples would include the defense of the Delaware River in the fall of 1777, the Penobscot expedition in 1779, and the defense of Charleston in 1780.

As with all vexillological research, it is vital to understand the historical context for the flags under study. The state navies were created in response to the perceived requirements of their respective state governments; their

histories mirrored the chronology and circumstances of the states' involvement in the Revolution and their interactions with the other states and the Continental government. These factors should be the framework for further research into flags of the state navies.



End Notes

1. The two exceptions were Delaware and New Jersey. The New Jersey Provincial Congress discussed building four row-galleys in July 1776, but nothing came of it. See Paullin, pp. 447–48.
2. For overviews of the state navies' organization and operations, see Paullin, chapters 11–17 and Coggins, chapter 12.
3. Arguably, the Connecticut Navy was the only one of the state navies to include a submarine. The famous *Turtle*, built to attack British warships in New York Harbor, was partially financed by the Connecticut government. Paullin, pp. 363–64.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 475.
5. See Nelson, chapter 4, for a detailed account of the action.
6. "Pilot Nathaniel Godfrey's Report of Action Between the Schooner Margueritta and the Rebels at Machias", NDAR, vol. 1, pp 655–56.
7. There are no known contemporary images of the Pine Tree Flag of the Massachusetts Navy. This reconstruction is based on an illustration, by British cartographer Charles Blaskowitz, of the "Floating Battery" flag of Washington's Cruisers, which may have been similar (Library of Congress image LC-USZ6245565, undated). The Floating Battery flag depicted an elm tree, not a pine tree; the tree on the reconstruction in Figure 1 is based on a 1776 Massachusetts bank note (See Travers, Figure 23). Special thanks to Dr. Peter Orenski for creating the pine tree flag image.
8. Paullin, p. 327.
9. See Ansoff, *Banners*, for specific citations.
10. John Paul Jones was in Boston in the summer of 1777, awaiting orders from Congress to a new command, and it is believed that his coat of arms was painted at this time. The painting is currently in the collection of the Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts. Special thanks to Grand Secretary Arthur Johnson and Librarian Cynthia Alcorn, who allowed the author to view and photograph the painting. The history of Jones's coat of arms is documented in Samuel Eliot Morison, "The Arms and Seals of John Paul Jones", in *American Neptune*, vol. XVIII, no. 4, October 1985, pp. 300–05.

The pine-tree-and-stripes flag in Jones's coat of arms has been reproduced in many flag books. There is no other known image or reference, but it has become part of the common lore of the American flag. It is possible that a flag like this existed briefly as a transition between the Continental Colors and the Stars and Stripes.

There is an additional intriguing connection between John Paul Jones and the flag of the *Freedom*. The chandler who provided the flag to the Massachusetts Navy was Joseph Webb of Boston, who was Grand Master of the Boston

Masonic Lodge. Jones was also a Mason, and it is quite likely that he and Webb met during Jones's stay in Boston. Conceivably, Webb might have helped Jones arrange for the arrangement and painting of his arms.

11. See Ansoff, *Banners*, for detailed references.
12. Lipscomb, p. 8.
13. Paullin, p. 420.
14. For the history of this flag, see Waites, pp. 1–2. In his memoir, Moultrie stated “I had a large blue flag made with a crescent [sic] in the dexter corner” (quoted in Waite, 2). Drayton, vol. II, p. 290, states that the flag flown on Fort Sullivan during the battle was “a blue flag with a white crescent; on which was emblazoned the word *Liberty*”. It is not clear exactly what Drayton meant—was the inscription on the crescent or in the field? The 2nd South Carolina Regiment, which manned the fort during the battle, wore a cap badge with the word “*Liberty*” in a crescent, and it seems reasonable to assume that the flag they flew would have the same device. Modern replicas of this flag show both versions.

There is a tantalizing reference in the diary of Captain Barnard Elliott, an officer in the South Carolina forces, describing signals to be used to report ships approaching the harbor. His entry for 9 March 1776 states that “Johnsons Fort will hoist the old common blue Fort Flagg or Jack when a coasting Schooner or Sloop is seen. . . If men-of-war, the New Provincial Flagg will be hoisted and lowered as many times as there are men-of-war seen...” It is not clear what the “old” and “New” flags were. Captain Elliott’s diary is held at the South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston. A somewhat inaccurate transcription appeared in the *City of Charleston Yearbook* for 1889, pp. 151–262.
15. O’Kelly, p. 55, states that “The *Defence* flew the blue South Carolina flag with the crescent” during this engagement, but does not cite a primary source. William Henry Drayton, the president of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina, was aboard the *Defence* during the battle. His report of the incident does not mention the *Defence*’s flag nor does the log of HMS *Tamar*, one of the British vessels involved. See Drayton, vol. II, pp. 70–74, and NDAR, vol. 2, pp. 1002–05 and 1015. This engagement represented the opening shots of the war in South Carolina, and if the “rebels” had been flying a distinctive flag one would think that the British, in particular, would have mentioned it.
16. Currency image courtesy *Colonial Currency, A Project of the Robert H. Gore, Jr. Numismatic Endowment, University of Notre Dame, Department of Special Collections*, on line at www.coins.nd.edu/. This is a fascinating annotated collection of high-quality images of colonial currency. Special thanks to Louis Jordan and Sara Weber of UND Special Collections for granting permission to use the image and providing a high-quality version.

John F. Millar, in his book *Early American Ships*, p. 162, states that the ship on the bank note is the South Carolina Navy ship *Prosper*, but he offers no evidence for this statement. As Millar himself points out, the *Prosper* was sold out

- of South Carolina Service months before the bank note was printed. Millar's equation of the *Prosper* with the ship on the note was repeated, without comment, in Thurman T. Morgan's article about the *Prosper* in the July/October issue of *South Carolina Historical Magazine*. For another example of Millar's tendency to jump to conclusions about graphic evidence, see Ansoff, FNJ, pp. 25–26.
17. Preble, p. 284, quoting British eyewitness sources. John Jeffries, a British Army surgeon later famous for his balloon experiments, wrote on 3 April 1780 that he noticed the "American thirteen-striped flag displayed on the [American] works," and that the Americans had previously flown "a blue flag with field and thirteen stars". It is not clear exactly what he meant by this, but he may have been describing a regimental color.
 18. See Ansoff, FNJ, pp. 33–41, for a detailed discussion of this legend. At the time that article was written, it was thought that the story of the red-and-blue rattlesnake flag originated in the 1872 edition of Preble's *History of the American Flag*, which stated that it was hoisted by John Paul Jones in 1775. Subsequent research indicates that Preble's source was probably Watson's *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania*, (1857), chapter 41: "The earliest frigate, from Philadelphia . . . of which Paul Jones was lieutenant, showed a flag of thirteen stripes of red and blue, with a rattlesnake, in a running attitude with the mouth open and sting projected, under it the motto 'Don't tread on me'. That same flag, says Sherburne, in his *Life of Jones*, was borne by the *Alliance* frigate, under Paul Jones . . ." The references to Sherburne and the *Alliance* are not accurate, and it is not known where Watson obtained his information. As discussed in the FNJ article, the earliest known association between the red-and-blue rattlesnake flag and South Carolina dates to the October 1917 "Flag Number" of *National Geographic Magazine*.
 19. Richardson, p. 129. Richardson's illustration of this flag shows the stars in a circle around the rice sheaf. This is not consistent with President Lowndes' description, which states that they are "scattered over the field" (heraldically "semé"). Figure 6 is the author's hypothetical reconstruction. Special thanks to Dr. Peter Orenski for providing the sheaf graphic.
 20. See Ansoff, FNJ, pp. 37–39 for a detailed discussion of the *South Carolina* and her flag.
 21. Paullin, 356–359. The Connecticut Navy also commissioned another ship, the *Minerva*, in 1775, but she was returned to her owners after the crew mutinied and refused to get her underway.
 22. Middlebrook, vol. 1, p. 45.
 23. Middlebrook, vol. 2, pp. 45–46. The illustration of the flag appears opposite p. 16.

24. Black-and-white depictions of heraldic shields traditionally use horizontal lines to indicate “azure” (blue). However, Middlebrook may have been jumping to conclusions about the intended color of the *Retaliation* flag. The mythical blue “Bunker Hill” flag is based on similar reasoning—it first appeared engraved in a 1693 flag book with horizontal lines and then hand-colored blue, but the accompanying caption clearly described the field as red. See Chapin, pp. 8–10. It seems equally likely that the *Retaliation* flag might have been converted from a British red ensign, with the British union replaced by a Connecticut symbol. Note: The *red* version of the “Bunker Hill” flag did exist in the 17th century, but it was apparently not used after the 1707 flag act, which made it illegal. See Chapin, p. 14. The best available evidence indicates that the American troops at Bunker Hill did not actually carry any flags.
25. Jackson, p. 17; Richardson, p. 112.
26. Richardson, p. 112; Moeller, p. 4. One might speculate that the Continental Colors, with the British crosses in the canton, were no longer considered appropriate after the colonies had declared their independence in July. However, the Continental Colors were flown on the Battery fort in New York when the British invaded in late July, and also on the ships of the Lake Champlain squadron in the fall of 1776.
27. *Ibid.* The payment to Ross is the only documented evidence that “Betsy” Ross made flags during the Revolution. She made them for the Pennsylvania Navy, not the Continental Army or Navy. William Canby’s memoir of Betsy Ross indicates that she was commissioned to make a large number of flags; it is possible that this story was a muddled reference to the situation in the spring of 1777.
28. On 26 September, the Continental Congress placed the Continental Navy vessels on the Delaware under the command of Commodore John Hazelwood of the Pennsylvania Navy to coordinate the efforts of all the naval forces defending Philadelphia.
29. A map of the Philadelphia defenses prepared by a British Army engineer in 1777 showed a striped flag with no canton on Fort Mifflin, and a striped flag with a saltire in the canton (probably intended to represent the Continental Colors) on Fort Mercer. See Ansoff, Fort Mercer.
30. Paullin, p. 388–390.
31. Moeller, pp. 2–5.
32. Illustration from Moeller, p. 2. Special thanks Andrea Ashby of the National Park Service, Independence National Historic Park, for providing the image, and to Dr. Moeller for providing the NPS contact.
33. Dr. Moeller’s article pointed out two other examples of American naval flags with striped cantons, but neither is based on a reliable source. One is an engraving of the Battle of Lake Champlain, published in Britain; there are two

paintings by eyewitnesses showing the Lake Champlain squadron's flags as being the Continental Colors, and those are more reliable than the work of a British engraver. The other is a reference in the London *Public Advertiser* of 14 November 1776, describing the flag of an American merchant ship, which was probably a typographical error. In any case, neither of these references had anything to do with the Pennsylvania Navy.

The article also cited a "return" (inventory) of 23 February 1777, stating that William Richard's store contained 89 yards of red bunting, 105 yards of white, and 166 yards of blue. This was a "snapshot" of the quantities in store at a given moment, and it would be premature to interpret it as meaning that the flags to be ordered were predominantly blue. Conceivably, it could also represent the fabric needed to convert existing Continental Colors into Stars and Stripes by fabricating new starred cantons.

34. See Preble, p. 227. Preble's source may have been a series of articles published by Thomas Westcott between 1867 and 1884 in the Philadelphia *Sunday Dispatch*. Westcott states in one of the articles, "In the autumn of 1775 the floating batteries of Pennsylvania upon the Delaware River used a white flag with a tree in the middle, and the motto: 'An appeal to Heaven'. The Pennsylvania Navy actually had only one floating battery, the *Arnold*, in commission in 1775; however, Jackson points out (p. 14) that the term "floating battery" was sometimes, confusingly, applied to other Pennsylvania Navy vessels. Jackson, p. 17, repeats the statement that the Pennsylvania floating batteries flew a pine-tree flag, and states that "This flag, or variations of it, was used by most of the state navies, including the Pennsylvania fleet", but also cites no primary source. The present author knows of no evidence that any state navy other than Massachusetts ever used the pine-tree-style flag.

For a detailed discussion of Washington's floating batteries and their flag, see Ansoff, *Banners*. The Pennsylvania floating batteries appear to have been much larger and more sophisticated vessels than those used by Washington in Boston.

35. Paullin, p. 473.
36. See Ansoff, FNJ, pp. 28–29, for details of this correspondence.
37. Sands, p. 310–311.
38. Paullin, p. 475.
39. Cross, p. 62.

Bibliography

- Ansoff, Peter, "The First Navy Jack", *Raven, A Journal of Vexillology*, #11, 2004, pp. 1–60. Cited as Ansoff, FNJ.
- "The Mythical Fort Mercer Flag", *NAVA News* #203, July/Sept. 2009, p. 5. Cited as Ansoff, Fort Mercer.
- *The Sign Their Banners Bore: The Pine-Tree Flag in the American Revolution*. Paper presented at NAVA 38, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2004 (publication pending). Cited as Ansoff, Banners.
- Buker, George E., *The Penobscot Expedition*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002.
- Chapin, Howard M., *The New England Flag*. Providence, Rhode Island: The Roger Williams Press, 1930.
- Clark, William Bell, *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (11 vols. to date). Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, 1964–present. Cited as "NDAR" with volume and page number.
- Coggins, Jack, *Ships and Seaman of the American Revolution*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books/Promontory Press, 1961. Chapter 12 deals with the state navies; Chapter 18 with the Penobscot expedition. The state navy material is mostly derived from Paullin, but it is usefully organized and includes tables of the ships comprising each of the navies.
- Cross, Charles B. Jr., *A Navy for Virginia, A Colony's Fleet in the Revolution*. Yorktown, Virginia, The Virginia Independence Bicentennial Commission, 1981.
- Drayton, John, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, From its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive, As Relating to The State of South Carolina . . .* (2 volumes) Charleston, South Carolina: A. E. Miller, 1821. This is a memoir based on the papers of William Henry Drayton, compiled by his son. The elder Drayton died during the war in September 1779 while representing his state in Philadelphia.
- Dudley, Dr. W. S., *State Navies in the American Revolution*. Paper delivered to the American Revolution Round Table of Washington, D.C., 4 January 1984 (a copy is on file at the Navy Department Library, Washington, D.C.). A useful introduction to the topic, but not comprehensive—it ignores the South Carolina Navy, for example.
- Jackson, John W., *The Pennsylvania Navy, 1775–1781, The Defense of the Delaware*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1974.

- Lipscomb, Terry W. *The Carolina Lowcountry April 1775–June 1776 and the Battle of Fort Moultrie*. Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Department of Archives & History, 1994.
- Middlebrook, Louis F., *History of Maritime Connecticut During the American Revolution, 1775–1783* (2 vols). Salem, Massachusetts: The Essex Institute, 1925.
- Moeller, Dr. Henry W., “Two Early American Ensigns on the Pennsylvania State Arms”, *NAVA News* #173, January/March 2002, pp. 2–6.
- Nelson, James L., *George Washington’s Secret Navy*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.
- O’Kelly, Patrick, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter, The Revolutionary War in the Carolinas*, Volume One, 1771–1779. Published by the author, 2004.
- Paullin, Oscar, *The navy of the American Revolution; its administration, its policy and its achievements*. New York: Haskell House, 1971 (Reprint, originally published in 1906). Chapters 11 through 17 are the standard reference on the state navies, based on extensive documentation from state archives.
- Preble, George H., *History of the Flag of the United States of America*. Boston: A. Williams and Company, 1880.
- Richardson, Edward W., *Standards and Colors of the American Revolution*. Philadelphia (?): University of Pennsylvania Press and the Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution and its Color Guard, 1982.
- Sands, Robert C. (attr.) *Life and Correspondence of John Paul Jones . . . From Original Letters and Manuscripts in the Possession of Miss Janette Taylor*. New York: A. Chandler, 1830.
- Steward, Robert Armistead, *The History of Virginia’s Navy of the Revolution*. Baltimore; Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 1993 (Reprint, originally published in 1934).
- Travers, Leonard, et al., *Massachusetts Paper Money, 1690–1780: The Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society*. Portland, Maine: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1988. The pages of this booklet are unnumbered; the illustrations are referenced by figure number.
- Waites, Wilma A., *A Flag Worthy of Your State and People: The History of the South Carolina State Flag*. Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1996 (2nd edition).