



By JIM MILLER
Blog - *For the Love of History*
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Where do I start? Hmm..... how about my birth. It's all my parent's fault for having me on Flag Day. I'm not kidding. The story about this flag starts in 2003, when I got an idea to create full size replicas of flags with a particular importance to California history. With no real idea what that would entail, I plunged ahead with the idea to use them for a lecture on important events in our State's history. The flags, as markers or witnesses to the events, would hopefully give the lecture some visual excitement. Usually when I start on a project with many parts, I choose the hardest one first, to get it out of the way. That choice, was our National Flag of 31 Stars, officially recognized on July 4, 1851 and commonly regarded as the California Statehood Flag.

I already had a fair working knowledge of our flag's history but the materials and construction details of mid-19th Century flags, were yet to be discovered. Thank God for books, the internet and good friends. There is no getting around it, you need to do your research to do it well. Lucky for me I fell in love with a particular 31 star pattern known as the "square frame",

when I first saw it on an original flag in Boleslaw Mastai's book the "The Stars and the Stripes". It was a flag pattern that was popular with ships in the mid-19th Century. If anyone has ever seen pictures of the unbelievable number of ships that clogged San Francisco's harbor during the Gold Rush, there is no doubt this style flag saw service in California.

In 1999, my wife Lindy and I visited Sturbridge Village in Mass. and fortunately we photographed an early American flag on exhibit. Those detailed photos would be of enormous help. My good friend Derek Manov owns an antebellum Navy Jack, which he let me handle and study. Both of these sources provided details as to stitch patterns, construction information and what materials they used. I also discovered that proper wool bunting, even a close match, was going to be the hardest to find. I'll get to that later. Dave Martucci of Washington, Maine has an amazing website <http://www.vexman.net/> . with tons of information about period American flags. Dave was even familiar with the Mastai flag and was extremely helpful on getting me on track with what makes a mid-century flag unique.

The wool bunting issue was still unresolved until I discovered Richard Gideon of "Gideon Flags", Pittsburg, PA <http://www.gideonflags.com/> . Richard had historically correct wool bunting for sale, that was woven by Rabbit Goody of Thistle Hill Weavers. Things were starting to come together. My flag was to replicate an original that would have been dyed using natural dyes.



Oh dear! This would be the next challenge. Liz Cowdery of "Linden Lane Farm", <http://www.fibersofmichigan.com/> was a God send. She sent me volumes of information on how to dye with indigo (blue) and madder root (red). The good people at "Earth Guild" in Asheville, North Carolina <http://www.earthguild.com/> supplied me with the actual dye stuffs.

There is not enough space to describe what it took to dye the wool but it was a project that deserves its own blog. My wife is an amazing seamstress in her own right but it was her ability to plan the lay-out of the parts, before I started the dyeing, that saved me. With 8 yards of 48" wool bunting at \$35/yard., there's no going back, once you start to cut. The finished flag would measure 6 by 10 feet, (pre-Civil War flags tended to be big) but I had to divide the wool into what would become the red, white and blue.

So, with all the wool finally dyed and everything ready, I started sewing it all together, by hand, with period correct linen thread. Most of the seams were flat felled with a running stitch, about 8 to the inch. I like to call it my 62 star flag, as I had to applique muslin stars on both sides, to match through. The last thing left was to finish the hoist end with a narrow strip of canvas, as most were done at the time and bind the holes with a buttonhole stitch over a brass ring. One more thing, as a practice, I normally sign and date the replicas I make, to help future historians make sense of them. Total time, from beginning to end.....about 240 hours. Wow, that was a project ! Now, how about those "other" flags?

