Q122 – Why does the flag have 50 stars?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The fifty stars in the American flag represent the fifty states. We started with thirteen stars for the thirteen original states. As the nation grew, so did the number of stars on the flag.

Vermont was an independent republic before it became the 14th state. More states were carved from territory won from Britain after the Revolution. Louisiana became the first state formed from the vast territory we purchased from France.
Mounting tension between slave states and free states led to the Missouri Compromise in 1820. Missouri was admitted as a slave state, and Maine – once part of Massachusetts – as a free state. More states followed, including Texas before the Mexican War and California after it.
During the Civil War, the western part of Virginia chose to stay in the Union – and West Virginia became the 35th state. In the half century after the Civil War, the West was settled and the map filled in.
For five decades, the flag had 48 stars. Alaska, purchased from Russia in 1867, had been a territory for almost a century when it finally gained statehood in 1959. Months later, Hawaii became the 50th state and the 50th star. By the way, it's the only state that was once a kingdom.