The Flags of Florida History

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THE FLAGS OF FLORIDA HISTORY

Many flags have flown over Florida since Juan Ponce de Leon landed in 1513. Among these have been the flags of five sovereign nations: Spain, France, Great Britain, the United States, and the Confederate States of America. Numerous other unofficial flags also have flown on the peninsula at one time or another. Only a written description remains of some and one has no known description at all.

SPAIN
Research indicates Spain had no truly national flag in 1513, when Juan Ponce de Leon landed on Florida shores, but the Castle and Lion flag of the King was recognized as the flag of the country.

FRANCE
The French established a short-lived settlement, in 1564, near Jacksonville at the mouth of the St. Johns River. During this period there was no single official flag for France. Their flag may have had a blue field which bore the royal golden fleurs-de-lys. The French also occupied Pensacola from 1719 to 1722 during the War of the Quadruple Alliance.

GREAT BRITAIN, 1763-1784
The red Cross of St. George, the patron saint of England, was the major element of the British flag. In combination with the white Scottish Cross of St. Andrew, it formed the Union flag. This flag flew over Florida from 1763 until 1784.

SECOND SPANISH PERIOD, 1784-1821
Charles III created the first Spanish national flag in 1785. It flew over Florida until the United States took official possession of the territory in 1821.
English adventurer William Augustus Bowles designed this flag after a congress of Creeks and Seminoles elected him "Director General of the State of Muskogee" in 1799. The capital of this state was the Indian village of Mikasuke (near present-day Tallahassee). Bowles was captured, turned over to Spanish authorities in 1803, and later died in a Havana prison. The "State of Muskogee" came to an end.

This flag flew over the "Free and Independent State of West Florida" from September 23 to December 6, 1810. This "State" of West Florida actually covered the area below the thirty-first parallel between the Mississippi and Pearl Rivers—now a part of Louisiana. The flag later became the unofficial ensign of the South in 1860-1861 and inspired Harry McCarthy to compose the well known song, "The Bonnie Blue Flag."

As Spanish power was declining in Florida, a group of seventy Georgians and nine Floridians crossed the St. Marys River to Amelia Island on March 13, 1812 to establish the "Territory of East Florida." They read a manifesto and raised a flag with the Latin inscription, "Salus populi lex suprema," or "The safety of the people, the supreme law." President James Monroe refused to acknowledge their claim and the movement failed.

In 1817 American citizens desiring the independence of Florida, sponsored an expedition into the Spanish territory led by Gregor MacGregor, a veteran of Latin American revolutions. The group occupied Amelia Island on June 20th and raised a white flag with a green cross. Four months later they were forced to leave and their flag was all but forgotten.
The United States Government admitted Florida as the twenty-seventh state on March 3, 1845. Since, by law, new stars were added to the national flag on the July 4th following the admission of each new state, a twenty-seventh star was added for Florida on July 4, 1845.

On March 3, 1845 Florida became the twenty-seventh state. Citizens of Tallahassee presented incoming Governor William D. Moseley with a flag which flew at his inauguration. Partly because of the controversy surrounding its motto, however, it never became an official State flag. The flag shown here is reconstructed from the written description.

This chapter is adapted from a pamphlet, "The State of Florida's Heritage and Emblems," Florida Department of State and from Allen Morris' Florida Handbook.
After Florida seceded from the Union in January 1861, a number of unofficial flags flew over the state. The General Assembly passed an act directing Governor Madison S. Perry to adopt "an appropriate device for a State flag which shall be distinctive in character." Six months later the Governor had the Secretary of State record the description of Florida's first official flag. Whether it was ever raised over the Capitol or in the field is unknown. The flag shown here is reconstructed from the written description.

Unofficial "secession" flags were flying in many parts of the state even before Florida left the Union. The "Ladies of Broward's Neck," in Duval County, presented this flag to Governor Madison Starke Perry. It flew at the Capitol when the Ordinance of Secession was signed on January 1st, 1861.

THE CONFEDERACY, 1861-1865

Floridians fought under at least five separate Confederate flags during the period 1861-1865. These flags have become the source of much regional pride—and many popular errors. At the Pensacola Navy Yard Colonel William H. Chase, Commander of Florida Troops, raised this flag which flew for eight months. Colonel Chase’s love star flag had the same design as that used by the Republic of Texas Navy between 1836 and 1845.