

Betsy Ross: Who was she?

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I always have wondered if there is a famous person in my family tree, haven't you?

As my maiden name is Ross, I've wondered if Elizabeth (Betsy) Griscom Ross, the woman who sewed the first United States flag, was related to me. To answer this question I had to first find out who Betsy Ross married and second, if they had any children.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Griscom Ross was born to Samuel and Rebecca Griscom on Jan. 1, 1752, in Philadelphia, and was the eighth of 17 children. Betsy grew up in a household where the plain dress and strict discipline of the Society of Friends of Free Quakers dominated her life. She learned to sew from her mother and great-aunt, Sarah Griscom.

For her education, she attended a Quaker public school. After her schooling, her father sent her to work for William Webster as an upholsterer apprentice. There she met and fell in love with a fellow apprentice named John Ross. Betsy's family was strictly Quaker and John's family was Christ Church, so a marriage would cause a split from her family and meant her expulsion from the Quaker congregation. But Betsy and John, being so much in love, eloped to Gloucester, N.J., and were married Nov. 4, 1773. After they married, they attended the Christ Church.

After marrying, Betsy and John started their own upholstery businesses. Upholsterers in colonial America not only worked on furniture but on all manner of sewing work. As the fabrics they depended on grew scarce, and business slowed considerably, they became financially stressed by the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War. John joined the Pennsylvania militia and was killed in January 1776. They had no children. After John's death, Betsy struggled to continue their upholstery business.

According to Betsy

Ross' journal, in June 1776, a committee from the Continental Congress came to see her about making a flag. They showed her a drawing, roughly executed, of the flag. She saw some defects in its proportions and in the arrangement and shape of the stars. Her suggestions were that it was square, and a flag should be one-third longer than its width; the stars were scattered over the field and should be either in lines or in some adopted form as a circle or a star; and the stars were six-pointed and should be five-pointed. The committee decided to use her suggestions. The final flag had 13 stripes of red and white. They stood for the 13 colonies that were becoming states. The flag also had 13 stars, which also represented the 13 colonies becoming states. The stars were five-pointed, and they were white on a blue background. In the modern flag, we still have 13 stripes, one for each of the original 13 colonies, but there now are 50 stars, one for each state that has joined the United States.

Betsy married the second time to Joseph Ashburn, a sea captain, on June 15, 1777. They had two daughters, Zillah and Elizabeth. Joseph was captured by the British during the Revolutionary War and sent to prison in England, where he died March 1782. She married the third time to John Claypoole on May 8, 1783. They had five daughters, Clarissa Sidney, Susannah, Rachel, Jane and Harriet.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Ross Ashburn Claypoole died Jan. 30, 1836, at age 84 in Philadelphia. She was buried at Free Quaker Burying Ground in Philadelphia.

Though, my research proved Elizabeth (Betsy) Ross Ashburn Claypoole is not related to me, I found it to be interesting and very educational. She was a hardworking woman who lost two husbands to the Revolutionary War and struggled to take care of her family.

Sources used: Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, census, public and private stories.