

The Flag on Prospect Hill

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Every history of the American flag describes the hoisting of the “Grand Union” or “Great Union” flag on Prospect Hill, near Boston, in January of 1776. A monument to this historic event (Figure 1) was built on Prospect Hill in 1903, and a plaque on the monument (Figure 2) describes it. The flag is usually described as having thirteen red and white stripes, and the British union crosses in the canton (Figure 3).

This paper presents a hypothesis that the flag raised on Prospect Hill on that historic day was not, in fact, the so-called “Grand Union”, but simply a British Union flag (Figure 4). It also posits that the terms “Grand Union” and “Great Union” were not used during the Revolution, but were retroactively applied to the striped union flag by 19th-century historians. This conclusion is based on a review of the primary sources that mention the incident, and an analysis of their context.

The striped union flag was used primarily as an ensign for the Continental Navy, and is referred to by various names in contemporary documents. For clarity, this paper will refer to it as the “Continental Colors” or “Continental Flag”.



*Figure 1. Prospect Hill Monument,
Somerville, Massachusetts.
Photo by the author.*

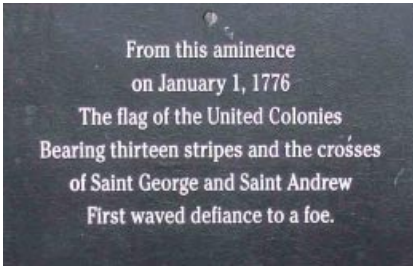


Figure 2. Plaque on the Prospect Hill Monument. Photo by the author.

BACKGROUND: THE BRITISH UNION FLAG

The Union Flag, combining the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, was created by King James I in 1606 to symbolize his dual status as the ruler of England and Scotland. For most of its history, the Union Flag was flown at sea as the naval

jack, and also as a garrison flag on forts and royal castles. It was also the basis for the “King’s Colours” carried by army regiments. A red saltire was added to the design in 1801 to symbolize the addition of Ireland to the United Kingdom. Since the early 20th century, it has come to be recognized as the civil national flag of the United Kingdom.

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, the Union Flag came to be flown by the colonists a symbol of their united resistance to British policies. John Rowe, a Boston merchant, wrote in his diary in 1767,

14 August Friday . . . This day the Colours were displayed on the Tree of Liberty abt. Sixty Peoples Sons of Liberty met at One of Clock & drank the King’s Health . . .

22nd August Saturday . . . Spent the Afternoon at the Warehouse & at Clarks Wharf. Mr. Hancocks Union Flag was hoisted for the first Time . . .¹

On 24 October 1774, the Boston Evening Post reported that

We have just received the following intelligence from Taunton, “that on Friday last a Liberty Pole 112 Feet long was raised there, on which is a Vane, and a Union Flag flying, with the Words LIBERTY and UNION thereon . . .”²

Several other examples of the use of the Union Flag as a symbol of resistance to British policies are reported to have occurred during the period leading up to the Revolution.³



Figure 3. The Continental Colors or the Continental Flag.



Figure 4. The British Union Flag, 1606 – 1800.

It may seem paradoxical that the colonists would use the British Union Flag as a symbol of protest against the oppressive policies of the British government. However, there were a number of reasons why this was appropriate from their point of view. First, colonial propaganda generally distinguished between the Crown (to whom the colonists expressed their continuing loyalty) and Parliament and the Ministry, whom they viewed as the sources of their oppression. A verse affixed to the flagpole in Taunton typified this sentiment:

Be it known to the present, And to all future Generations,
That the Sons of Liberty In TAUNTON
Fir'd with a Zeal for the Preservation of Their Rights as Men
and as American Englishmen,
And prompted by a just Resentment of The Wrongs and In-
juries offered to the English Colonies in general, and to This Prov-
ince in particular,
Through the unjust Claims of A British Parliament and the
Machiaveilan Policy of a British Ministry,
Have erected this Monument or Liberty-Standard . . .⁴

The reference in this verse to “the English Colonies in General” hinted at another aspect of the Union Flag as a protest symbol. The colonies were separate entities, with no formal unifying political ties. The Union Flag, as a symbol of the Crown, was also a symbol of unity among “American Englishmen” from New Hampshire to Georgia. In context, its very name hinted at the idea of a union among the colonies, a concept that was not

viewed favorably in London.⁵ At the same time, the display of the Union Flag by the colonists was a not-so-subtle act of subversion. It was the King's flag, and its use by private citizens was in a sense a challenge to authority. The modern concept of a national flag that represented the people as well as the government did not exist in the 18th century.

“PRETTY BURLESQUE”—THE WAR BEGINS

Even after hostilities erupted at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the Americans still professed loyalty to the Crown, and associated the King's symbols with their cause. A British officer in Boston wrote in his diary on 1 May 1775,

The Congress that's sitting at Concord has resolved to have an Army of 13000 Men . . . The Rebels have erected the Standard at Cambridge; they call themselves the King's Troops and us the Parliaments. Pretty Burlesque!⁶

A satirical print published in Britain in June 1775, depicting the British retreat through Lexington (Figures 5), showed both the American and British troops carrying Union Flags. The American flag had the word “Liberty” on the horizontal stripe, in a style reminiscent of the 1774 description of the Taunton flag (Figure 6). The author of the engraving is unknown, but he was clearly sympathetic to the American cause; the print is entitled “the Retreat From Concord to Lexington of the Wild Irish Asses Defeated by the Brave American Militia . . .” and the British soldiers are depicted as donkeys.⁷ There is no record of the American troops carrying any flags at Lexington or Concord, and many other details of the print are inaccurate. However, it does indicate that the Union Flag was regarded as an appropriate symbol of the colonial cause, even by sympathetic Britons.

After the battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775, the forces organized by the New England colonial governments settled into an arc of defensive positions around Boston, with headquarters in the town of Cambridge (Figure 7). A signal station was established on Prospect Hill (Figure 8), a prominent height north of Cambridge and in the center of the American

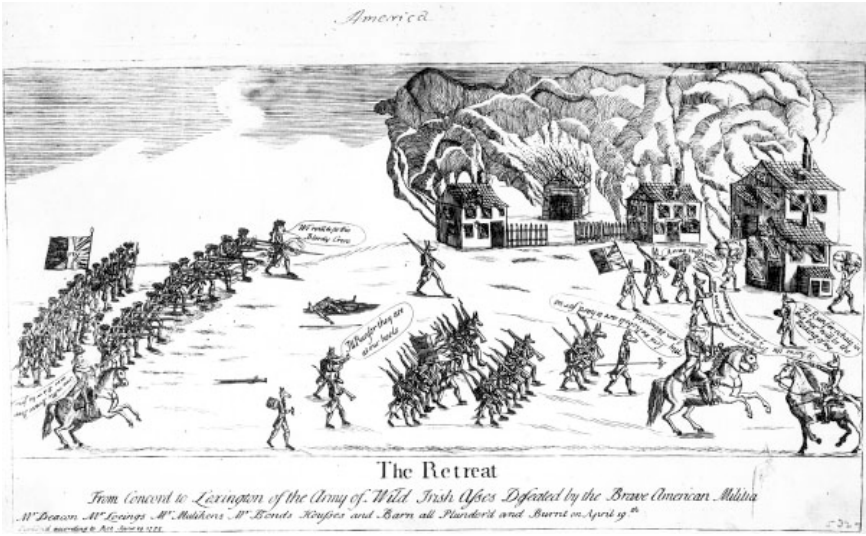


Figure 5. “The Retreat From Concord to Lexington of the Wild Irish Asses Defeated by the Brave American Militia”. Image courtesy of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection at Brown University Library and the John Carter Brown Library.



Figure 6. Detail of “The Retreat” showing the flag carried by the American troops.

line. A 76-foot flagpole was erected on the hill on 22 August,⁸ and there are various descriptions of signal flags being flown from it.⁹ The station was visible from most parts of the American lines, as well as from Boston. The British derisively nicknamed it “Mount Pisgah”, because it overlooked the strong British defensive lines on the Charlestown Peninsula. Like Moses, the Americans could see the “promised land” of Charlestown, but could not go there.¹⁰

George Washington assumed command of the forces around Boston in July. He faced the difficult task of creating a new Continental Army from the heterogeneous units organized by the individual states. That he achieved this, in the face of tremendous logistical difficulties and while facing a powerful enemy force in Boston, is a great tribute to his leadership. The new Continental Army formally came into existence on 1 January 1776.¹¹



Figure 7. The Prospect Hill area. Prospect Hill is the rectangular fortification just above the center of the image. The Charlestown peninsula is at the right, Cambridge (location of Washington's headquarters) is at the lower left. The north end of Boston is visible at the lower right. Detail from *A Plan of the Town of Boston and its Environs with the Lines, Batteries and Encampments of the British and American Armies* by Sir Thomas Hyde, 1776. Library of Congress digital ID g3764b.ct000252.

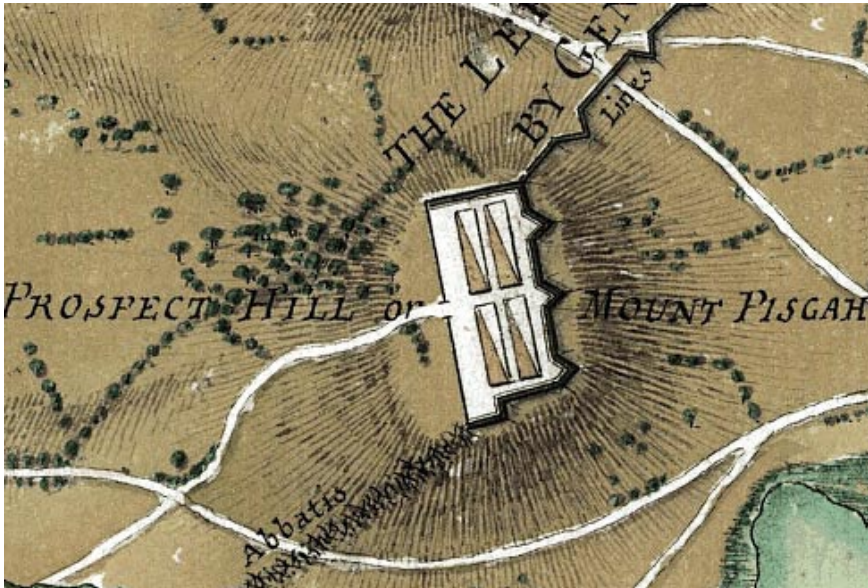


Figure 8. Detail of the Hyde map, showing Prospect Hill.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the King's speech at the opening of Parliament on 27 October 1775 made it clear that he had no sympathy for the distinctions made by the colonists:

“. . . [the colonies] now openly avow their revolt, hostility, and rebellion. They have raised troops, are collecting a naval force; they have seized the public revenue, and assumed to themselves legislative, executive, and judicial powers. . . . The authors and promoters of this desperate conspiracy . . . meant only to amuse by vague expressions of attachment to the Parent State, and the strongest protestations of loyalty to me, whilst they were preparing for a general revolt.”¹²

Copies of the King's speech were dispatched to the colonies, and arrived in Boston at the end of December 1775. By happenstance, the news of the King's rejection of Americans' "protestations of loyalty" coincided, almost to the day, with the establishment of their new Continental Army.

THE FLAG ON PROSPECT HILL: EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

There are three eyewitness accounts of what occurred at Prospect Hill on 1 January 1776. The best known is by Washington himself, in a letter to his friend Joseph Reed in Philadelphia:

Cambridge, 4th Jany 1776

Dear Sir

[. . .]

We are at length favour'd with a sight of his Majesty's most gracious speech, breathing sentiments of tenderness and compassion for his deluded American subjects; the eccho [sic] is not yet come to hand, but we know what it must be, and as Lord North said, and we ought to have believed (and acted accordingly,) we now know the ultimatum of British justice. The speech I send you; a volume of them was sent out by the Boston gentry, and farcical enough, we gave great joy to them (the red coats I mean),

without knowing or intending it, for on that day, the day which gave being to the new army, (but before the proclamation came to hand) we had hoisted the Union Flag in compliment to the United Colonies; but behold! it was received in Boston as a token of the deep impression the Speech had made upon us, and as a signal of submission, so we learn by a person out of Boston last night. By this time, I presume, they begin to think it strange that we have not made a formal surrender of our Lines.¹³ [...]

Washington referred simply to the “Union Flag”, and there is no indication that he meant anything other than what he said. The point he was making to Reed was the irony of the Army’s hoisting a symbol of the Crown just before receiving the King’s message of hostility toward the colonies. His comment would not have made any sense if the flag had been one (such as a striped flag) that was identifiably a symbol of the colonies; his whole point was that it was a recognizably *British* flag. His remark that the troops in Boston would interpret it as a “signal of submission” was undoubtedly written with a sarcastic smile, and he would probably be surprised to know that later historians have taken it seriously.¹⁴

All modern accounts assume that the flag to which Washington referred was the Continental Flag of 13 stripes with the British union in the canton. Neither his words or the context would seem to support this assumption. The Continental Flag was created in Philadelphia for use by the embryonic Continental Navy. It was never officially adopted or promulgated, and there is no mention of it in any of Washington’s extensive correspondence with the Continental Congress between July and December of 1775. When he wrote his letter to Reed, Washington was probably not even aware that it existed.¹⁵

The second eyewitness to the flag-raising on Prospect Hill was an anonymous British merchant ship captain who arrived in Boston on January 1 after a rough passage. In a long letter to his ship’s owners in London, dated 17 January 1776, he reported:

I can see the Rebels’ camp very plain, whose colours, a little while ago, were entirely red¹⁶; but, on the receipt of the King’s

speech, (which they burnt,) they have hoisted the Union Flag, which is here supposed to intimate the union of the Provinces.¹⁷

Like Washington, the captain referred to the flag simply as the “Union Flag”. His correspondents in London would not have heard of the Continental Flag,¹⁸ and if the flag on Prospect Hill had been something other than the normal British Union Flag it seems likely that the captain would have further described it. He also made the statement that the flag was “*here* supposed to intimate the union of the Provinces”, [emphasis added] implying that it had other meanings elsewhere.

The captain obviously made exactly the assumption that Washington thought the British had made: that raising the King’s colors was a reaction to the King’s speech. However, the motive that the captain imputed was the opposite of what Washington jokingly suggested to Reed: he read it as an expression of colonial unity rather than submission.

The third eyewitness account was a letter written by the British lieutenant William Carter of the 40th Regiment of Foot:

Boston, 26th January, 1776.

The Provincials have entered on the new year with spirit.

The King’s speech was sent by a flag [of truce] to them on the 1st instant. In a short time after they received it, they hoisted a union flag (above the continental with the thirteen stripes) at Mount Pisga; their citadel fired thirteen guns, and gave the like number of cheers.¹⁹

Unlike the other two eyewitnesses, Lt. Carter mentions “thirteen stripes”. However, it seems fairly clear from his phrasing that he is talking about a Union Flag flying above another, striped flag. As with the anonymous ship captain, Carter’s correspondents in Britain would not have any reason to think that “union flag” meant anything different from what it usually meant.

Neither Washington nor the ship captain mentioned any other flag

being hoisted under the Union Flag. On the other hand, Carter referred to the lower flag as “The continental”, and he specified that it had thirteen stripes. One can only speculate about what, if any, flag was really hoisted under the Union Flag on that historic day. Perhaps it was one of the signal flags that were commonly flown on Prospect Hill. Washington might have simply failed to mention it because it was not pertinent to the point he was making to Reed. Carter, on the other hand, might have seen a striped signal flag and assumed, in light of the salutes and cheers, that it was intended to represent the colonies.²⁰ He did not indicate the colors of the stripes, or whether they were horizontal or vertical.

In summary, all three eyewitnesses stated that the flag raised on Prospect Hill that day was the “Union Flag”. The most straightforward assumption is that they intended the term “Union Flag” to mean what it normally meant—the British Flag with the union crosses overall. It is possible, of course, that Lt. Carter was giving a muddled description of a single flag with both the union crosses and thirteen stripes. However, if this had been true, it is extremely unlikely that both Washington and the anonymous ship captain would have described it as a “Union Flag” without any qualification.

SECONDARY ACCOUNTS

Two secondary accounts are frequently quoted in vexillological literature. The first is an item that appeared *Dunlap’s Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser* in Philadelphia on 15 January 1776:

Our advices conclude with the following anecdote:—That upon the King’s Speech arriving at Boston, a great number of them were reprinted and sent out to our lines on the 2nd of January, which being also the day of forming the new army, the great Union Flag was hoisted on Prospect Hill, in compliment to the United Colonies.—this happening soon after the Speeches were delivered at Roxbury, but before they were received at Cambridge, the Boston gentry supposed it to be a token of the deep impression the

Speech had made, and a signal of submission—That they were much disappointed at finding several days elapse without some formal measure leading to a surrender, with which they had begun to flatter themselves.²¹

Much of the phrasing of this account is very similar to Washington's letter to Reed, and it is very likely that the writer of the article had read Washington's letter. It was apparently not uncommon for supposedly private correspondence to appear in the newspapers; Washington himself had complained about this in an earlier letter to Reed.²² However, it does contain some additional information; in particular, it suggests a possible reason for the discrepancy between Washington's account and the British accounts concerning the timing of the flag-raising and the delivery of the King's speech. More significant, however, is that it appears to be the source of the term "Great Union" which was used by later historians as the name for the striped Continental Colors. The origins of the terms "Great Union" and "Grand Union" are discussed in more detail below.

The second account appeared in the British *Annual Register* for 1776:

The arrival of a copy of the King's speech, with an account of the fate of the petition from the continental congress, is said to have excited the greatest degree of rage and indignation amongst them; as a proof of which, the former was publicly burnt in the camp; and they are said upon this occasion to have changed their colours, from a plain ground, which they had hitherto used, to a flag with thirteen stripes, as a symbol of the number and union of the colonies.²³

This account states explicitly state that the "flag with thirteen stripes" was hoisted as a symbol of the colonies. However, it is not an original account (it describes what the colonists "are said" to have done). In addition, the 1776 edition of the *Annual Register* was not published until 25 September 1777,²⁴ long after the striped Continental Flag had become known to the British and, in fact, after it had been superseded by the stars and stripes. The description of changing from a plain ground to thirteen stripes accurately recalls the transition from the British red ensign to the

American Continental colors, and the editors probably conflated this with accounts of the event at Prospect Hill. It is notable that this account does *not* refer to the “union flag” as such.

The five quotations cited above apparently comprise the entire corpus of contemporary sources for the event on Prospect Hill in January 1776. All three of the eyewitness accounts state that the “Union Flag” was raised that day. Only one of the eyewitness accounts mentions a striped flag, and it is fairly clear that he was referring to another flag in addition to the Union Flag. Of the two second-hand accounts, the one that mentions stripes was written long after the Continental Colors had become common knowledge. *None* of the primary sources described the flag as having both stripes and the British union crosses.

“GREAT UNION” AND “GRAND UNION”: THE STORY OF THE STORY

The idea that a striped union flag was raised on Prospect Hill seems to have originated in a footnote in Richard Frothingham’s history of the siege of Boston, published in 1849. The relevant passage repeats several of the primary sources that have already been quoted; however, it is quoted here verbatim to show how Frothingham drew his conclusions from those sources:

Another flag is alluded to in 1775 [sic], called “The Union Flag” . . . Washington (Jan. 4) states . . . that it was raised in complement to the United Colonies. Also, that without knowing or intending it, it gave great joy to the enemy, as it was regarded as a response to the king’s speech. The Annual Register (1776) says the Americans, so great was their rage and indignation, burnt the speech, and “changed their colors from a plain red ground, which they had hitherto used, to a flag with thirteen stripes, as a symbol of the number and union of the colonies”. Lieut. Carter, however, is still a better authority for the device on the union flag. He was on Charlestown Heights, and says, January 26: “The king’s speech was sent by a flag to them on the 1st instant. In a short time after they received it, they hoisted a union flag (above the continental

with the thirteen stripes) at Mount Pisgah; their citadel fired thirteen guns, and gave the like number of cheers.” This union flag also was hoisted at Philadelphia in February, when the American fleet sailed under Admiral Hopkins. A letter says that it sailed ‘amidst the acclamations of thousands assembled on the joyful occasion, under the display of a union flag, with thirteen stripes in the field, emblematical of the thirteen united colonies’.²⁵

Frothingham appears to have been the first to equate the “Union Flag” on Prospect Hill with the one used by the Continental Navy. The Continental fleet under Hopkins actually sailed from Philadelphia in early January. Although Lt. Carter did refer to “the continental with the thirteen stripes”, it is extremely unlikely that he (or anyone else in Boston) had yet heard of the new Continental Colors.²⁶ And, as already discussed, he clearly described two flags: a “union flag” and another with stripes.

The idea that the flag raised on Prospect Hill was a single flag with both a union and stripes was reinforced by Schuyler Hamilton in his 1853 history of the American flag. After quoting Lt. Carter’s letter, he remarked,

. . . we may expect inaccuracies in the description of a flag newly presented to [British observers], and which, even to an officer on Charlestown Heights, who, as appears, was at some pains to describe it, appeared to be *two* flags . . . [emphasis in the original]

Hamilton apparently assumed that Lt. Carter made a mistake by referring to two flags instead of one. He does not seem to have considered the possibility that the lieutenant really was “at some pains to describe it” and was accurately reporting what he saw.

Hamilton also appears to have been the first to assign the name “Great Union Flag” to the flag on Prospect Hill. He refers to the Philadelphia newspaper account of January 15th which, as we have seen, used that term to refer to it:

We observe [that] . . . in the extract from the newspaper account of this, that the flag was displayed on Prospect Hill, and that it must have been a peculiarly marked Union flag, to be called

the Great Union Flag.²⁸ As this was the name given to the national banner of Great Britain, this indicates this flag as the national banner of the United Colonies . . . They were British colonies: and, as we have shown, they used the British Union but now, they were to distinguish their flag by its color from other British ensigns . . . This being the case, stripes of color would naturally be suggested as being striking, as enabling them to show the number and union of the colonies . . . Hence, probably the name *The Great Union Flag*, given to it by the writer in the *Philadelphia Gazette*, before quoted . . . indicated, as respecting the Colonies, precisely what the Great Union Flag of Great Britain indicated respecting the mother country.²⁹ [emphasis in the original]

Hamilton's statement that "Great Union Flag" was the "the name given to the national banner of Great Britain" was somewhat misleading. Actually, the term "great union" referred generically to the design of the combined English and Scottish crosses, rather than to a particular flag. The term was used, for example, in the royal warrant that described the colors to be carried by British infantry regiments (Figure 9):

George R.

Our will and pleasure is, that the following regulations for the colours, clothing, etc. of Our marching regiments of foot, be duly observed and put into execution . . .

The King's, or first colour of every regiment, is to be the Great Union throughout.

The second Colour to be the colour of the facing of the regiment, with the Union in the upper canton . . ."

In the center of each colour is to be painted, or embroidered, in gold Roman characters, the number of the rank of the regiment, within a wreath of roses and thistles on the same stalk . . .³⁰

The fact that the newspaper article referred to the flag as the "great union" supports the idea that it was a union flag with the combined English and Scottish crosses overall. The newspaper was probably not using "great union" as the name of the flag, but simply as a description, i.e. the



Figure 9. King's Colour of the 40th Regiment of Foot (Lieutenant Carter's unit). Aylor, British Regimental Drums and Colours in North America 1755-1783.

flag with the great union on it. There is nothing to substantiate Hamilton's statement that the flag on Prospect Hill "must have been a peculiarly marked Union flag, to be called the Great Union Flag". Nevertheless, Hamilton's use of the term as a proper name has been perpetuated by later historians, and is often used to refer to the Continental Colors.³¹

The name "Grand Union" was first applied to the Continental Colors by George Preble in his 1872 history of the American Flag. Preble stated that:

A letter from Boston, in the 'Pennsylvania Gazette,' says "The grand union flag was raised on the 2d, in compliment to the United Colonies."³²

As we have already seen, the letter that was printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on 17 January 1776 actually read:

By authentic advices from the Camp at Cambridge, of the 3rd and 4th instant, we learn that . . . on the 2d of January, which being also the day of forming the new army, the great Union Flag was hoisted on Prospect Hill, in compliment to the United Colonies ...

Preble evidentially substituted "grand" for "great" in his notes. Because his work was accepted as the definitive history of the American flag, his mistake has been perpetrated in vexillological and general literature ever since.³³

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

All eyewitness accounts of the flag-raising on Prospect Hill describe the flag as the “Union Flag”. The context of the accounts suggests that all were referring to the standard British Union Flag rather than a continental variation. Only one account, that of Lieutenant Carter, mentions both the union and stripes, and it appears to refer to two separate flags.

The identification of the Prospect Hill flag with the colors used by the Continental Navy appears to have originated in Frothingham’s 19th-century history of the Siege of Boston. There is no indication that any of the eyewitness accounts to the Prospect Hill incident were referring to the Continental Colors. It is unlikely that any of them, especially the British commentators, even knew that such a flag existed at the time. The idea that the British troops in Boston thought that the flag was a sign of submission is also an invention of later historians, who took seriously a comment that Washington clearly intended as a jest.

The terms “Great Union” and “Grand Union” (as names for the Continental Colors) *both* appear to have been invented by 19th-century historians. The former was a misinterpretation of a newspaper reference by Schuyler Hamilton, and the latter was apparently a transcription error by George Preble. Both of these names are commonly used in popular literature about the American flag, but neither appears to have any historical basis.

These conclusions are not the result of newly discovered information, but of a re-evaluation of the primary sources that have been quoted by historians for over 150 years. The symbolism of the flag on Prospect Hill is so appealing that writers have tended to overlook the actual context of the primary sources that describe it.



Appendix A

Preble's "Anonymous Letter"

In addition to five contemporary sources discussed in the main text, George Preble included a sixth quotation in his history of the American flag:

An anonymous letter, written Jan. 2, 1776, says: "The grand union flag of thirteen stripes was raised on a height near Boston. The regulars did not understand it; and as the king's speech had just been read, as they supposed, they thought the new flag was a token of submission"³⁴

Preble cited no source for this letter, and it does not appear in any other account of the siege of Boston. Many of the "quotations" in Preble's work appear to have actually been his own inaccurate paraphrases of other documents that he was recalling from memory,³⁵ and one suspects that this one was a mixed-up recap of the sources already cited.

The author offers the following speculation about the source of Preble's quotation. Preble is known to have used both Schuyler Hamilton's history of the American flag and Peter Force's *American Archives* as sources for his own book. As noted in an earlier footnote, the 15 January article from *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser* was reproduced in *American Archives* as a footnote to Washington's letter to Joseph Reed of 4 January 1776. Since Force did not indicate that the source of the footnote was a newspaper article, Preble probably assumed that it was a letter, and listed it as such in his notes. He probably obtained the newspaper account separately from Hamilton (Hamilton cited the source as the *Philadelphia Gazette*—there was no such newspaper in 1776, and his reference was probably a typographical error for the *Pennsylvania Gazette*). Since Preble copied down or paraphrased only the material dealing with the flag, he did not realize that the quotations from Force and Hamilton were two versions of the same text. He then paraphrased both quotations in his book, thus creating a spurious source that was actually a duplication.

There are, of course substantial differences between Preble's "anonymous letter" and the newspaper account. The letter refers to the flag as "the grand union flag of thirteen stripes" and states that it is a "new" flag. The author believes that these were *ex post facto* changes that Preble made in a quotation that he recalled from memory. It should also be noted that *both* of his "quotations" are actually loose paraphrases of the newspaper account—for example, he changed the words "great Union" to "Grand Union" in both versions. Preble also reinforced the idea that the British in Boston took the flag on Prospect Hill as a sign of submission. As shown in the main text, this was based on a joking comment by Washington.

Preble stated that the "letter" was written on 2 January, while the text in *American Archives* is headed 15 January. However, the date of 2 January is mentioned in

the paragraph dealing with the flag which, again, is probably the only section that he copied into his notes.

One should not judge Preble's inaccuracies too harshly. He lived in a world without photostatic copies, scanners, or electronic media, and relied entirely on his memory, handwritten notes, and paper files. Given the large quantity of source material that he consulted, it is not surprising that many errors crept into his published work.

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- Wright, Robert K., *The Continental Army*. Washington D.C., Center of Military History, United States Army, 1983.

Endnotes

1. *Diary of John Rowe*, vol. 4, pp. 597 and 602. The original diary is in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society. A much-edited version was published in the MHS Proceedings, Second Series, Vol. X, March Meeting, 1895, p. 11.
2. *Boston Evening Post*, 24 October 1774, LOC/N Reel 2894. The so-called “Taunton Flag” is traditionally depicted as a British red ensign with the words “Liberty and Union” in white in the field, and the modern city flag of Taunton follows that design. However, the *Evening Post* description simply calls it a “union flag”, and its capitalization suggests that the word “and” was not part of the wording on the flag. The colonial version of the union flag in the well-known engraving of the battle of Lexington (see below) has the word “Liberty” written across the horizontal bar of the union cross, and it seems reasonable that the Taunton flag followed a similar pattern.
3. Preble mentions that Union Flags were raised over the tent in Boston, in which a company assembled to celebrate the anniversary of the Stamp Act in 1773 (p. 196), on sleds carrying wood for the inhabitants of Boston in January 1775 (*ibid.*), and in New York in March 1775 (p. 197), and on a Liberty Pole in Savannah on 19 June 1775 (p. 201). He commented, “No description of the union flags of these times has been preserved . . . nevertheless, it is more than probable, and almost certain, that these flags were the familiar flags of the English and Scotch union, established in 1707, and long known as union flags, inscribed with various popular and patriotic mottoes.” (*Ibid.*) The author has not been able to verify Preble’s references. 1707 refers to the date when England and Scotland were formally combined into the United Kingdom; the union flag itself, however, had been in existence since 1606.
4. *Boston Evening Post*, *loc. cit.*
5. The British government had long feared the specter of a union among its American colonies. As early as 1764, pamphleteer Thomas Pownall wrote that the colonies “must be guarded against having, or forming, and principle of coherence with each other above that, whereby they cohere in this center . . . they should always remain incapable of any coherence, or of so conspiring amongst themselves . . . [I]t is essential to the preservation of the empire to keep them disconnected and independent of each other: they certainly are so at present.” Quoted in Olson, p. 60.
6. Barker, pp. 39-40.
7. “The Retreat from Concord to Lexington of the Army of Wild Irish Asses Defeated by the Brave American Militia, Mr. Deacon, Mr. Loeings, Mr. Mullikens, Mr. Bonds Houses and Barn all Plunder’d and Burnt on April 19th”, Published According to the Act June 29 1775. This cartoon is unsigned, and was published in London shortly after the news of Lexington and Concord

arrived in Britain. The original is held by the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, R.I., and was acquired in March of 1952 from the estate of R. T. Haines Halsey, along with more than 200 other cartoons. Very special thanks to Peter Harrington, Curator of the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection at Brown University Library, for providing the author an excellent scan of the cartoon, and to Susan Danforth at the JCBL for the bibliographic information.

8. "Tuesday, August 1, 1775 . . . raised the mast that came out of the schooner that was burnt at Chelsea, for to hoist our flag upon, in the fort upon Prospect hill in Charlestown, seventy-six feet high." Lunt, p. 197. The schooner was *HMS Diana*, which was destroyed by Massachusetts troops on 27 May 1775, after running aground at Noddle's Island. *Ibid*, p. 193.
9. Cutler, pp. 16-20.
- 10 The relevant passage is Deuteronomy 3:26-27, in which Moses writes: . . . *and the Lord said unto me. . . Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan.* One wonders what the British thought about the immediately following phrase of Deuteronomy: *But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.* See also Deut. 34:1-4.
11. See Wright, Chapters 1-3, for a concise history of the evolution of the Continental Army.
12. His Majesty's Most Gracious SPEECH to Both Houses of PARLIAMENT, On FRIDAY, October 27, 1775. Published as a broadside by Hall & Sellers, Philadelphia, 1776. A transcription and high-quality image of the broadside are available as part of the Library of Congress "American Memory" collections at www.loc.gov (Digital ID 1440150a).
13. Reed, pp. 35-36.
14. Washington had long since decided that separation from Britain was the only realistic option. In another letter to Reed on 10 February 1776, he wrote ". . . I have never entertained an Idea of an accommodation since I heard of the measures which were adopted in consequence of the Bunker's Hill fight. The King's speech has confirmed the sentiments I entertained upon the news of that affair, —and if every man was of my mind, the ministers of G[reat] B[ritain] should know in a few words upon what issue the cause should be put." (Reed, p. 65) However, he carefully continued to refer to the British as the "Ministerial" troops in official correspondence. Not until April 1, after the British evacuated Boston, did he make reference to "the King's . . . troops", and remark to Reed "I think it idle to keep up the distinction of the ministerial)." *Ibid*. p. 94.

15. It is not known exactly when, or by whom, the Continental flag was created. It was most probably designed by the Naval Committee of Congress in late November 1775, at the same time that the committee established regulations for the Navy. The first ships of the Navy were converted merchant ships, and the Naval Committee presumably hit upon the expedient of converting the ships' existing red ensigns by adding stripes. The earliest mention of the flag is in a draft letter written by Richard Henry Lee, a member of the Naval Committee, in mid-December 1775. This letter is reprinted in NDAR Vol. 3, p. 640, where it is given the date of 5 January 1776; however, circumstances indicate that it was actually drafted the previous month. See LDC, pp. 542-544. The letter describes the flag as "a Jack [sic] with the Union flag, and striped red and white in the field". (Compare this language with Lieutenant Carter's description).

There is a long-standing legend that the Continental Flag was created at a meeting at Washington's headquarters in October 1775, attended by Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Harrison, and Thomas Lynch as representatives of Congress. Some accounts even suggest that the meeting was called for the purpose of creating the flag. This is folklore. The meeting did take place, but its purpose was to work out the details of the organization of the Continental Army. Extensive minutes were kept of the sessions, and none mention anything about a Continental flag.

16. The red flag mentioned in this quotation is commonly assumed to have been the flag that General Israel Putnam unfurled on Prospect Hill on 18 July 1775. (See the article in the *New England Chronicle* or the *Essex Gazette* for 13—21 July 1775, LOC/N Reel 3213). The history of "Putnam's Standard" is beyond the scope of this paper, and the author intends to address it separately in the future.
17. AA, Series 4, Vol. 4, pp. 710-712. The identity of the ship is not known. The *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Weekly Newsletter* (the only newspaper published in Boston during the siege) reported in its edition of 4 January 1776: "Since our Last arrived here from England . . . a Ship with Provisions, and a Snow and Brig with Ordnance Stores. The Lord Hyde Packet is also arrived here and two Ships from Ireland with Part of the 17th and 55th Regiments." (LOC/N Reel 2897). The captain mentions in his letter that his cargo included hogs and sheep, so his vessel may have been the "Ship with Provisions". It should be noted that the ship captain may *not* actually have been an eyewitness to the flag-raising on Prospect Hill. According to his letter, he did not arrive in Boston until January 1st.
18. The earliest British reference to the Continental Flag is a letter from a British informer to Lord Dartmouth on 20 December 1775. NDAR Vol. 3, p. 186. A letter from another British spy, James Brattle, on 4 January 1776 also mentions the flag and describes it as "English Colours, but more Striped." *Ibid*, p. 615.
19. A facsimile of the letter is reproduced in Cutler, p. 12. Lieutenant Carter is the only eyewitness who specifically states that the flag was raised on Prospect Hill ("Mount Pisgah"). However, all agree that it was readily visible to the British in Boston, and

it is reasonable to assume that they all were describing the same incident.

20. It is notable that both of the British eyewitnesses clearly state that the Union Flag was raised after the Americans read the King's speech. Was this the case, or was it raised (coincidentally) before the speech was delivered to the American lines, as Washington stated? At this remove we will probably never know.
21. *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser*, Monday 15 January 1776, LOC/N Reel 3215. A facsimile is reproduced in Cutler, p. 10, and a transcription is in NDAR Vol. 3, pp. 807-808. There is also a transcription in AA Series 4, Vol. 4, p. 576, where it appears as a footnote to the transcription of Washington's 4 January, with no source indicated. The same article appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on 17 January, and in the *Pennsylvanischer Staatsbote* (translated into German) on 16 January. LOC/N Reels 1447 and 3215, respectively. Hamilton, pp. 55-56, quotes the AA transcription, and gives the source as the *Philadelphia Gazette* and the date as 15 January. There was no newspaper by that name in 1776; Hamilton probably confused the name with the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the date with the earlier appearance of the article in the *Pennsylvania Packet*.
22. "The Extracts of letters from this camp which so frequently appear in the Pens[ylvani]a papers, are not only written without my knowledge, but without my approbation . . ." Washington to Reed, 15 December 1775, Reed, p. 28.
23. Murdoch, p. 317.
24. *Ibid*, p. 294.
25. Frothingham, p. 283. The letter describing the sailing of the fleet from Philadelphia was printed in Dixon and Hunter's *Virginia Gazette* 2 March 1776, and is transcribed in NDAR Vol. 3, pp. 1188-1189. The information in the letter was somewhat garbled, but the description of the fleet's colors is confirmed by several other sources. In the original text the word "union" is in italics and "Flag" is capitalized.
26. As noted previously, the earliest known British reference to the Continental flag was a letter to Lord Dartmouth (the British Colonial Secretary) from an informant in Maryland. The letter was written 20 December 1775, and almost certainly did not arrive in London until after 1 January 1776. The letter referred to the "Continental flag" but did not otherwise describe it.
27. Hamilton, p. 58.
28. Hamilton capitalized the word "Great" here, although it was not capitalized in the original newspaper account.
29. Hamilton pp. 56 and 68-69. See the earlier footnote about the sources of the newspaper quotation.
30. "The Royal Clothing Warrant, 1768". Transcribed in Alyor.

31. Curiously, Hamilton actually quoted from the King's regulations concerning the great union (p. 58), but he related it to Lt. Carter's account rather than the newspaper account: "From the above [the royal warrant] we see that, to the mind of a British officer, the Union flag, supposed to have been displayed in connection with the receipt of the king's speech, above a flag with thirteen stripes, would indicate an acknowledgment of the supremacy of the king over the United Colonies, supposed to be represented by the thirteen stripes." Then, having made a case that Carter could have seen two flags, one of which was the British union flag, Hamilton continued: "Without further proof, therefore, we may conclude that the "Union" flag, displayed by General Washington, was the union of the crosses . . . with thirteen stripes through the flag of the field." (pp. 58-59)! He completely missed the import of the term "great union" in the newspaper account, and discarded the most straightforward interpretation of Carter's account.
32. Preble, p. 218.
33. Preble also appears to have inadvertently created a spurious additional reference that has been perpetrated by later historians as a primary source. See Appendix A.
34. Preble, p. 218.
35. For a detailed analysis of one example, see Ansoff, pp. 28-29.