

The Story Behind "An Appeal to Heaven" Flag

The year was 1775 and our country was just about to face its greatest military battle, it was the beginning of the American Revolution. At that time, the British (the most powerful military in the world) was occupying Boston and problems in the colonies were rising fast. George Washington understood the times and wanted to begin intercepting supplies from incoming British ships, however the popular consensus from the Continental Congress was to avoid anything that would further upset King George. General Washington decided to take it upon himself to commission six ships and start a navy presence. This was even rumored to be at Washington's personal expense. Since the ships would need a flag to fly under, and since Betsy Ross had not yet spun her stars and stripes handiwork, all of these newly commissioned ships began sailing under the "An Appeal to Heaven" flag. In addition to these ships, this flag was also known to be seen on floating batteries, river banks, in towns, battlefields like Bunker Hill, and even in places of most importance like our nation's capital in Philadelphia.

The phrase "An Appeal to Heaven" was used by the great English philosopher John Locke who had a major influence on our founding fathers, so much so that much of our country's original documentation is inspired from his work. The meaning of the phrase comes from Locke's work on the universal law of nature. In 1689-90, Locke published his *Second Treatise of Government* which said, "... where the body of the people, or any single man, is deprived of their right, or is under the exercise of a power without right, and have no appeal on earth, then they have a liberty to appeal to heaven, whenever they judge the cause of sufficient moment. "

The Pine Tree had its inspiration from two places. First, the Iroquois Indians during a very troubling time in their history, united six of their great tribes together in unity under a great pine tree. This important treaty was symbolized by each of the chiefs burying their weapons under a pine tree from which we get the phrase, "bury the hatchet." This tree was said to be guarded by a bald eagle at its peak, clutching six arrows, representing the six tribes that were united. Does this sound familiar? The American eagle on our seal has 13 arrows in its clutches representing the 13 colonies, and that seal received its inspiration from the story of the Iroquois.

Secondly, the pine tree was a foundational resource in building the necessary infrastructure of our fledgling nation. America's virgin old growth forests had pine trees of magnificent size. These trees were invaluable in that day, especially for the tall masts on the great sailing ships. In the mid 1700's, the King of England saw this great value and wanted them for his own Royal Navy and would put his mark on these impressive trees as not to be touched. This act infuriated the colonists and served as a symbol of America's Independence.

We can quickly see that the phrase "An Appeal to Heaven" was used during these crucial early years of the great Colonial experiment that became our United States. George Washington himself knew and personally believed in the Almighty God who could bring aid to the struggling nation as they strove for independence. His choice of the flag emblazoned with "An Appeal to Heaven" gave inspiration and hope to those who from an outside perspective had little chance of victory.

Today, our hope is that the words of and the history about this flag, can once again become the rallying cry for a people who are seeking the God of heaven to heal America. We as a people have strayed from a clear dependence on the Almighty and have instead begun trusting ourselves. We must once again be reminded that there is no earthly remedy for the spiritual decadence and lethargy that consumes us, apart from a renewed "Appeal to Heaven."

Finally, the unity that the Iroquois taught our founders in their use of the pine tree on that first flag is still necessary in our modern appeal to heaven. Jesus prayed that we would be one, as He and His Father were one (John 17:35), but unfortunately Jesus' appeal to heaven to His Father has largely gone unheeded by the modern church. We have become so individualistic and divided that we have rendered ourselves as ineffective. The time is now for Christians everywhere to willfully decide to bury whatever "hatchets" that have divided us and unite under a banner of Biblical unity as we become the answer to Jesus' prayer. In the same way that a fledgling nation had no hope apart from their Appeal to Heaven, we too have no hope and no power apart from that same battle cry. Would you join us in choosing to willfully unite together and humble ourselves in an Appeal to Heaven for our United States and Laurens County, that the Gospel would be shared and that God would renew our land?