

History of the Pledge of Allegiance

In 1992, the nation began its second century with the Pledge of Allegiance. This also marks the time, one hundred years ago, when the American Flag became a familiar site in the school classroom, and in front of public school buildings.

In 1892, Francis Bellamy (a Baptist Minister, political activist, and first cousin of American novelist Edward Bellamy) created the Pledge of Allegiance for Youth's Companion, a national family magazine for youth published in Boston. The magazine had a national circulation of approximately 500,000, the largest of its day.

One of the magazine's owners, James Upham, had the idea of using the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' (re)discovery of America to promote the use of the American Flag in public schools. Bellamy was hired to help with public relations.

By February 1892, Bellamy and Upham had lined up the National Education Association to support the Youth's Companion in sponsoring the nation's public school observance of Columbus Day. At that time the magazine had been instrumental in the sale of American Flags to about 26,000 schools.

On June 29, Bellamy and Upham arranged for Congress and President Benjamin Harrison to announce a national proclamation, making the public school flag ceremony the center of the national Columbus Day celebrations for 1892. Bellamy, under the supervision of Upham, wrote the program for this celebration, including its flag salute, the Pledge of Allegiance. His original version was:

I Pledge Allegiance to My Flag and to the Republic for which it stands,
One Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for All.

The program and its pledge appeared in the September 8 issue of Youth's Companion.

In 1923, the first change in the pledge was made. It was from "My Flag" to "The Flag of the United States". Then in 1924, one year later, the second change was added to the first: "Of America".

This change was made so that children of newly-arrived immigrants could be certain that the flag they were saluting stood for their new "homeland".

The pledge stood this way until 1954, when "Under God" was added by Congress and President Eisenhower, at the urging of the Knights of Columbus.

Over the last century, the Pledge of Allegiance has become a major centerpiece in American patriotism programs. Each class day, over 60 million teachers and students in the United States recite the Pledge, along with thousands of Americans at official meetings of organizations such as the Elks, Masons, American Legion; and of course Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

[So with this look at our pledge of allegiance, may we all stand and give the Pledge of Allegiance to our Flag.]