



# Old Glory

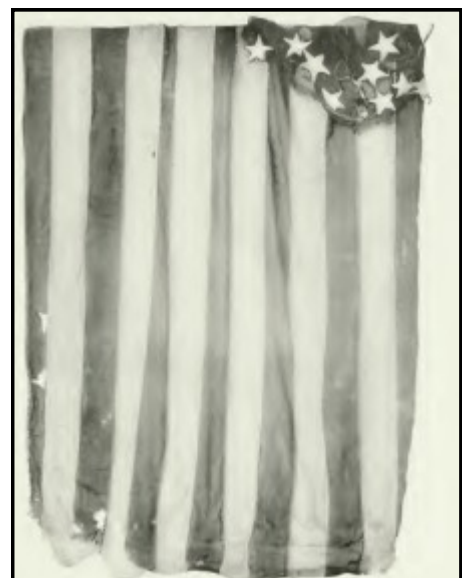
by  
Mike Prero

The original "Old Glory" was a flag owned by the 19th-century American sea captain William Driver (March 17, 1803–March 3, 1886), who flew the flag during his career at sea and later brought it to Nashville, Tennessee, where he settled. Driver greatly prized the flag and ensured its safety from the Confederates, who attempted to seize the flag during the American Civil War.

Driver was deeply attached to the flag, writing: "It has ever been my staunch companion and protection. Savages and heathens, lowly and oppressed, hailed and welcomed it at the far end of the wide world. Then, why should it not be called Old Glory?" Driver retired from seafaring in 1837, after his wife died from throat cancer. At the time, Driver was 34 and had three young children. He settled in Nashville, Tennessee, where his three brothers operated a store. Driver remarried the next year to Sarah Jane Parks, a Southerner with whom he had several more children. He took his flag with him to Nashville, flying it on holidays "rain or shine." The flag was "so large that he attached it to a rope from his attic window and stretched it on a pulley across the street to secure it to a locust tree."

In 1860, Driver and his wife and daughters repaired the flag, sewing on ten more stars, and Driver added (by appliqué) a small white anchor in the lower right corner, to symbolize his maritime career. By that time, the secession crisis had begun, and Driver's family was split. While Driver was a staunch Unionist, two of his sons were fervent Confederates, and one died from wounds suffered at Perryville. In March 1862, Driver wrote: "Two sons in the army of the South! My entire house estranged...and when I come home...no one to soothe me."

Soon after Tennessee seceded from the Union, Governor Isham G. Harris sent men to Driver's home to demand the flag. Driver, then 58, was not intimidated; he met the men at the door and said, "Gentlemen...if you are looking for stolen property in my house, produce your search warrant." The men left, but later local an armed



*The original "Old Glory" owned by sea captain William Driver.*

group showed up on Driver's front porch, but was confronted by Driver, who said, "If you want my flag you'll have to take it over my dead body," leading them to leave.

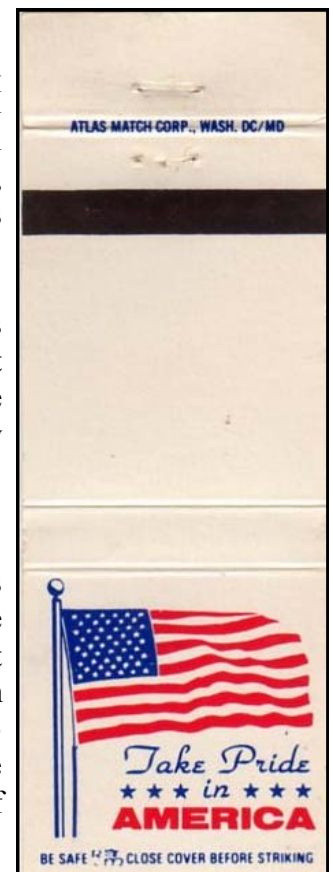
In order to save the flag from further threats, Driver (aided by loyal women neighbors) had it sewn into a coverlet and hidden until late February 1862, when Nashville fell to Union forces. When the Union Army entered the city, Driver went to Tennessee State Capitol after seeing the American flag on the Capitol flagstaff. The aide-de-camp to the Union commander in the city, wrote that: "A stout, middle-aged man, with hair well shot with gray, short in stature, broad in shoulder, and with a roll in his gait, came forward and asked, 'Who is the General in command? I wish to see him.'" Introducing himself as a sea captain and Unionist, Driver brought the coverlet with him. The aide-de-camp recalled "Capt. Driver—an honest-looking, blunt-speaking man, was evidently a character; he carried on his arm a calico-covered bed quilt; and, when satisfied that Gen. Nelson was the officer in command, he pulled out his jack-knife and began to rip open the bed quilt without another word...[Then], the bed quilt was safely delivered of a large American flag, which he handed to Gen. Nelson, saying, 'This is the flag I hope to see hoisted on that flagstaff in place of the d—d Confederate flag set there by that d—d rebel governor, Isham G. Harris.' He spoke triumphantly, with tears in his eyes." Nelson accepted the flag and ordered it run up on the Capitol flagstaff, accompanied by "frantic cheering and uproarious demonstrations." The 6th Ohio Infantry later adopted the motto "Old Glory."

That night, a violent storm "threatened to tear the banner to pieces" and so Driver replaced it with a newer flag, taking the original Old Glory for safekeeping. The flag apparently remained in his home until December 1864, when the Battle of Nashville was fought. As Confederate troopers sought to retake the city, Driver hung his flag in a clearly visible spot out of the third-story window and left to join the defense of the city. For the rest of the American Civil War, Driver served as provost marshal of Nashville, serving in hospitals.

According to Mary Jane Roland, one of Driver's Nashville-born daughters, Driver gave her the flag as a gift on July 10, 1873, telling her: "This is my old ship flag Old Glory. I love it as a mother loves her child; take it and cherish it as I have always cherished it; for it has been my steadfast friend and protector in all parts of the world—savage, heathen and civilized." Driver died on March 3, 1886, and was buried in the Nashville City Cemetery, where (at Driver's request) his rescue of the *Bounty* descendants is noted on his grave marker.

Over the next several decades, a family feud took place over the flag and its ownership. Driver's Salem-born niece, Harriet Ruth Waters Cooke, claimed that she had inherited it, and presented her version of Old Glory to the Essex Institute in Salem (which later became the Peabody Essex Museum), "along with family memorabilia that included a letter from the Pitcairn Islanders to Driver."

In response, Roland wrote her own account of the flag, publishing *Old Glory, The True Story* in 1918. In that memoir, Roland "disputed elements of Cooke's narrative and presented documentary evidence for her claim" that the flag she owned was the true Old Glory. In 1922, Roland gave her Old Glory to President Warren G. Harding as a gift; Harding had the flag sent to the Smithsonian Institution. The same year, the Peabody Essex Museum sent its own Old Glory to the Smithsonian as well on loan. Both flags became part of the collection of the Smithsonian Institution, where they remain today at the National Museum of American History. [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old\\_Glory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Glory)]



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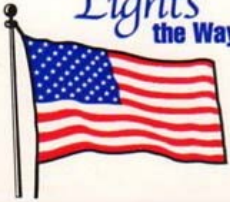
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