

The Forster Flag

The oldest existing flag with 13 stripes for the 13 colonies is linked to the Manchester militia in 1775. A replica stands beside you.

The flag traces back to Samuel Forster, merchant and minuteman. On April 19, 1775, Forster and other men from Manchester, with the 6th Essex County Regiment, marched toward Lexington to engage the British. They only made it as far as Medford when told of the British retreat. According to lore, they carried this flag adapted from a British red ensign with the Union Jack removed and white stripes added (showing six on one side and seven on the other). While its carrying is not documented, the flag is nevertheless considered the oldest of its kind with its stripes representing the thirteen united colonies.

The flag passed through the Forster family for the next 200 years. After Israel Forster, owner of the historic house at the corner of Pine and Central St., died in 1818, the Forster flag was loaned to the Massachusetts State House for display. In 1975, family members Connie and Harry Knight sold it to the Flag Heritage Foundation. In 1999, the flag was commemorated as one of the 20 most important American flags and honored by the US Postal Service.

In 2014, the Forster flag was put up for auction and sold to private collectors. They loaned it to the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia where it is currently on display.