



## *The Washington Flag Congress 2011*

### **Introduction**

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Beginning with the first International Congress of Vexillology (ICV), which was held in Muiderberg, Noord-Holland, The Netherlands in 1965, the biennial meeting of flag scholars from around the world has gathered a total of 24 times, and on one-quarter of those occasions the convocation has occurred upon the North American continent. ICV 3 was held in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1969; ICV 7 in Washington, D.C., in 1977; and ICV 9 in Ottawa, Ontario, in 1981. Six years later the Atlantic coast region was left for the Pacific when ICV 12 met in San Francisco, California, in 1987, and just before the turn of the millennium came ICV 18 in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1999. For its sixth North American meeting, and for the first time in its 46-year history, the ICV returned to an earlier host city for this 2011 gathering in the Washington, D.C., area.

One can trace the growth of the discipline of vexillology in several different ways, including reflecting on how the shifting locations of these biennial ICVs, all hosted by extraordinarily hard-working local vexillologists, moved from beyond the confines of western Europe and eastern North America to the Pacific Coast with the San Francisco meeting in 1987, then jumped the Pacific and dropped to the Southern Hemisphere for ICV 13 in Melbourne, Australia, in 1989. ICV 16, in 1995, ventured into Eastern Europe with the meeting in Warsaw, Poland, while two years later ICV 17 was held in Cape Town, South Africa. Global expansion continued with the first South American ICV, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2005, and then the first Asian ICV, held in Yokohama, Japan, in 2009.

The accelerating spread of the practice of vexillology can also be traced by the ongoing rise in the number of active vexillological associations holding delegate status for the FIAV General Assembly meeting held at each ICV. The first ICV consisted of 31 individuals and it set up a governing council consisting of representatives from two vexillological organizations—one European, one American—and a third elected individual. The first General Assembly was held at ICV 3 with twelve charter organizations. By the time of this Washington Flag Congress the membership roster had grown to 52 associations, with three more voted in during the meeting to become active participants at ICV 25 in Rotterdam in 2013.

Undeniably, then, vexillology has spread around the world, and the number of practicing vexillologists and vexillological societies (with their own scholarly publications and/or websites) has grown remarkably. But what about the goal of vexillology: the accumulation of verified data about flags, and not only data, but scholarly evaluation and interpretation of that data? Have those grown as well? Has vexillology made any inroads as a field of study? This is something that can and should be considered both quantitatively and qualitatively.

One way to do this would be to take the last three ICVs held on the North American continent and compare them for what sort of contributions they made to vexillology. This approach does offer a constant in time measurement, for there is a 12-year time span between ICV 12 in San Francisco and ICV 18 in Victoria, and another 12-year time span between ICV 18 in Victoria and ICV 24 in Washington, DC. Along with offering possible evidence and insights into ways vexillology has grown or evolved in this period of time, this exercise provides an opening context to begin a perusal of the rich range of papers included in this collection while also suggesting directions vexillology could or should be headed in the future.

The San Francisco Flag Congress (1987) resulted in 19 published papers in the proceedings, written by flag scholars representing 8 different countries. The Victoria Flag Congress (1999) resulted in 22 published papers in the proceedings, written by flag scholars representing 11 different countries. This current volume of the Washington Flag Congress (2011) contains 36 papers written by flag scholars representing 15 different countries (and representatives from at least 25 different countries participated in the Congress!).

How might we assess the range of topics covered at these ICVs? As is often the case in the scholarly study of flags, Dr. Whitney Smith has pioneered a way.

In 1992, Dr. Smith established a standard Vexillological Classification System (see *Flag Bulletin* 92). He later utilized this in 2002 to index the range of contributions published in *The Flag Bulletin* for the period 1992–2001 (see *Flag Bulletin* 203). A brief review of this system, followed by its application to the last three North American ICVs, suggests some ways vexillology has stayed constant over the years, and some other ways it has evolved, expanded, and grown.

#### Vexillological Classification System

0	Terminology
1	Theory
2	Documentation
3	Technology
4	Design
5	Symbolism
6	Usage
7	History
8	Vexillology
9	Miscellanea

For a fuller description of each of these categories and examples of the sorts of subtopics Dr. Smith suggests they cover, do see *The Flag Bulletin* 92 referenced above. Of course, one could argue that many of the essays included here and given at the earlier ICVs span several of these categories, and that is quite true. For simplicity's sake and to evaluate the general historical developments of vexillology as a social science, I have taken the liberty of assigning each essay to one general category where it seems most likely to fit, given Smith's system and the model he followed in *The Flag Bulletin* 203. Some might quibble about the placement of a particular essay here or there, but overall, this process does provide a summary overview of where we have been and how we have progressed, and it suggests where we might be headed.

Throughout its years of existence, as Smith has pointed out in the past, the majority of scholarship in vexillology has consisted of identifying and describing flags, putting them into taxonomies, and documenting their origins and histories. (Indeed, a scan of *The Flag Bulletin* 1992–2001 Index bears this out: four pages are devoted to all the listings in the Vexillological Classification System for Categories 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 combined, while Category 7, History, gets 24 pages alone!) Such research and writing is at the core of vexillology, and provides a valuable and necessary service. However, Smith has cautioned, and I would concur, that in studying flags and their roles in societies, we should not be satisfied with just describing and categorizing, we need to regularly strive for higher critical thinking skills such as interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and contextualizing. We need, as a discipline, to push further and deeper with inquiry into usage, into not only what flags look like, but how and why they affect people the way they do. Ultimately, vexillology should tell us not only about flags but about people—about the social groups that use them or have used them in the past.

Applying the Vexillological Classification System to these ICV papers from the last three North American congresses reveals that Smith was correct—overall, most work has been done in flag classification and description, on the origin and histories of flags. Still, there have been some significant shifts over time. At ICV 12 in 1987, 63% of the published papers fell into that category. At ICV 18 in 1999, 50% of the papers fell into that category. A threshold has been crossed since then, and although at ICV 24, the highest ranking category remained #7, History, it was only 33% of the total number of papers given at this most recent congress. By then, more of the papers were probing into the other aspects of vexillological inquiry included in Smith's taxonomy, and more and more of these scholarly works were crossing several categories listed in Smith's Vexillological Classification System, and doing so in sophisticated intellectual ways.

Between ICV 12 and ICV 18, there is evidence of growing interest in the study of flag technologies and the statistical analysis of flags. From ICV 18 to ICV 24 there are noteworthy increases in the study of flag design and symbolism. There is also evidence of a real spurt in the study of flag usage in different cultures and historical moments, a tripling of the number of presentations in these areas. There is also greater diversity across the categories. ICV 12 and ICV 18 both had papers spanning six of the ten possible categories in Smith's taxonomy, while at ICV 24 that number rose to eight of the possible categories.

Overall, what is the category that had grown the most significantly over the last 24 years? The answer would be #6, Usage—contributions related in some way to research into and analysis of flag usage. Perhaps not as rapidly as Smith had originally hoped, but clearly, vexillology is growing and evolving. As someone lucky enough to have attended all three congresses being discussed here, I can also testify from my anecdotal memory: each time the congresses were stimulating and rewarding experiences in intellectual engagement—but the depth of what could be learned and the level of sophistication with which the research was done, the new knowledge that the scholarship conveyed—this got better and better holistically each time, too.

Which leads us to these collected proceedings from the most recent ICV, the Washington Flag Congress of 2011. What follows are the 36 essays presented at that gathering. (Three of them, originally presented in Spanish and French, have English translations included.) Enjoy the wealth of information—and the spectacular color imagery that accompanies these essays! The essays are listed in alphabetical order according to the last names of the authors. You might browse the table of contents to get a sense of the wide range of topic areas, and remember this bit of advice: each essay begins with a brief abstract that you can quickly peruse to see if that essay

is one that might provide some answers to questions you have or that will enrich your understanding of flags in a way that you would appreciate.

Here are some quick topical groupings to help you get started dipping into the thousand pages of flag information that await you. If you are interested in Flags in Art, take a look at the essays by K. Hartvigsen, Herreros, Maddish, and Malgieri. For Flags changing in one place over time, consider Bartlett, Gregoric, and Klimeš. For Flag Design, go to Burton, van den Muijzenberg, and van Westerhoven. Interested in finding out about some Forgotten Flags? See Berry, Couceiro, and Engene. For Flag Influences, check out Brožek, Etchells, and Raeside; for focused Flag Taxonomies, consult de La Condamine, Healy, Heimer, Lupant, Parsons & Faul, and Schmöger. For Flag Conservation, turn to the experts at Spicer & Deutsch and Thomassen-Krauss; for Flags in History, see what Ansoff, Grimes, Kelly, and Martucci share. For some romps through varied cultural uses of flags, look to Borošak, Guenter, Platoff, and Poels. Jakopič documents a patriotic celebration; J. Hartvigsen explores a flag-related legal procedure. Herold waxes philosophical on the essence of vexillology while Raullet models different ways to spread it in your local communities.

Ancillary materials are included as a CD bonus. Those who attended the Congress in particular will appreciate this electronic access to the ICV 24 Program; the ICV 24 Schedule; the ICV 24 Roster; the *NAVA News* 211—ICV 24 Report excerpt; the ICV 24 Flag proposals; the Group Photo; a Photo Gallery of memories from the gathering with images generously shared by Emil Dreyer, Jan Oskar Engene, Francisco Gregoric, Sebastià Herreros Agüí, and Ted Kaye; a sample delegate voting card from the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of FIAV, and even an MP3 of the official FIAV anthem which debuted at ICV 20 in Stockholm, *Marcia Vexillum* !

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There are many whom we all should thank vigorously for making ICV 24 such a success. The Organizing Committee worked long hours for two years of preparation and then behind the scenes to ensure a smoothly running week of activities; the members came together and fashioned a spectacular Washington Flag Congress 2011 experience. This group consisted of NAVA President Hugh Brady, Chesapeake Bay Flag Association President Jack Lowe, Program Chair Gustavo Tracchia, Venue Chair Peter Ansoff, and Congress Coordinator Ted Kaye. They were supported in turn by more than thirty red-shirted NAVA volunteers, from the Chesapeake Bay Flag Association and beyond, who stepped forward to offer hard work and dedicated service to make the Congress enjoyable for all. (Volunteers, although your names are not all listed here, do know you are very much appreciated and sincerely thanked!)

Two in particular need to be singled out for shaping and bringing these Proceedings to fruition. Gustavo Tracchia coordinated the submission and acceptance of papers for the Congress, supplemented by NAVA's Scientific Committee. Managing Editor Ted Kaye handled much of the transformation from ICV presentations to this final version. To both of these gentlemen a good deal of credit and praise should be given.

And, finally, our executive leaders, whose dedication to the ongoing expansion and academic usefulness of vexillology steered us to the point of having this ICV, also deserve recognition and gratitude, both on the continental level for guiding the North American Vexillological

Association, the host of the ICV, and on the global level for overseeing FIAV, the federation of the many vexillological associations of the world. Thanks, then, to the NAVA officers for 2011: President Hugh Brady, First Vice President Gus Tracchia, Second Vice President Annie Platoff, Secretary Bill Trinkle, and Treasurer Ted Kaye. Thanks, also, to the FIAV Executive: President Michel Lupant, Secretary-General Charles A. Spain, Jr., and Secretary-General for Congresses Graham Bartram. Volunteers all, they serve because they believe in the positive possibilities that can come through the ongoing advancement of flag studies.

As you read the collection of essays here before you, it is hoped your personal knowledge of flag studies will be broadened and deepened. May these scholarly works serve you in your own research, and stimulate you to make future contributions to the available writings in this fascinating topic area. Vexillology can and will go forward. Join us, collectively, in that effort: keep studying those flags!

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