

## The Michigan Flags Project:

An Introduction to the Vexillology of Michigan coupled with a Guide to Research in these United States

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Kevin Harrington

This year [2000] I have been trying to gather a great deal of information on flags in Michigan, Ontario's neighbour state—on all kinds of flags: historical, national, state, civic and county, sport, ethnic and native, maritime and recreational, institutional, commercial, and corporate. This gathering of data was done as an experiment in determining what works as vexillological finding aids and where the access thresholds are.

The muse of vexillology, Semaia, inspired me—she pointed out that there were very few state-by-state flag histories, and dropped in my lap, in the way the Dannebrog was dropped from the heavens in 1219, three books—*Flags of Louisiana*, *Flags of Tennessee*, and *Flags of Texas*. In each of these the writer introduces historical flags (“six flags over”, etc.), the state flag with variations of it, a few regimental colours, a handful of civic and county flags, and flags used during the Confederacy—all three being southern states.

For a long time, Dr. Whitney Smith's work, *The Flag Book of the United States* (1970, 1975) has been the chief guide to state flags. Dr. Smith will be the first to say that the work is not exhaustive. It contains quite scholarly and reliable information, never equaled, on the state flags and some Native American flags but falls short in civic and county flags, and other flags of a local nature. (Of course, the adoption of civic flags has boomed in the last twenty-five years.)

Four books, then—but there are fifty states and various territories and twenty-five years of new information. American vexillology, despite its organizations, lacks scholastic leadership. It behooves NAVA to systematically examine these needs and, working with regional flag associations, such as GWAV and NEVA, and individual vexillologists, to develop an agenda of research to fully document state and local flags by a certain time period before this new century is much older. NAVA and every American flag association could well start by publishing indexes to their own publications.

My aim then is to provide a sketch, an outline of how to proceed in flag research at the state level. I chose Michigan, for a number of reasons, some fairly obvious such as its proximity to Southern Ontario. Michigan is similar in historical background to Ontario and central Canada, in its economic activities, in its geological structures, and its geographical dispositions. We share French exploration, British hegemony, forestry, mining, agriculture, automotive industry, pioneer settlement, immigration waves, language and accent, Indian traditions, strong seasonal differences, flora and fauna, the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway. (Major differences lie in the experiences of war, black/white demographics, urban decay, some aspects of government, and maybe in flag design.)



State Flag of Michigan—Brown, B, B-, V, Y, R, W/B+

## Seven Steps to Research at the State level

### 1. The Vexillological Literature (with application to Michigan)

*The Flag Book of the United States* (1970, 1975) One and a half pages on Michigan, one large colour illustration of the state flag, three significant dates. Mention of a governor's flag and an early regimental flag (Brady Guards). No mention of Detroit or other cities in the short section on civic flags.

*The Flags of Michigan* (John Robertson, 1877) This rare book is dedicated to the "war flags" or regimental colours of Michigan in Mexican Wars and the War between the States. Strange to say, it lacks any flag illustrations. It does, however, discuss flags of sovereignty over Michigan, the colours of the Brady Guards, the Great Seal of Michigan, and the origin of the state motto.

*State Names, Flags, Seals, Songs, Birds, Flowers and Other Symbols* (George Earle Shankle, 1938, 1941) Three short paragraphs on the seal of the state of Michigan; three lines on the flag.

*Flags of the United States* (William Crampton) Two brief paragraphs on the seal and flag.

*How Proudly They Wave: Flags of the Fifty States* (Rita D. Haban, 1989, 1995) One and a half pages on Michigan's flag and seal. Seems largely derived from Smith.

*Flags and Insignia* (National Geographic, 1917) Brief account of flag and seal.

*The Flag Bulletin*, (1997, no. 173) "Characteristics of American Civic Flags", (Alfred Znamierowski)

The two published indexes of *The Flag Bulletin* reveal no articles on Michigan.

*Flagwaver* This is the journal of the Great Waters Association of Vexillology which embraces Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana. Good coverage of civic flags of this region.

*NAVA News* There is no index, and I do not have a complete set, but I cannot remember articles covering flags of Michigan or its cities.

*Gaceta de Banderas* Occasional information and black-and-white drawings of civic flags.

*Proceedings of International Congresses of Vexillology.*

*Comunicaciones XI C.I.V. Madrid*, 1985, (1987) "Unusual city flags of the United States of America", (John M. Purcell) contains a brief account with colour illustrations of Detroit's flag.

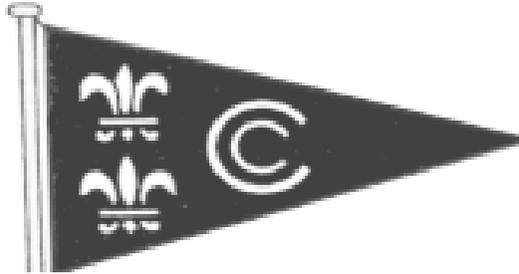
## 2. Para-vexillological Literature

*World Book* encyclopedia (1985) Detroit's flag is found on the colour plate

*Lloyd's Register of Yacht Clubs* (1966) Yacht & Sailing Club Burgees: Bayview, St. Clair, Saginaw Bay, Portage, Oscoda, Pentwater, Windmill Point, Mackinac Island, Old Club, Grosse Point, Detroit, Tawas Bay, Edison, Paw Paw Lake, Grosse Point Club, Little Traverse, Indian Lake, Diamond Lake, Grand River, Charlevoix, Eight Ball, Les Cheneaux, Ford, Macatawa Bay, Grosse Ile, Leland, Menomenee. Private Signals: John B. Ford III, no. 968; Henry Ford II (no. 972)

*Star Register of Yachts, Clubs & Flags* (1997) Bayview, Detroit Boat, Detroit YC, Diamond Lake, Eagle Lake, Ford, Grand River Sailing, Grosse Ile, Grosse Point, Gross Point YC, M & M, Macatawa Bay, Mackinac Island, Oscoda, Paw Paw Lake, Pentwater, Portage, St. Clair, Tawas Bay, Wyandotte,

*Complete Guide to Clubs & Flags* ( Stars Pub., 1999) as above.



*Detroit Country Club—W/B+*

*Das Flaggenbuch*, part II, (Germany, Defense Ministry, 1928) Yacht Club burgees: Kalkaska, Grosse Point Y.C., Bayview (Detroit), American Power Boat Association (Detroit), Lake Michigan Yachting Association, Country Club (Detroit), Detroit BC Yachtsmen, Bay City (Essexville), Inter-Lake Y.A., Monroe, Detroit Y.C., Yachtmen's Association of America, Northport Point, Onigaming (Houghton)

*Brown's Flags and Funnels* (J.L. Loughran, 1982) No steamship companies found with headquarters in Detroit or other Michigan ports.

*Echoes of Glory: Arms and Equipment of the Union* (Time Life Books, 1991) Regimental colours: 6th Michigan Infantry, 18th Michigan Infantry, 1st Michigan Infantry.

State blue books or almanacs or year books I haven't yet found one for Michigan but many states provide abundant information on their symbols in such annual publications. (Within the year I had found a copy in a famous Detroit used book store of the *Michigan Manual* of 1977-1978—there are colour illustrations of state symbols but no text. However it does quote (p.1) the Official

Pledge of Allegiance to the state flag, “*I pledge allegiance to the flag of Michigan, and to the state for which it stands, two beautiful peninsulas united by a bridge of steel, where equal opportunity and justice to all is our ideal.*”

### 3. Realia

This is a way of referring to actual flags that may be seen flying or displayed, mostly through personal visits to cities, states, ports, etc.

One might make a checklist on visiting a city to cover these places: state archives, state library, state capitol, city hall/municipal offices and their council chambers, port and marinas, drill halls or army barracks, museums, and ethnic clubs.

Examples: In Alpena, Michigan, a city flag is a display case in the lobby of city hall; the civic flag of Ypsilanti and that of a Greek sister city may be seen in the city council chambers. In downtown Detroit the Wayne County flag flies from the county building. Of course, a fluttering flag is most difficult to sketch or photograph, but it's a start and the sighting does validate or document the flag's use.

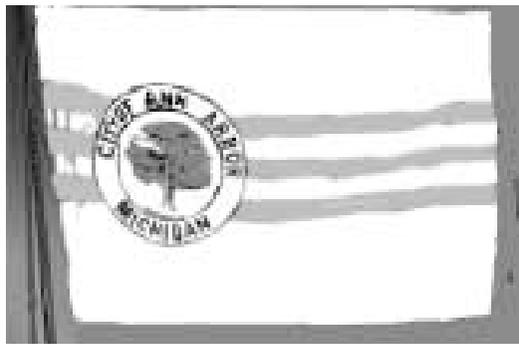


*City of Ypsilanti, Michigan—B/W*

#### 4. Media Information

Flag news and information appearing in newspaper, magazines, etc. on flags can be traced in different ways in libraries:

- (a) Periodical indexes, esp. Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. Generally material is identified directly under the subject heading Flags.
- (b) Vertical files—these are collections of clippings from the press, brochures, pamphlets, photocopied articles, etc. They have long been maintained by libraries, particularly the local history and/or reference sections. Now is the time to look through these before they disappear as libraries go on line and discontinue the practice of clipping and filing. The material may be under “Flags” for the national and state flags, or under “Emblems”, “Symbols”, or sometimes “Heraldry”, “Seals” too, and even “State Flag”, “State Seal”. However at the municipal level you might just find it under the city or county name plus the word “Flags”, “Symbols”, or “Emblems” or “Seal”.



*City of Ann Arbor, Michigan—V,N/W-O-W-O-W-O-W*

- (c) Go online as well at the libraries because often they will have the local newspaper indexed. (The index to local newspapers may also be a bound volume on the reference shelves.)
- (d) Local publications such as a journal of state history will have an index volume every so many years or at the end of each bound

volume there may be a yearly index. However I was discouraged when I could not find anything under “flags” in the index to the Michigan Historical magazine. But I then thought of looking over the contents pages of each volume, here material of interest soon jumped out at me. The explanation for the missing entry may be that the indexer was in the habit of entering only proper nouns, e.g. Michigan, Adams, not a common noun like “flag”.

In the very first two volumes of this journal were articles on the flag, seal, and other symbols of Michigan. It takes much longer of course to handle and peruse each volume. On the other hand there is the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections. It is in many volumes, but the indexers caught every use of the word flag and the index is quite helpful in determining such things as when the American flag was first flown, the British flag in the War of 1812, the giving of flags to Indian chiefs, etc.

If you can't get to the libraries of certain cities or counties, write, fax, phone or e-mail the reference librarian. State explicitly what you are looking for and the librarians will find the material. Be prepared to send a minimum of \$10 to \$25 dollars to start, whether or not they find anything, plus a charge for photocopying. One city library requires a payment of \$90 an hour for reference work.



*City of Jackson, Michigan—B,N/Y/R/B; Letters Y; Flowers V,R*

## 5. Internet

Material on state flags and seals is fairly easily accessed by searching under state name plus the word flag or symbols. I have tried city after city, likewise counties, but have rarely found city flag information on the web site. There often is the seal, in colour, and it may not take too long by e-mailing someone on city hall (names and addresses are given, e.g. the mayor or the clerk) to find out if the flag contains the seal, and that's more than halfway!

Of course there are many vexillophiles who maintain web sites with flag illustrations you can download. There is often no text or explanation, and sometimes a problem of authenticity exists.

Searching <michigan state seal flag> is productive but does anything new come out? Images of the flag may be copyright, e.g. entry from *Compton's Encyclopedia*.

For the flags and pennants of sports teams in Michigan, the internet can be effective—at least you will get the team logo image and then you can narrow it down as to how that logo might appear on a flag. I was lucky—I found the names of sports teams on a Silverdome (Pontiac) stadium website.

## 6. Fellow Members of Vexillological Associations

Contacting three members of NAVA who lived in the state of Michigan brought forth at least three flags so far, a county flag (Lenawee) and two city flags (Adrian, Port Huron) that may be in the process of changing. Rich Kenny has put together a great collection of civic flags, many of which he has displayed at NAVA meetings, e.g. in Chicago, civic flags of Illinois. I've often photographed these—finding the attractive flag of Redford Township gave me another level of government to consider! (I am particularly indebted to Michigan vexillophiles Mark Ritzenhein, Robert Kidd, and James Acheson.)



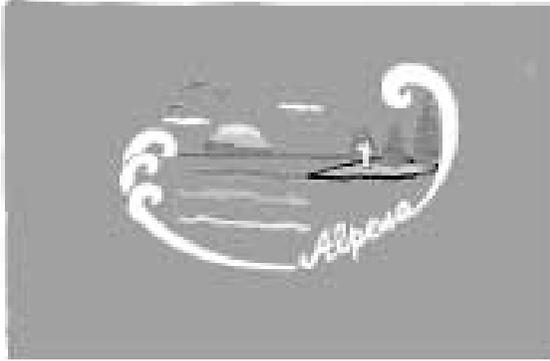
*City of Redford, Michigan—B/W*

## 7. Direct Correspondence

It is not hard to write a letter to a mayor or city/county clerk if you wish to find out about a civic flag. (The addresses are available in any large reference library, e.g. University of Toronto's.) Its composing will of course take some effort. The problem is getting a reply. There is a formula well-known in the advertising world that a six per cent response is not bad for any request for attention. Theoretically then a letter sent to 100 municipalities might engender six answers. You would think that with new technology, especially e-mail and fax, there would be a much easier exchange of information.

Unfortunately, I suppose, despite new technology, these are busy and stressful times, and no one wants to assume responsibility for extra work brought about by unsolicited requests from persons outside the organization. I base my observations on experiences with Canadian, American and more recently specific provinces and states. My letters, sent by regular mail to fifty Michigan cities and counties, netted two responses, a four per cent response. However with time this had increased to four, an 8% return. My letters were sent by regular mail because it was much easier to find mailing addresses for these fifty entities than to contact them all by Internet, plus the appearance on formal stationery might be better viewed. (On the other hand perhaps a child's scrawl would have been as effective!) Follow-up by e-mail had poor results—one answer. (An Alpena civic employee did e-mail me that I

could see the city flag in a display case in the lobby!) Telephone costs are prohibitive unless you know the exact person to speak to, but in the few cases I did try telephone follow-up, I received promises but no results.

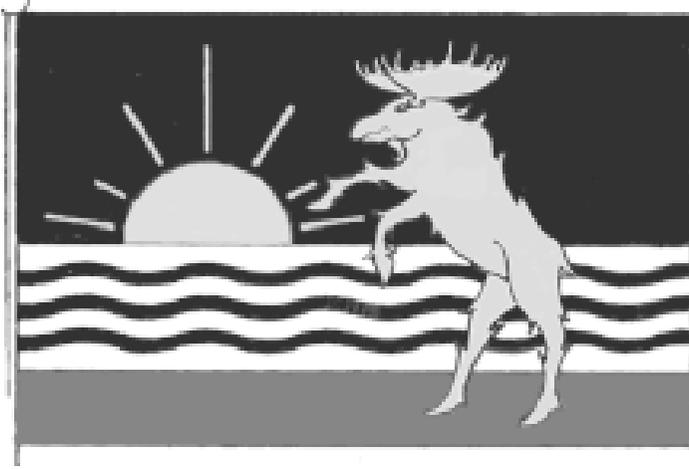


*City of Alpena, Michigan*  
Y,O,R,V,W/B-

So one must try direct correspondence but keep the total costs of follow-up in mind.

## **Conclusion**

The seven steps I advocate produced quite a number of flags for Michigan, close to a hundred. But what is more it produced a great deal of flag history, a flag pledge, flag usages, flag proposals, flag protocol, flag contests, as well as information on coats of arms, badges, seals, and floral and other emblems. I am confident that these steps applied assiduously by a North American vexillologist to any jurisdiction or authority—state, province or territory, even county, region, district, port, club, township, city, town, or village—will discover much to aid vexillological studies in our continent. The material is out there waiting for you! The steps may need to be expanded or modified to suit different regions. Let us network to share our explorations, successes, and the occasional blind alley.



*Proposal for new State Flag, 1973  
Au/B-W-B-W-B-W-B-W-V; Au Moose*

*This paper was presented at the 34<sup>th</sup> NAVA Meeting in Lansing, Michigan in October 2000 and received the Driver Award for best paper given that year.*

