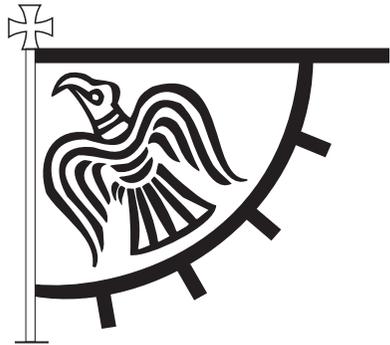


Raven

Roughly a millennium ago, intrepid Norsemen braved Atlantic storms to venture into the Great Unknown and came upon the coast of North America for the first time. As those hardy seafarers gazed upon the new land with awe, it is quite likely Native Americans, hidden along the coast, peered out at the Viking vessel with equal amazement. As far as we know today about verified European explorations and the historic and cultural uses of flags in Native American cultures, the flag flying on that first ship would have been the first flag to fly in North America.

According to Dr. Whitney Smith, in his *The Flag Book of the United States*, it seems probable that this first flag in North America was the most common Norse flag, known as “Raven, Terror of the Land,” or more simply “Raven.”¹ Legend recounts that the daughters of a Danish warlord, Ragmar Lothbroc, worked together to complete the first Raven in just one morning in the ninth century. Legend also teaches that the banner created by these sisters had magical properties. Although it lacked a device, when Lothbroc’s forces carried it into battle, if they were destined to emerge victorious, a live raven would appear flying in the middle of the flag, while it would hang blank and motionless if they were destined for defeat.



Courtesy W. Smith

Smith points to the image of a raven flag found on tenth-century coins unearthed in England and Ireland as evidence of the evolved use of the banner with the raven device. He describes the shape of the flag as “an irregular triangle,” and although we do not know the colors used for the raven or the border, we do know the field of this flag was white.

In the spirit of those resilient, brave, and adventurous Vikings, the North American Vexillological Association proudly adopts the name of this first flag

¹The legend and information on Raven, the Viking Flag, are taken from Whitney Smith, *The Flag Book of the United States*, rev. ed. (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1975), 11.

on the continent as the name of its annual scholarly journal. At the same time, the journal is dedicated to the need for multiple perspectives; thus, it also symbolically draws on the spirit of those Native Americans watching from the shore. Just as the Raven signalled the beginning of a new era for the Americas, so, it is hoped, will the birth of this journal signal another step forward for the social science of vexillology.

Included in the following pages you will find some notable scholarship recently produced in flag studies. Future issues will continue to build upon this precedent. Always, this journal will follow a basic premise of the North American Vexillological Association: it has no political, religious, or patriotic objectives. For some people the line between flag-waving and flag-studying, between emotional identification and intellectual inquiry, can become a blur. True vexillologists must be aware of the power and process of patriotism and nationalism, but they will constantly remind themselves these are cultural phenomena that we are analyzing, not preaching. Reflexive awareness of one's own enculturation is important for all who will engage in this discipline.

As the range of work in this premiere edition indicates, the journal invites discourse in all areas of vexillology, and it will deal with flags not only topical to North America but worldwide. Details on the juried review system and information on submissions may be found at the front of this issue.

The North American Vexillological Association committed itself to the creation and continuation of *Raven* at the organization's twenty-fifth anniversary annual convention, which was held in San Antonio, Texas, 9–11 October 1992. In the years ahead, let us hope that this publication shall become a lasting and important source to which readers can turn to find internationally respected articles in vexillology.

All legends have some basis in fact. You might say it is just my imagination, but as I look up at the masthead banner I see the bird magically come alive. The *Raven* has taken flight; we continue onward in the fascinating study of flags; persevering in the spirit of those voyaging Vikings, the intellectual victory shall be ours!

Scot M. Guenter, President
North American Vexillological Association