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Top: Flag of South Africa. Source: shutterstock.com
Right: View of the Old City from the Citadelle. Source: Ted Kaye
Editor’s Note | Note de la rédaction

NAVA is a non-political organization. That means that the association, regardless of the opinions of our officers and members, refrains from advocating on behalf of or against any candidates or issues—even those related to flags. While our status as a 501(c)(3) organization merely prevents us from participating in political campaigns of individual candidates, the association has a long tradition of refraining from any political activity. In our publications, we strive to avoid political bias as well; when we publish works on controversial flags or flag-related practices, our aim is to report the facts as well as we can and to allow our readers to form their own opinions. Flags are often political symbols, and articles about them will frequently deal with political events. However, NAVA’s approach will always be to analyze and understand the way that flags are involved in such events, rather than passing judgment on the events themselves. Should we err, we welcome your corrections at VexillumEditor@nava.org.

However, it’s clear there is another form of bias that is present in our pages—the bias toward novelty. Our content largely derives from two main sources: research our readers perform and submit, and attempts to expand upon information about flags that are in the news. In all news reporting, coverage emphasizes what is different today than it was yesterday. “War Declared” is a headline, while “Peace Continues” is not. This, of course, gives readers an unbalanced sense of how life is lived for most people most of the time. Flag coverage is similar: “Judge Rails Against State Flag” is news, while “81 Judges Leave State Flag Untouched” is not. The stories of the many who cherish and honor existing flags and participate in long-standing flag-related practices are often left untold in the haste to cover dramatic changes in flags. While such a bias toward the novel is understandable, we must do better if we are to present vexillology in all its aspects. To that end, I will endeavor to include more stories of the persistence of old flags and practices. You can help, too—please send in your stories! Tell us how you practice flag-flying and other rituals, and what it means to you when you see a well-established flag that you revere. If you’re involved with community organizations that work with flags, let us know about that, too.

In this, the last issue of Vexillum for 2018, we are pleased to bring you a round-up of recent association happenings, such as a summary of the Annual Meeting in Québec City and the results of our recent election. There is happy news of an expanded flag collection at a Canadian museum. Chris Maddish brings us up to date on the changes made to the symbolism of the colleges of Yale University since 1991, when Gus Tracchia performed the research that we published in our last issue. New flags have been adopted in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Metairie, Louisiana.

As always, we welcome your contributions, criticism, and feedback. Wishing you a happy new year filled with flags, I am

Yours truly,
Steve Knowlton
Editor, Vexillum
The “V” in “NAVA”

It was great to see everyone at our recent meeting in Québec. It was everything that a NAVA meeting is supposed to be: a fine venue, a varied and interesting program of presentations, an inspiring (if chilly) tour of the historic Citadelle, dinner at the Parliament Building, and lots of camaraderie. You'll find extensive coverage in this issue and on the NAVA website.

There were also some encouraging signs concerning the issues that have divided NAVA for so long. Two in particular stood out for me. One was Annie Platoff’s Toast to the Association at the Whitney Smith Dinner. One of the core sentiments in her toast was that anyone interested in “flag design, flag history, flag law, or some other aspect of flags” has a home in NAVA. (Annie’s original text is shown at right.) Her words reflect both an ideal and a reality: we are, and should be, a “big tent” for all who share our strange passion for symbols made of colored cloth.

The second point was an exchange at the end of the business meeting on Sunday morning. Jim Croft spoke eloquently about NAVA’s core mission, as stated in our Articles of Incorporation, “to promote vexillology as the scientific study of flags”. He recalled a conversation with our founder, Whitney Smith, in which Whitney made a distinction between vexillology (studying flags) and vexillography (designing flags). Pete Loeser responded by noting that, while we honor Dr. Smith as the founder of our association and the coiner of the word “vexillology,” we must acknowledge that NAVA’s scope has expanded considerably since 1967. He opined that our path to the future must begin from where we are now, not where we were a half-century ago.

Annie’s toast, and the points made by Jim and Pete, bracket a dilemma that NAVA faces as we begin our second 50 years. Some argue that we should not be involved in flag design activities (vexillography) because they do not fall within the scope of “scientific study”. Others point to the reality that our members have always been involved in flag design in various ways, and that we’ve published guidelines and articles on various aspects thereof. Also, the flag design aspect of our activities is the one that has attracted the largest share of attention from the general public, and is part of what the public associates with the term “vexillology”. Like it or not, that genie is out of the bottle.

So, how do we resolve this dilemma? The answer, I think, is that both sides in the discussion need to give a little. The purists need to acknowledge that flag design is not incompatible with the “scientific” aspect of our mission. As I stated in a letter to the editor of Flag Research Quarterly last year, it is appropriate for us to “analyze the factors that distinguish a successful flag design, to encourage the public to incorporate those insights into their flag-design efforts, and to provide impartial technical assistance to such efforts when requested”.

On the other hand, those who are involved in flag design efforts must be careful not to cross the line into advocacy, or even the perception of advocacy. This may involve some rethinking and revision on our part. For example, the title of our signature publication, Good Flag Bad Flag, is catchy but unfortunate. Saying that a flag design is less likely to be successful is not the same thing as saying it’s bad. This is particularly true when we use existing flags, especially national flags, as examples. Flags are touchstones of respect and pride, and referring to one as “bad” can be offensive and counterproductive.

The bottom line is that we need to modify Dr. Smith’s dichotomy to reflect the reality of our association as we face the future. The “V” in NAVA stands for vexillology, and it includes vexillography along with other aspects of flag study. We also need to carefully review our current and future activities to make sure that we respect the “scientific” aspect of our stated mission. Annie, Jim, and Pete all laid down markers for us in Québec. Let’s continue the discussion.

Peter Ansoff
President, NAVA
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NAVA 52: Celebrating Les Drapeaux in Québec City

NAVA’s 52nd Annual Meeting took place in Québec City October 12–14, 2018. In attendance were 77 vexillologists and guests from 26 states and provinces, as well as four countries outside of the United States and Canada. The meeting was held on the campus of the École nationale d’administration publique, a branch of the Université du Québec, while the nearby Hotel PUR hosted many of the attendees.

The first event of the conference was the annual Preble Lecture, open to the public. Our speaker was Jean-Pierre Gendreau-Hétu, a scholar of wide-ranging interests. He couldn’t decide which of two topics to present, so he divided his time in half and gave both talks!

In “Synchronicity in Vexillology, or Could the Fleurdelisé Have Somehow Played into Georgia’s Second Change of Flags?”, Gendreau-Hétu recounted his time as a journalist in the Republic of Georgia during the early 1990s, as the nation was breaking away from the Soviet Union. The pattern of crosses in the 2004 Georgian flag closely resembles the pattern of cross and fleurs-de-lis on the Québec flag, and Gendreau-Hétu wonders whether, as parliamentarians chose new iconography for the republic following the overthrow of Eduard Shevardnadze, they drew inspiration from Québec’s fleurdelisé banner.

The second part of the Preble Lecture was “Folk Heraldry in the Time of the Motor Vehicle: Québec, Car Plates, and Identity.” Gendreau-Hétu traced the use of license plates on cars in the province of Québec as they increasingly exhibited markers of francophone identity in ways that mirrored the iconography of the Québec flag.

Following the Preble Lecture, attendees enjoyed the President’s Reception with wine, light snacks, and fellowship. Afterward, over 60 attendees trooped over to local restaurant Mo Resto for a group dinner (many relying on smartphone translation apps to puzzle out the menu), capped off by Vexi-Bits. Seventeen attendees briefly shared highlights of their personal flag collections and stories about the flags.

On Saturday morning, the conference officially kicked off with the opening ceremony, as President Peter Ansoff welcomed members, especially those who came from Ireland, China, Australia, and St. Pierre and Miquelon, and NAVA’s anthem, “Winchester Fanfare”, played.
A morning of flag-centric presentations followed and the afternoon was taken up with a tour of the Citadelle of Québec, an active military base built in the nineteenth century to defend the city against possible attack from the country to the south. As home to the francophone Royal 22e Régiment of the Armée canadienne, La Citadelle displays many military flags, badges, and other regalia. A visit to the Royal 22e Régiment Museum, with its numerous battle-flown flags and other fascinating artifacts, concluded the afternoon.

Saturday evening found the group at the Parliament Building, where they enjoyed a tour of the ornate lobby and the chambers of the National Assembly and the former Senate (which was abolished in 1968). While each room held fascinating treasures of historic and symbolic iconography, one highlight was the Salle des drapeaux, in which are hung recreations of eight significant flags from the history of Québec. The tours were followed by the traditional group photo, then the Whitney Smith Dinner in the former parliamentary dining room, now a public restaurant called Le Parlementaire.

Over a repast featuring some uniquely Canadian treats (maple-flavored gelatin!), NAVA member Carmen Barcena gave the keynote address. Ms. Barcena is the Head of Ceremonial Protocol Services for the Government of Canada, and she regaled the group with tales of “Preparing for the G7” meeting that was held in La Malbaie, Québec, in June 2018. Her team of six oversees an inventory of 40,000 flags in an Ottawa warehouse and is constantly challenged to ensure that their specimens match the latest flag specifications issued by the governments of visiting dignitaries. Properly displayed flags make envoys to Canada feel welcome and respected, which is the purpose of Ceremonial Protocol Services.

Sunday morning started with the annual business meeting. Because elections were held online this year, the meeting was devoted to a review of the association’s affairs led by Peter Ansoff, followed by questions from the membership. Another batch of fascinating presentations rounded out the morning. Kin Spain, representing the Hemisflag Committee, invited all to attend the 28th International Congress of Vexillology and NAVA 53, to be held in San Antonio, Texas, July 15–19, 2019. See http://www.texflags.org/hemisflag.htm. Al Cavalari conducted an auction of flags donated by attendees, including some rare or unique items, such as a hand-sewn flag of the Communist Party of India, circa 1970.

The conference concluded with the awarding of the Captain William Driver Award to Rachel Phelan, whose talk on her historical and physical analysis of a flag used in the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin took the honor. Hearty rounds of applause were extended to all who helped put the conference together, namely Luc Baronian and his organizing committee, the volunteers who helped with the weekend’s events, the Presentation Review Committee, and the Flag Design Committee (see box for a full list). After a very short NAVA executive board meeting (2 minutes, to plan future meeting dates), the weekend culminated in a group dinner for 35 at Noctem Artisans Brasseurs.
NAVA 52 Presentations

Flags in the Classroom – Tyler Amick
Floral Elements in Modern Local Flags in China – Xing Fei
When Pigs Fly – Kevin Harrington
Small Wonder: The Camp Color of the Royal Highland Emigrants – Matthew Keagle & Gwen Spicer
The Vexillological Frontier: Non-Flagged Geographical Areas and Birthright Flags for Canada – Christopher Maddish
The Sixteen-Star Flag: Strawman of the Rebellion – David B. Martucci
What is Cartographic Vexillology?: Understanding the Use of Maps in Flags – Carlos A. Morales-Ramirez*
Captured! James Connolly’s Green Flag of Ireland – Rachel Phelan
Soyuz and Symbolic Union: Representations of Unity in Soviet Symbolism – Anne M. Platoff
National and Provincial/Territorial Symbols in Municipal Flags in Canada: Patriotism at the Community Level? – Rob Raeside
Flags and Risk Management in the Corporate Environment: War Stories from the Digital World – Greg Slayden

* Published as “Cartographic Vexillology of Subnational Flags in North America” in Review of International Geographical Education Online (RIGEO), vol. 8, issue 2 (Summer 2018).

Merci Beaucoup

The NAVA Executive Board and the Organizing Committee for NAVA 52 extend their gratitude for the many contributors, supporters, and volunteers who made the event possible.

We especially thank:

Fiscal Sponsors:
CRW Flags for underwriting the President’s Reception
The Portland Flag Association for underwriting the Preble Lecture
Bear Flag Museum, CRW Flags, Elmer’s Flag & Banner, The Flag Guys, Jeff R. Bridgman Antiques, Herold Flags, and smALLFLAGS.com for underwriting the Driver Award

Speakers:
Jean-Pierre Gendreau-Hétu for the Preble Lecture
Carmen Barcena for the Whitney Smith Dinner keynote address

In-Kind Sponsors:
The Flag Shop (BC) for the large meeting flags
Aannin & Company for the small meeting flags
Promex GmbH for the meeting pins
Dixie Flag Mfg. Co. for storing and shipping past meeting flags
L’Étendard for lending poles and flags

Vendors:
Hotel Pur (host hotel), Intercar (buses), Le Parlementaire (Whitney Smith Dinner), Université de Québec/ENAP (presentations venue)

Volunteers:
Organizing Committee:
Luc Baronian (chair), Peter Ansoff, Amber Atteberry, Jim Ferrigan, Ted Kaye
Flag Design Committee:
Zach Harden, Ted McNabb, Dean Thomas, Chantal Zakari
Presentation Review Committee: Luc Baronian, Rafael Chacón, Carlos Morales-Ramirez
Local Assistance:
Mary Ansoff, John Bertrand, David-Roger Gagnon, Lee Herold, Chris Maddish, Rich Monahan, Dave Martucci, Bill Trinkle

NAVA 52 montage

1 President Peter Ansoff.
2 Mary Ansoff and Joan Merrington at registration desk.
3 David Martucci during his presentation.
4 First-Timers Lunch.
5 Jim Brown presents at VexiBits.
6 Luc Baronian at opening of NAVA 52.
7 Steve Wheatley on tour of the Citadelle.
8 Annie Platoff offers toast to NAVA at Whitney Smith Dinner.
9 Matthew Keagle on tour of the Citadelle.
10 Jim Brown and Shayne Campbell dressed for the Whitney Smith Dinner.
11 Flag socks.
12 Companions Lunch.
13 Driver Award Presentation, Rachel Phelan and Peter Ansoff.
14 Boy Scouts: Alex Spinelli, Jim Ferrigan and Charles Spain.
15 Outgoing Executive Board from left: Ted Kaye, Jim Ferrigan, Steve Knowlton, Luc Baronian and Peter Ansoff.
16 Whitney Smith Dinner toast to absent friends by Doreen Braverman.
17 VexiBits presentation by Jim Croft on right with Dave Martucci on left.
18 Parliament’s Hall of Flags with Rob Raeside and Nicolas Hugot.

All photos, pages 4–7: Ted Kaye
New Arms and Flags for Yale Colleges

By Christopher Maddish

Recently, Vexillum published an article by Gus Tracchia on the flags of the residential colleges of Yale University. Those flags are based on the coat of arms of each college. In August 2017 two new undergraduate residential colleges opened at Yale University, named for the American printer and statesperson Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) and civil rights activist and Episcopal priest Pauli Murray (1910–1985). At the same time, Calhoun College was renamed; it is now known as Grace Hopper College and was also granted a new coat of arms. Consequently, three new coats of arms were added for the undergraduate colleges of Yale University. It is expected that armorial banners for each college will be fabricated in due course.

The coat of arms for Pauli Murray College has three white, eight-pointed mullets on a chief of red (figure 1). Five-pointed mullets are common heraldic devices for the Murray family name. In the arms of Pauli Murray College, the mullets are said to represent her work to spur changes in “race relations, women’s rights, and the cultural prescription of gender identities”. The blue and white disc counter-charged on a field of white and blue is based upon stationery that Murray used.

The coat of arms for Benjamin Franklin College is a quartered shield (figure 2). Upon quarters one and four is a broken bend of white on a field of blue, which represents a lightning bolt. Quarters two and three have a red field with a single white fleur-de-lis on each field. The fleurs-de-lis refer to Franklin’s position as America’s first ambassador to France. The arms of both Murray College and Franklin College were designed by University Printer John Gambell.

Calhoun College was renamed after protests spurred debate among the students, alumni, and faculty of Yale. The college was originally named for John C. Calhoun (1782–1850) in 1930. Calhoun was an alumnus of Yale who had a prominent place in American politics during the nineteenth century. In positions such as vice-president of the United States and senator from South Carolina, Calhoun was an influential advocate for the institution of slavery and the right of states to secede from the union.

One major protest against the name of Calhoun College took place on April 29, 2016. Part of the protest consisted of students holding pictures of modified arms of Calhoun College. Instead of bearing the words Urim and Thummin written in Hebrew (as did the original Calhoun College arms), the protesters’ signs had handwritten names of other noteworthy persons inserted as possible replacements for Calhoun’s name (figure 3). Some names included Harriet Tubman, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and Rosa Parks.

In the end, the university’s board of trustees determined that, in the words of President Peter Salovey, “John C. Calhoun’s legacy as a white supremacist and a national leader who passionately promoted slavery as a ‘positive good’ fundamentally conflicts with Yale’s mission and values.” One of the suggested names from the April 29 protest, shown in the in the center of Figure 3, second row from the front, was “Grace Hopper”. That name was chosen within a year of the protest and announced on February 2, 2017.

Grace Hopper (1906–1992) was a United States Navy officer, computer scientist, and alumna of Yale. Hopper created the first data processing language, FLOW-MATIC; it formed the basis of the language COBOL, which is still in use today. On a more familiar note, Hopper coined the computer terms “bug” and “debug”.

The arms of Grace Hopper College consist of a yellow dolphin on a blue field, with a multitude of white discs and billets upon the field (figure 4). Upon a chief argent is an engrailed black fess that subtly memorializes the black engrailed saltire of Calhoun College’s arms. The heraldic dolphin honors Hopper’s service in the Navy. Finally the billets and discs reflect the zeros and ones of fundamental binary computer code. Three people were responsible for the design of Hopper College’s coat of arms: artist historian Steven Scher, Yale University Printer John Gambell, and Jonathan Corum, a graphics editor at the New York Times.

Christopher Maddish teaches high school biology in Pennsylvania at the Mathematics, Civics, and Sciences Charter School of Philadelphia. He shares his ideas for flag designs and observations on vexillology online in his blog “The Voice of Vexillology, Flags & Heraldry” at http://zebratigerfish.blogspot.com
The Ralph Spence Flag Collection: A Legacy Gift to Settlers, Rails & Trails

Settlers, Rails & Trails Inc. (SR&T) is a museum in Argyle, Manitoba—home to the Canadian Flag Collection, the second largest assemblage of flags in the country. It was fitting that this year on Canada’s National Flag Day (February 15, 2018), seven large boxes containing over 250 flags arrived at SR&T, having been carefully packed by the staff at the Canadian Museum of History (CMH) for their long journey from Québec to Manitoba.

The flags were donated by the Right Reverend Ralph Spence, retired Anglican bishop of Niagara, former chancellor of Renison University College in the University of Waterloo, and president of NAVA 1977–78. Among his flag-related accomplishments was designing the city flags of Hamilton and of Burlington (both in Ontario). In 2016, Spence had donated his personal flag collection of more than 3,500 items to three organizations: the Canadian Heraldic Authority (headquartered at Rideau Hall in Ottawa); the Canadian Museum of History (Gatineau, Québec); and SR&T.

SR&T’s president, Shayne Campbell, chose the 250 flags from a catalog provided by the CMH, ensuring that the selection complemented the Argyle museum’s collection of other historic, corporate, regional, sport, and special occasion flags. With this accession, SR&T now holds over 1,300 items in its Canadian Flag Collection. “Ralph’s collection of flags is truly wonderful, and will be a wonderful new addition to SR&T’s existing displays. We are excited to display flags that our visitors here in Western Canada rarely have access to. Bishop Spence is a wealth of information and we are also grateful for the many telephone conversations discussing details of his collection,” said Campbell.

Currently the museum has the “Vintage, Rare, & Royalty” selection of flags on display, with highlights such as the Canadian governor general’s car flag (ca. 1935), Prince Charles’s car flag (2012), a World War I Victory Loans flag (1919), and a roll of four uncut hand-waver Canadian Red Ensigns (ca. 1890).

The museum collects flags from across Canada, including the nation’s embassies and high commissions around the globe. Due to its far-reaching collection, it has become known as “Canada’s Flag Depository”.

Figure 1. Selections from the Ralph Spence Flag Collection on display at Settlers, Rails & Trails Inc. in Argyle, Manitoba.

Figure 2. Enlarged view of poster: https://nava.org/vexillum-4/ralphspenceflagcollection.html

Figure 3. Selections from the Ralph Spence Flag Collection on display at Settlers, Rails & Trails Inc. in Argyle, Manitoba.
New Flag: Tulsa • Oklahoma

After more than a year of debate, the Tulsa city council recently voted to approve a new city flag. Through vigorous marketing by its designers since late 2016, the flag had already come to represent the city, and now it is official. The design replaces a little-used flag adopted in 1973, which had the city’s seal on a white background; city officials could identify only four places where it was ever displayed.

Local boosters Jacob Johnson and Joey Wignarajah led a group which proposed a city flag design competition, aiming to create a new symbol that could be used widely throughout the city and become a rallying point for Tulsans. None of the city’s three previous flags (from 1924, 1941, and 1973) had ever been flown widely.

In late 2016, the #TULSAFLAG campaign launched a website, tulsaflag.com, that called for designs, referring to a 2015 TED Talk by Roman Mars and the flag design principles articulated in NAVA’s Good Flag, Bad Flag. High-production-value graphics and videos invited participation of designers and the community. The social media outreach touched over 500,000 people.

Its pitch read, “Do we already have a flag? Um yes, well, kind of. ‘So what’s wrong with that one?’ Our current flag isn’t really a flag to begin with. It is actually just our city seal on a white background. City seals are meant be viewed close up on paper, because of the amount of detail—not on a flagpole viewed from 100 feet away. Also, it’s copyrighted, meaning we can’t mass produce this flag. Even if we wanted to fly this flag at our homes and businesses, it would be illegal. City ordinances forbid Tulsans from displaying their own flag. We believe Tulsa needs a real flag. A flag by the people and for the people. A banner we can be proud to fly. It’s time for a great flag that represents all Tulsans.”

The design process began by asking respondents to an online poll, “What is an event that was critical in defining and shaping Tulsa?” Respondents said: Discovery of oil (34%), Black Wall Street and Tulsa Race Riots (30%), the Council Oak Tree and Founding of Tulsa (14%), and Downtown’s Art Deco Style (8%). After tallying the poll results, the #TULSAFLAG organizers prepared a design brief that included the community input summary, a history of Tulsa, and the principles of flag design (with multiple tongue-in-cheek attempts to pronounce “vexillology”). The brief was posted online before the design competition opened.

The competition received nearly 400 submissions, which a design panel narrowed down to three finalists for a text-to-vote campaign ending in May 2017. The independent panel of seven judges comprised academics; art historians; design, branding, and materials professionals; and entrepreneurs from the Tulsa community. Its stated goal was to pick designs that represent the community input and are beautiful, memorable, and unique.

Each finalist design took into consideration events and landmarks that have shaped Tulsa’s history. Johnson said, “The design panel did an incredible job at choosing fundamentally great designs that will make great flags and will also give the public a diverse set to choose from.” Of the 8,167 votes cast by text, the winning design by Jordan Winn received more than half.

The dark blue, cream, red, and gold flag includes a shield with a red circle and a beige star. The design elements represent different aspects of Tulsa and Oklahoma history. The shield recalls the Native American tribes forced to relocate to this region of the country and echoes a similar element on Oklahoma’s state flag. The red circle represents the blood shed and lives lost in the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, and the beige star in the center represents Tulsa’s bright future.

After the winning design was announced, a backlash against change rattled Tulsa’s elected officials. While supportive of updating the flag, some city councilors questioned whether the process had been inclusive enough. The use of social media and the absence of a “none of the above” option posed concerns. Former mayor Dewey Bartlett joined a vocal minority of critics, expressing on Facebook his dislike for the three options.
In an interesting twist, a British vexillographer, Alan Hardy, launched a rival effort, launching a social-media effort called “Tulsa Flag Take 2” that attempted to supplant the Tulsans’ effort with alternative designs. Because of these concerns, the design waited in limbo without official approval.

Undeterred, Johnson and Wignarajah mass-produced the new flag design and flooded the city with its image. Residents, businesses, and even the current mayor enthusiastically used the design, which appeared on t-shirts, stickers, advertisements, murals, and—of course—flags. Winn, the flag’s creator, got a tattoo of the flag on his arm, saying, “It’s a gift to the city… If they want it, cool. If they don’t, that’s cool, too.” (Winn, a professional graphic designer, had submitted ten proposals in the competition.)

Ultimately, after over a year, the city council took up the matter of the flag. City Councilor Ben Kimbro noted that the design had effectively become the city’s new flag. “It’s on ball caps and shirts and shorts and socks and flying at my house, so it has been publicly adopted so it needs to be adopted by the city… The response to it has been overwhelmingly positive.” Mayor G. T. Bynum added, “The design has already been embraced by Tulsans… It is time to make it official.” He had worn a t-shirt with the flag’s emblem for all his public appearances on September 18 (9/18 day, recalling Tulsa’s area code).

On October 3, the city council’s 7–0 vote finally brought the two-year effort to a successful conclusion. The flag’s promoters, Johnson and Wignarajah, celebrated with Winn at City Hall. And writer Kevin Canfield summarized the results in the Tulsa World: “In the end, it was ordinary Tulsans, not the people running the city, who delivered a new flag.”

Tulsa’s flag is licensed under Creative Commons Zero, meaning that the design is in the public domain, and the Tulsaflag.com website provides full specifications, vector art, and varying file-size images for public use.

New Flag: Metairie • Louisiana

Metairie, a suburb once part of New Orleans, lies in an unincorporated part of Jefferson Parish and has no corporate identity. However, on October 24, 2018, the Parish Council gave its imprimatur to a flag proposed by Metairie locals, to represent the community of Metairie and Metairie Ridge and to promote civic pride among its residents and regional collaboration with its neighbors”. (Metairie Ridge is a local geological feature that extends from New Orleans west through Metairie.) Introduced in concert with the region’s tricentennial anniversary, the flag represents an area with about 150,000 residents.

Members of the Young Professionals of the Jefferson Chamber (a business advocacy organization) spent 18 months researching vexillography and the community’s history, and created a flag whose distinctive colors and symbols reflect the area’s diverse French-Spanish-American heritage, rich Louisiana history, and connection to New Orleans. The main charges on the flag are three gold fleurs-de-lis and coeurs-de-lis (flowers and hearts of the lily), representing tradition, wisdom, prosperity, opportunity, faith and innovation. The red and blue field, divided by a narrow white stripe, signifies the principles of natural liberty and equal justice guiding a limited, transparent government.

“The Metairie flag is quite literally a banner opportunity to promote excitement and interest in where we live,” said Matt Miller, chair of the Jefferson Chamber Young Professionals. “With a cohesive symbol for Metairie, and more broadly the entire unincorporated region along Metairie Ridge, we hope to unite the area and make a lasting cultural impact.”

A panel of 19 NAVA members recently evaluated the new flag of Metairie at the request of its designers. They each rated the design on a scale of 0–10 and provided comments. Their ratings of Metairie’s flag averaged 8.1, a very high score among flag designs. In fact, in NAVA’s 2004 survey of 150 city flags, only ten designs were rated above 8.0. (Since then, many cities have improved their flags, but Metairie’s would likely still rank among the best in the U.S. today.)

While NAVA itself does not judge flags, the panel of NAVA members strongly supported the new design. One especially enthusiastic judge wrote: “I would give this flag a 10. It is simple, clear, and easy to see the elements. Once you see and understand it, it would be memorable, even for children. The fleurs-de-lis on blue quickly make the New Orleans area apparent and are historically meaningful. The coeurs-de-lis need to be introduced to non-natives, but this is not an impediment, as all flags need to be introduced, and presumably will strike a chord in Metairie. It has excellent use of color, not over- or underdone. The white stripe at an angle really sets off the two elements well. And the flag properly separates base color and metal color according to ancient guidelines. It pleases the eye and looks balanced. It speaks to its home without words or letters, well done. It has familiar symbols, yet is distinctive and pleasing. People would likely be attracted to it and enjoy seeing and using it.” Another wrote: “The design is beautiful and symbolic. Great flag!” And Clay Moss (son of former Metairie residents) summed up the design, saying, “Very good design balance relative to all components, and thoughtful representation of south Louisiana’s collective ethnic heritage”.

The flag was first raised officially on All Saints Day (1 November) in Metairie’s Veterans Memorial Square.
Flag Design “Rules”: An Idea with Many Aspects

By John M. Hartvigsen

A recurring topic of interest among flag enthusiasts has been the design of flags. Some seek to discern and prescribe what makes an attractive flag, while others are curious to find out the ways and means that a flag moves people. Attractive flags are often the most revered and displayed; conversely, some well-beloved flags incorporate design elements that would be disapproved by many standards. This paper will present examples of design which bring out aspects of flags that may be overlooked in prescriptive vexillography but which nonetheless provide important fodder for analytical vexilology. A review of the evolution of commonly-accepted flag design standards will form the basis of the discussion.

Vexillology as a Subdivision of Heraldry

Vexillology and vexillography were for many years considered to be a subdivision of heraldry, and F. Edward Hulme declared as a matter of fact that “flag-devising is really a branch of heraldry, and should be in accordance with its laws, both in the forms and colours introduced.” However, modern vexillologists are more apt to describe the two scholarly pursuits as sister disciplines that have considerable overlap, while each has different outlooks and approaches that may not be applicable or acceptable for the other.

A Civil War Vexillographer

The U.S. Civil War spurred the creation of many flags, particularly on the Confederate side. William Porcher Miles, a slaveholder and ardent secessionist leader, chaired the Confederate government’s Committee on the Flag and Seal. He also designed the battle flag for the Army of Northern Virginia, which has come to be known popularly as the “Confederate Flag” (figure 1). While his views on slavery and white supremacy are out of step with twenty-first century societal norms, his views on flag design are in step with modern views of vexillography (flag design):

A Flag should be simple, readily made, and, above all, capable of being made up in bunting. It should be different from the Flag of any other country, place or people. It should be significant. It should be readily distinguished at a distance. The colors should be well contrasted and durable, and, lastly, and not the least important point, it should be effective and handsome.

A student of heraldry, Miles wrote a formula for good flag design that was consistent with his time and foreshadowed concepts that would appear later in vexilographic guidelines:

1. No words or letters-of-alphabet should appear.
2. Arms, supporters, mottoes, laurel-wreaths, seals, badges, flags, small shields, sunrises, mountains, trees, scenery, scattered stars, meaningless ornamentation and filigrees,—all these are deplorable on flags. Detail-ridden flags are an eye-sore.
3. A principal device, when set nearer the staff instead of centrally, and shown LARGE, helps toward the good effect and recognition of the flag, and towards its support by the wind.
4. A device should not be polished and shaded and titivated up to “look real”.
5. Colours should not be outlined in Black. A device can be drawn by the colour of the field (light or dark).
6. No graduations of colour should appear.
7. Colours should be restricted to the limited standard flag colours, otherwise they cannot be included correctly in printed flag sheets.
8. No two near-related colours should be set together / e.g.:—Turquoise and Blue, except in small details.
9. Adjacent colours should be photographically distinguishable in tone.
10. The Heraldic Rule of Tincture (metal against colour), need not be insisted upon, on flags. Fimbriating ruins a flag design.
11. Proportions of a flag and its parts should be such as are easy to remember, and should be stated in the blazon.
12. If children can draw the flag correctly on a postcard, so much to its credit.
13. Flags should be easily recognizable at a distance even in black-white photography.
14. Flags very soon perish by weather and should not in design be costly to manufacture.
15. The terms “dexter”, “sinister”, “right”, “left”, are to be avoided;—rather say “staffward and flyward” OR SUCH.
16. The Cross is A CHRISTIAN Symbol.
17. Printed sheets of flags should be fielded a very pale buff, to show up the whites. (White is a flag colour.)

Figure 1. A Civil War vintage Battle Flag of the Army of Northern Virginia. Source: https://acwm.org/blog/myths-misunderstandings-confederate-flag
A Heraldic Plan to Redesign State Flags

In 1973, Walter Angst, a Swiss-born conservator at the Smithsonian Institution, published an article titled “Heraldic Plan for Redesign of the State Flags”, which included design guidance closely tied to the rules of heraldry (figure 2). Angst explained that heralds of old were familiar with “what today is called vexillology, the science of flags”. However, he concluded, “The science of flags has sadly declined since 1373”. Angst did not list rules as Loynes had done. Rather, he gave a description of his thoughts on good flag design, following the rules of heraldry:

The simpler its design the better it is. In heraldry, which is the basis for vexillology, a flag's symbolism was expressed either by a “canting” design—a play on the surname—or by alluding pictorially to some family situation, peculiarity or special deed. Colors were distinct, arranged in stark contrasts of warm and cold, dark and light, with easily legible figures, stylized and exaggerated in their characteristic forms. The division of the field obeyed heraldic rules based on the need for maximum visibility and immediate identification.6

Of the fifty state flags, Angst only found Maryland's flag to be perfect as a flag constructed along heraldic principles.


In 2013, Steven A. Knowlton and Laureen P. Cantwell revived the idea of using heraldry to redesign state flags (figure 3).7 They noted that “among the most common motifs in U.S. state flag design is the placement of a state seal or achievement of arms on an undivided field” and “that the use of seals on state flags should be recognized as a genre of flag design in which the creators seek to [quoting Perry Dane] ‘convey a sense of specific legal authority’”.8 They argue that “despite its prevalence, this style of design has proven dissatisfactory to flag enthusiasts”, and conclude that “ vexillologically speaking, however, sigillar flags fail the test of distinctiveness and visibility”. Yet they acknowledge that state flag designs “remain politically difficult to amend”.

The article includes illustrations in which heraldic or quasi-heraldic symbols found on state flags are rearranged to create armorial banners. While these attempts to embody heraldic principles in flag design produces flags that vary in their visual appeal to me, they show that heraldic rules for design, while offering the advantage of conforming to a centuries-old body of practice, do not guarantee a flag that will hold visual appeal and win the hearts of the people it aspires to represent.

**Good Flag, Bad Flag**

In 2001 Ted Kaye, then the editor of Raven, compiled a booklet titled Good Flag, Bad Flag that outlined “principles of good flag design”. His sources included “the distilled wisdom of many people who have written on the subject, including Philippe Bondurand, Frederick Brownell, William Crampton, Michael Faul, Jim Ferrigan, Richard Gideon, Kevin Harrington, Lee Herold, Ralph Kelly, Rich Kenny, David Martucci, Clay Moss, Peter Orenski, Whitney Smith, Steve Tyson, Henry Untermeyer, and Alfred Znamierowski”. These seventeen vexillologists, likely with strong opinions on many flag topics—including flag design—undoubtedly provided Kaye with a huge mountain of material, from which one can infer that his role was necessarily more than a simple compiler and editor. Indeed, the distillation process may have produced some points that not all his sources would agree upon. This is not to contend that Kaye's distillation was his own creation or was incorrect, but rather that there is room in vexillology for differences of opinion on details of flag design, and that Kaye's summation necessarily was guided and shaped by his own views and is not the authoritative and final word on the subject of flag design.

The booklet was published by the North American Vexillological Association in hard copy in 2006, distributed to members, and placed on the NAVA website so that it is accessible by the general public.9

The Five Basic Principles of Flag Design listed in Good Flag, Bad Flag are:

1. **Keep It Simple**: The flag should be so simple that a child can draw it from memory...
2. Use Meaningful Symbolism: The flag's images, colors, or patterns should relate to what it symbolizes...

3. Use 2–3 Basic Colors: Limit the number of colors on the flag to three, which contrast well and come from the standard color set...

4. No Lettering or Seals: Never use writing of any kind or an organization’s seal...

5. Be Distinctive or Be Related: Avoid duplicating other flags, but use similarities to show connections...

The Guiding Principles of Flag Design

The North American Vexillological Association and the United Kingdom’s Flag Institute, both organizations desiring to promote good flag design, signed an agreement on May 16, 2014, to appoint a joint commission that would produce a report outlining “The Guiding Principles of Flag Design”. Some asked, why create a new set of guidelines for flag design when Good Flag, Bad Flag is still available? One answer is that for scholarly organizations, subjects are always open to being revisited and reviewed. It had been a decade since Good Flag, Bad Flag was published. One area that had changed was methods of manufacture. When William Porcher Miles wrote his guidance for flag design in 1861, he stated, “If a flag can be made out of cotton bunting, so much the better.” He likely meant a flag with pieced-together and appliquéd components, which was common in the nineteenth century. Mass-produced flags in the twentieth century were made with a silkscreen process. The cost of making up individual screens for each color made flag designs using many colors more costly. In the past decade, the proliferation of digital printing has changed the manufacture of flags substantially.

The Report produced guidelines for “Vexillological Best Practices” that cover general rules of flag design, use of color, consideration of the physical structure of flags, display of devices, and selection and use of symbols on flags. The report was published in NAVA News and is posted on NAVA’s website.11 “The Commission’s Report on the Guiding Principles on Flag Design” is the most comprehensive and complete guidance on flag design; however, the subject of flag design has proven controversial, and the emotional nature of flags often plays a role in the questions of flag design or redesign.

Finding the Exceptions to the Rules

A chart made to compare the five sets of guidelines for flag design shows that many principles appear repeatedly (Table 1). A few seem to be universal: avoid lettering, don’t use seals, and keep the number of colors to a minimum. However, some flags fail to follow the rules, but still “work” and are nevertheless widely flown and beloved in their communities. On the other hand, some attempts at flag design fail to produce a widely-used flag. There is a certain serendipity in flag design and adoption; circumstances beyond simple graphic and physical design influence a population's embrace of a flag. One overriding rule, therefore, could and should be added: “Does it work?” (that is, does the flag appeal to the populace it is intended to represent).

Members of the Joint Commission did not include this as one of their listed “Vexillographic Best Practices”; however, they did include the following in the introduction:

The principles contained within it are only guidelines, as for each “don’t do this” there is almost certainly a flag which does just that and yet works. An obvious example would be item 3.1 “fewer colors”, yet who would deny that both the flag of South Africa and the Gay Pride Flag work well, despite having six colors each.

An important part of a flag is its aesthetic appeal, but as the 18th century Scottish philosopher, David Hume, wrote, “Beauty in things exists merely in the mind which contemplates them.” Different cultures will prefer different aesthetics, so a general set of principles, such as this report, cannot hope to cover what will and will not work aesthetically. What it can do is advise on design elements that tend to work well, and warn of those that do not work.12

Individuals might question the efficacy of adhering too inflexibly to guidelines, no matter how obvious and valid they may appear. Roman Mars, who supported principles of flag design in his TED talk described above, received comments that caused him to rethink the issues of flag design at least to some degree. In a follow-up to his talk, Mars wrote:

Sticking to these principles [of flag design] does not, sadly, guarantee that you’ll design a great flag (or anything else), but it’s a good start. However, as with all design, there are always outliers that violate the conventional principles, and still manage to delight and inspire. So, here are seven of my favorite flags that totally break the rules—and in doing so make the world a more interesting place. After all, all rules are made to be broken, design rules more than most.13

Mars then went on to list flags that he identified as “7 Fantastic Flags That Break Every Design Rule” (figure 4):

1. South Africa: Multi-colored gorgeousness…. It gracefully combines the color schemes of the African National Congress and the British and Dutch flags. All the colors (and the history linked to them) converge on the flag and point to a new future for South Africa. Despite the rogue additional color, the flag is simple, striking and memorable.

2. Maryland: A beautiful mess…. It’s not simple—no child could possibly draw this from memory—but the striking combination of the gold and black Calvert coat of arms along with the red and white Crossland coat of arms… rocks my world.

3. California: A bold republic rises…. This flag doesn’t need the lettering, but I’m also certain there’s something about the anachronistic moniker of “California Republic” that makes the California state flag resonate with its citizens.

4. Wales: Flagrant rule-breaking. The dragon on the Welsh flag has a few too many details to qualify as “simple” in my book, but as someone on Twitter wrote me, “If the Welsh flag breaks the rules, then the rules are crap.” I hear ya.

5. Bhutan: An awesome dragon. This flag also has far too many details, and therefore loses its power when seen from a distance, but P&! it, that’s an awesome dragon!

6. Moscow: A city favorite…. A Muscovite sent me her flag and said that though it may break some rules, Moscow loves its flag. I think that’s great. Loving your flag is the only rule.
that really matters. The other five are just a method to get you there. Plus, that dude's slaying a dragon!

7. Zheleznogorsk: Behold, the insane flag of a secret city. Hell yes! The “secret” city of Zheleznogorsk in Russia was founded in 1950 to make weapons-grade plutonium for the USSR. The flag featuring a Russian bear splitting an atom might be too complex for a child to draw easily, but every child who sees it will want to draw that flag! It would also make a great t-shirt, poster, sticker, album cover, tattoo…

I add to Roman Mars's list of flags that violate rules of flag design, but nonetheless work (figure 5):

1. The U.S. President's Flag. While some might derisively name this flag an “S.O.B.” or “Seal on a Bed sheet”, it is a magnificent flag that identifies the U.S. presidency and its pride and unity due to the historical associations each of the symbols and some symbols (U.S. flags and bald eagle) which appear to symbolize the federal rather than the state government. Yet, when we understand the why these symbols were selected in at Utah's statehood in 1896, its symbolism becomes powerfully apparent.

2. The U.S. Army Color. It has writing emblazoned upon it, including the military service's name, date of creation, and even a motto: “This We'll Defend”. It features the old War Office Seal, which is too complex to be drawn from memory, on a white background. However, for me and millions of soldiers and veterans, it calls to mind the proud traditions of military service, dating from before the founding of the nation, that we carry on.

3. Napoleon's Flag of Farewell. This military color displayed at the final military review of Bonaparte before his first exile to Elba in 1814 is too complicated, displays too many symbols, uses too many colors, and has lettering and numerals in its design. Still, it is a handsome flag that works because each of the elements of its design recalled for his guard an occasion of military triumph.

4. The Utah State Flag. The design, strictly speaking, is not a seal, but an emblem based on the State Seal which was in place when Utah achieved statehood in 1896. It uses letters for a motto and the state's name. It has a multitude of symbols and some symbols (U.S. flags and bald eagle) which appear to symbolize the federal rather than the state government. Yet, when we understand the why these symbols were selected in at Utah's statehood in 1896, its symbolism becomes powerfully apparent.

5. The Mexican flag is very popular in its homeland, despite the following flag design rule violations:

a. On one level, the name of the state, Utah, may have been included to identify the flag and the state it represents. However, it is also a subtle reminder that the pioneers who settled the area chose the name Deseret, which they maintained had the meaning of “honey bee” and tied in with the state symbol, the beehive. Congress refused to adopt a name strongly favored by these pioneers, but instead forced the name Utah upon them.

b. The years shown on the flag do not only represent the year the Mormon pioneers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley (1847) and the year of statehood (1896), but they also define a period known as the struggle for statehood. It took almost fifty years for the United States Congress to admit as a state the area which is now Utah. During that time neighboring states were admitted on all sides, with each taking a chunk of Utah Territory on their admission.

c. The two U.S. flags displayed behind the shield and the bald eagle perched on the top of the shield are a way of saying, “It took half a century, we were denied repeated requests, but we made it; Utah is finally a state!”.

d. These symbols show how the early citizens of the new state viewed themselves and how they wanted others to see them.

6. The Mexican national coat of arms: It features the symbols displayed are shaded to make them realistic pictorial depictions.

e. Scene depicted: The central emblem shown on the coat of arms is a scene from Mesoamerican mythology.

f. Use of wreaths: A wreath of both oak leaves and laurel leaves is depicted.

g. Not distinctive: Colors of the Mexican tricolor are also those of Italy, which displayed them first. Without the arms, the flag could not be distinguished from that of Italy except by proportions and the shades of the colors.

Despite these “violations”, it is can certainly be maintained, as the Joint Principles of Flag Design acknowledge, that for each “don’t do this” that the Mexican flag does, there is an element that makes the flag beloved among the Mexican populace. An earlier piece described in detail the ways that the symbolism of the Mexican flag serves to inculcate a sense of national pride and unity due to the historical associations each of the elements of the flag design carries.14
Figure 5. Top row from left: The United States Presidential Standard, the United States Army Color, Napoleon’s Flag of Farewell. Bottom row from left: Utah, Mexico.
Source: wikipedia.org; shutterstock.com; flickr.com. Detail of Antoine-Alphonse Montfort, Napoleon Bids Farewell to the Imperial Guard at Fontainebleau, April 20, 1814 (1825), accessed via Artstor.

Conclusion
Flag design is not just about a list of rules, no matter how complete. While the general trend of flag design principles certainly brings flags closer to being distinctive and easily understood at a distance, there is no guarantee that flags designed along those lines will result in a flag that is understood by those in the communities that are served. In addition to clean design, vexillographers should also consider history, heritage, symbolism, emotion, branding and usage when proposing new flags.

Table 1: Comparison of Flag Design Principles. Some principles are condensed from their original wording.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HERALDIC PRINCIPLES (ANGST)</th>
<th>MILES</th>
<th>LOYNES</th>
<th>GOOD FLAG, BAD FLAG</th>
<th>GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF FLAG DESIGN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL OF INTRICACY</td>
<td>The simpler its design the better it is.</td>
<td>A flag should be simple.</td>
<td>Detail-ridden flags are an eye-sore.</td>
<td>Simplicity is important in creating a design that is easy to recognize and simple to reproduce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A flag should be readily made.</td>
<td>Flags should not be costly to manufacture.</td>
<td>Avoid having a different design on the reverse of the flag as this will undermine memory.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUFACTURING</td>
<td>A flag should be capable of being made up in bunting.</td>
<td>A flag should be easily made.</td>
<td>Avoid having a different design on the reverse of the flag as this will undermine recognition and make the flag much more expensive to manufacture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLORS</td>
<td>The colors should be well contrasted.</td>
<td>No graduations of colour should appear.</td>
<td>Using fewer colors will keep the design simple and bold.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colors were distinct, arranged in stark contrasts of warm and cold, dark and light.</td>
<td>Colours should be restricted to the limited standard flag colours.</td>
<td>Contrast is important — use light colors on dark, and vice-versa.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A flag should be readily made.</td>
<td>No two near-related colours should be set together.</td>
<td>If the use of non-contrasting colors is unavoidable, make use of outline colors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

John M. Hartvigsen was President of NAVA 2014–2017. This paper was originally presented as part of a longer talk at the 49th Annual Meeting of NAVA in Ottawa, Ontario, on October 18, 2015.
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<td>SYMBOLISM</td>
<td>It should be different from the Flag of any other country, place or people. It should be readily distinguished at a distance. It should be effective.</td>
<td>A principal device helps toward the good effect and recognition of the flag, and towards its support by the wind.</td>
<td>Use Meaningful Symbolism: The flag’s images, colors, or patterns should relate to what it symbolizes.</td>
<td>Avoid using features in the design that will cause the flag to become dated or obsolete. A single device should be placed to ensure that it will be seen with the flag in flight or at rest. The symbols on a flag should be both distinct and representative. A flag should represent the totality of any particular community rather than individual parts of it.</td>
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**DISTINCTIVENESS**

| RENDERING OF DEVICES | Easily legible figures, stylized and exaggerated in their characteristic forms. The division of the field obeyed heraldic rules based on the need for maximum visibility and immediate identification. | A device should not be polished and shaded and titivated up. A device can be drawn by the colour of the field. | Be Distinctive or Be Related: Avoid duplicating other flags, but use similarities to show connections. | A flag needs to be distinctive to stop it being mistaken for another. Compare it to neighboring and similar flags to check that they are not easily confused. A flag should emphasize its own identity over that of any higher level grouping. Only include symbolic references to other entities if there is a clear, direct relevance. |

**APPROPRIATE USE OF DEVICES**

| OTHER CONSIDERATIONS | Proportions of a flag and its parts should be such as are easy to remember. | Abandon rectangles only when meaningful. Consider fabrication methods. All rules have exceptions, but depart from these principles only with caution and purpose. Design a flag that looks attractive and balanced to the view and the place, organization, or person it represents. | Think what the flag will look like when flying in a brisk breeze and when hanging down on a still day. The edges of a flag need to be defined so that it stands out from its environment. The way a flag flies means the hoist is more visible than the fly. Devices that are placed in the fly of a flag are often obscured when the flag is hanging limply. | No words or letters-of-alphabet should appear. The Cross is a CHRISTIAN Symbol. No Lettering or Seals: Never use writing of any kind or an organization’s seal. Use of writing on a flag defeats its purpose. Seals, coats-of-arms, and logos are usually too complex on a flag. It is better to use an element from these devices. Avoid representing any particular feature in multiple ways. |
Lessons from American City Flag Redesign Efforts

By Ted Kaye

Introduction

Vexillologists generally study flags after their design and adoption. Seldom do we have clear insights into the processes by which flags are designed and adopted. Even less often do we have the opportunity to participate in or influence those processes. However, in recent years a number of municipalities in the United States have redesigned their flags, or adopted flags for the first time. Members of NAVA and other vexillologists have followed closely, and in some cases been part of, the activities surrounding flag design and redesign in the twenty-first century. We have learned much about the considerations—both aesthetic and political—that surround the debate over municipal flag adoption efforts. This article focuses on the lessons that may be drawn from examining recent city flag redesign efforts in the United States.

In 2003, NAVA published American City Flags, and followed that by conducting an internet-based survey in which participants rated the design qualities of the 150 flags in the book. While subsequent news coverage in nearly every city spurred discussion among the general public, only a handful of governing bodies re-examined their flags, and even fewer actually changed them. In 2006, NAVA published Good Flag, Bad Flag (GFBF)—a summary of commonly accepted principles of flag design—in a redesigned web-friendly and hard-copy format. The new edition of GFBF brought the basic “rules” of flag design to a mass audience for the first time.

But in 2015 a TED Talk by radio and podcast host Roman Mars, later posted as a video on the internet, triggered a wave of city flag design and redesign in the United States (and beyond). Titled “Why City Flags May Be the Worst-Designed Thing You’ve Never Noticed”, the talk has been viewed 5 million times. In it, Mars describes the basic principles of flag design as presented in Good Flag, Bad Flag; shows examples of successful and unsuccessful city flags; and concludes with a call for cities to improve their flags.

Figure 1. The opening frame of the 2015 TED talk by Roman Mars.

Mars asserts:

There is a scourge of bad flags—and they must be stopped. That is the truth and that is the dare. The first step is to recognize that we have a problem... I’ve seen first-hand what a good city flag can do in the case of Chicago. The marriage of good design and civic pride is something that we need in all places. The best part about municipal flags is that we own them. They are an open-source, publicly owned design language of the community. When they are done well, they are remixable, adaptable, and they are powerful. We could control the branding and graphical imagery of our cities with a good flag, but instead, by having bad flags we don’t use, we cede that territory to sports teams and chambers of commerce and tourism boards... But a great city flag is something that represents a city to its people—and its people to the world at large. And when that flag is a beautiful thing, that connection is a beautiful thing.

As we move more and more into cities, the city flag will become not just a symbol of that city as a place, but also, it could become a symbol of how that city considers design itself, especially today, as the populace is becoming more design-aware. And I think design awareness is at an all-time high. A well-designed flag could be seen as an indicator of how a city considers all of its design systems: its public transit, its parks, its signage. It might seem frivolous, but it’s not.

“In my crusade to make flags of the world more beautiful, many listeners have taken it upon themselves to redesign their flags and look into the feasibility of getting them officially adopted. If you see your city flag and like it, fly it—even if it violates a design rule or two. I don’t care. But if you don’t see your city flag, maybe it doesn’t exist, but maybe it does, and it just sucks, and I dare you to join the effort to try to change that.

A large number of U.S. cities so far have answered the call issued by Mars. Watching, advising, and interacting with those efforts can provide vexillologists an active laboratory of flag design and adoption.

After NAVA published the results of its 2001 survey of U.S. and Canadian state, provincial, and territorial flags, I asserted a formula for adoption of state flags which can be adapted to city flags as well. The steps to actually getting a city flag changed to a successful design are:

1. Create public discontent with the flag or enthusiasm for change.
2. Get city government agreement that a change is necessary.
3. Create a process to receive designs.
4. Name a proper committee to judge them.
5. Have the city council vote yes or no.

Recent experience in U.S. cities bears out the suggestion that this technique is a course of action most likely to result in the enactment of new flag legislation.
Status of Redesign Efforts

As of mid-2017, I had examined about 100 city flag redesign efforts begun in the previous two years. At that time, about half of the cities had flag-design efforts in the idea stage. In a sense, those didn’t count, as they had not found traction for progress. But they show the kind of person who might initiate the process—sometimes a media figure, often a designer or an activist, and sometimes an elected official. These instigators often proposed multiple designs. Of the rest, about a quarter of the cities had active efforts under way, some with the endorsement of the city government and some without. The sponsors were sometimes individuals, new groups, or existing organizations (such as arts commissions, community promotion agencies, or schools), or even departments within the city government. Another quarter had nearly reached the end of a process—selecting a flag design—but had stalled at the finish line. These failed efforts mostly reflected a lack of political groundwork, with minor exceptions. But about half of the cities had new flags adopted.

Lessons Learned

What can vexillologists learn from these efforts, and share with those who are interested in city flags and their redesign?

The most important lesson is that the work is less about flag design than it is about the political process. In fact, as NAVA president Peter Ansoff has pitifully observed: “Designing the flag is the easy part…”10 While we vexillologists have articulated and publicized basic design principles as they apply to flags, we continue to learn about the pitfalls and best practices in the flag-adoption process. Those have more to do with group decision-making, public relations, political considerations, and democracy.

In fact, Roman Mars observed that some cases of poor city flags are “discouraging enough to make you think that good design and democracy just simply do not go together.”10 It seems that in many cases, a city’s leaders confuse representing the city government with a flag and representing the city as a whole with a flag. The question is, does the flag represent just the city’s government—mayor, council, bureaus, employees—or does it represent the entire city—all of its residents, its institutions, its history? This confusion may explain the predominance of city seals—the ultimate symbol of the city government—on flags.11

When we examine the efforts that have not advanced beyond the idea stage, it appears that it is counterproductive to argue to retire the current flag and to propose a new design at the same time. That is, the decision to change a flag can be undermined by the distraction of considering a new design. So it seems imperative to seek and obtain city agreement to change a flag before advancing any new design.

In fact, nearly all of the stalled efforts omitted the important initial step of lining up political support for flag change. Some campaigners exhibit a naïve belief that a good redesign will be self-evident and that once elected officials see it, they will embrace it. Others believe that the weight of public opinion after a design is selected will sway elected officials. But while flag design is an artistic process, flag adoption is clearly a political process.

Common objections to flag change include: the city faces more important issues (why is a city flag important?); we lack resources for new flags (this will cost money); the current flag is part of our history (the designer was a good person); there’s no compelling reason for change (nobody’s complained about this); and, a new flag might be unpopular or non-representative of the city (let’s not stir up a hornet’s nest). Counterarguments to these objections center on: the costs are minimal, especially since most current flags are rarely flown widely; the to-be-retired flag will be honored as part of the city’s history; the new flag can be part of the city’s “brand”—a tool of economic development; and, the flag can inspire civic pride and community cohesion.

Here are twelve lessons to be learned from examining over 100 flag redesign efforts begun between 2015 and 2017, with overlapping vignettes from cities demonstrating the lessons:

1. Advance approval of the concept and process from elected officials greatly increases the likelihood of the successful adoption of a new flag design. Without it, the likelihood of success is significantly lower.

A widely remarked-upon example of terrible design, the flag of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, certainly deserves an update. Graphic designer Steve Kodis led a long effort, bringing together the city’s design and activist communities. Under the umbrella of “Greater Together”, he connected the organizations AIGA-Wisconsin, Ink to the People, and 89.9 Radio Milwaukee.12

Greater Together held several community workshops on flag design and drew interest from aldermen and the mayor. After a competition that received 1,006 submissions, five judges narrowed them down to 50 semifinalists and five finalists.13 The judges—three design professionals, a historian, and a vexillologist—made changes in each finalist design. The public rated the finalists on a 0–10 scale; there were over 7,000 responses and some campaigning by the designers. “Sunrise over the Lake” won and was unveiled in a large public event on June 14, 2016. While some Common Council members and the mayor had been supportive, and many people simply call it “the new flag”, it has not yet adopted (recently it came before city council only to be referred to the arts commission). Meanwhile, Kodis has promoted it as the “People’s Flag of Milwaukee”, calling on the citizenry to “contact your alderperson” and posting vector artwork and full specifications (including Pantone numbers) online.
2. Although this may be obvious, attempts to create a flag for a city without a flag fare better than efforts to replace an existing flag. (There is one fewer obstacle to overcome.) Because Aberdeen, Washington, had no flag, local resident John Barclay approached the city council in June 2015 to propose the concept. With its encouragement, and the support of the Aberdeen Revitalization Movement (which wrote, “sometimes we chance to happen upon an idea whose time has come”), he created a design and brought it for approval a year later. His presentation included a discussion of the basic principles of flag design. The council voted on June 29, 2016, to adopt the flag as the city’s official flag, with one dissenting vote from councilwoman Tawni Andrews, who said the design reminded her of Alvin and the Chipmunks.

3. It is counterproductive to propose a new design before obtaining agreement to change the current flag. Most efforts that began with asking a city to adopt a single proposed design have not proceeded past the idea stage.

Gabe Re, an art director and graphic designer in Albuquerque, New Mexico, published a pitch for a new flag on his website in 2015. He identified the challenges with the current flag (giving it an “F” grade, citing GFBF principles), saying “we can do better”, and proposed an alternative “inspired by the folk art of the American Southwest, the state’s natural landscape, and the red clay of the city’s Rio Grande river”. However, after his initial excitement, he put the effort on hold when he found no enthusiasm from city officials.

4. Providing guidance on flag design principles leads to better designs and stronger winners—nearly all efforts cite the basic principles presented in GFBF.

Columbia, South Carolina, the state capital, had suffered negative flag publicity around the Confederate Battle Flag, which had been removed from the capitol grounds in 2015, so it was eager for positive news. In the spring of 2017, the Columbia Design League (CDL), in partnership with One Columbia for Arts and History, secured city council approval to collect ideas and designs from the public for a new city flag, offering a $2,500 prize. Its attractive website asked “Need a Flag Design Crash Course?” and offered the GFBF principles. 547 designs were submitted and a team of nine NAVA members served as judges to narrow them down to ten finalists plus nine alternates. Under the leadership of Lee Snelgrove (executive director of One Columbia), the CDL committee removed one of the finalists as too closely resembling the Confederate Battle Flag and substituted another design. It then found that one student submission had been plagiarized from a Kentucky state flag design proposal, so it was removed. The public rated 18 designs on a 0–10 scale during the summer of 2017, and a team of local experts then sent a final proposal to the city council, which has not yet acted. One Columbia functions as the city’s arts commission, making the process semi-official.
5. Organizations can be more successful than individuals acting alone—creating a group to promote flag change, or recruiting existing organizations to sponsor the effort, significantly increases the chances of success. (This is a natural reflection of the political process; it demonstrates to city decision-makers that there is broader support for flag change.)

Bellingham, Washington, had no flag, so in early 2016 the Downtown Bellingham Partnership organized an unofficial contest to design one. Brad Lockhart, a popular local graphic designer, created the winning design. Over the apparent opposition of the mayor, he secured the endorsement of the Port of Bellingham and the Nooksack and Lummi Tribal Councils, had the flag flown by dozens of local businesses and hundreds of citizens, and secured 1,200 supporters on Facebook. After a year in limbo, the flag was officially adopted by the city council on April 24, 2017.

6. Involving students advances the cause—whether they drive the effort or are simply assured inclusion in it, their involvement can induce political support.

High school students in Albany, Oregon, learned that their city had no flag. Forming GUAVA (the Greater Unified Albany Vexillological Association) under the guidance of teacher Cole Pouliot, they created a design and took it to the city council, which recommended they conduct a community competition. Albany’s public information officer Marilyn Smith created a page on the city website, which drew media attention and 40 submissions. A review committee of seven community leaders narrowed the field to five finalists, which were then offered on the city’s website, and on ballots at the local library and city hall, for the public to rate. The city council considered all five finalists, and on August 10, 2016, ultimately adopted the design rated most highly by the public—the design originally proposed by GUAVA.

7. Public voting is not always necessary—half of the flags were adopted by city councils without a public consultation or vote, relying instead on committees or the council itself to decide.

Dan Dunne, a member of the city council of Liberty Lake, Washington, launched an effort via Facebook in May 2017, coordinated by the Spokane Valley Arts Council, to design a flag for the city and its surrounding community, with a prize of $300. He received 46 entries. The council narrowed them down to 14 semifinalists and asked several designers to make minor changes. It selected three finalists for consideration by a small group of representatives of the essential organizations of the community: the Spokane Valley Fire Department, the Liberty Lake Sewer and Water District, the Central Valley School District, the city government, the Kiwanis Club, the Rotary Club, and the local newspaper the Liberty Lake Splash. On December 18, 2017, the group chose a winner, designed by Rebekah Wilding.

8. Smaller cities seem to have more success. Nearly all of the cities adopting new flags have populations of fewer than 150,000. Perhaps the complexity of politics in larger cities makes flag change more difficult, or maybe there are just more small cities in the universe considered.

Sunnyvale, Texas (population 6,000), had used an unofficial flag for many years until resident Ross Miracle proposed a new design in March 2015. Over the next year he persisted in lobbying city officials to adopt his design. Town government staffers posted it online and polled residents. The town council directed staff to conduct a two-month competition between Miracle’s design and two others that were submitted. With the advice of NAVA member Federico Drews, the town distributed with residents’ utility bills a poll asking citizens’ opinions about the three proposals and the current flag. While 67% voted for the current flag and only 30% favored Miracle’s, after much debate the town council adopted Miracle’s design on July 25, 2016.

9. It helps to consider the process from a public-relations perspective, and to plan a campaign to build public support—first for flag change and then for the design adopted.

South Bend, Indiana, adopted a seal-on-a-bedsheet flag for its centennial in 1965. As part of its sesquicentennial festivities, in late 2015 the organizing group South Bend 150 conducted a contest to redesign the flag. It used coordinated...
media outreach, a website, and public events to advance the contest. More than 200 submissions came in, and a flag design committee—consisting of professional designers, marketing professionals, city officials, and SB150 representatives—put forward three finalists for public input. After community input, collected in person and online and totaling over 1,000 comments, the committee produced a composite design integrating elements from all three finalists. The city’s common council adopted the flag on March 14, 2016.

10. Most contemporary flag-change efforts employ social media to reach, influence, and hear from the public, actively using websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, scribd, change.org, Straw Poll, and SurveyMonkey.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, Joey Wignarajah and Jacob Johnson launched a redesign effort, with a timeline that started in November 2016 and planned to finish in June 2017. Local press covered the project’s start extensively as the organizers received city council approval of the process. The concept even drew a humorous editorial cartoon showing “rejected designs.” With a professional website, snappy videos, and a Facebook campaign funded by local foundations and their own resources, Wignarajah and Johnson received 378 submissions, had an independent panel narrow them down, and then offered three finalists to the public, who voted for two weeks via text message. 51% of the 8,200 votes favored design “B”. One city councilor explored returning to a version of the 1924 flag, until it was pointed out that “TULSA” read on the reverse as “ASLUT”.

Meanwhile, a rival activist based in the United Kingdom seized on the large number of negative Facebook comments about the finalists and conducted his own competition, receiving over 200 entries. He conducted a series of runoffs, and narrowed them down to 20. While the city council so far has balked at changing to the new flag, more than 200 have been distributed and it flies prominently in downtown Tulsa. [Editor’s note: see p. 10 for news of the flag’s adoption in October 2018.]

11. City officials must be prepared for negative reactions (to flag change and to proposed designs). They are often surprised by the volume and magnitude of criticism.

Mayor Matt Powell of Cedar Park, Texas, asked the community in April 2016 to submit designs to replace the city’s flag. Over 250 submissions arrived and were discussed at three public hearings; then a subcommittee of three city council members chose two finalists, from which the full city council selected a winner in September. After the flag was unveiled in a large public event in December 2016, a Facebook-driven public backlash ensued, protesting the lack of a vote by the public and resistance to the barbed-wire imagery. Still, the flag was soon flying at ten city locations, including Veterans Memorial Park, City Hall, the Police Department, the city’s four fire stations, and the city library; the city spent $6,985 for the flags at the city facilities as well as some desktop flags. But the city council quickly took those flags down and sent all 250 original submissions to the city’s Parks, Arts, and Community Enrichment Board, asking it to narrow down the designs in anticipation of a public vote. It selected 16, not including the initial winner. A vote has not yet taken place.

12. The process can take much longer than people expect. (While some efforts have taken as little as two months from start to finish, most take much longer and some have gone on for more than two years.)

Pocatello, Idaho’s civic pride logo was never intended to serve as its flag, which apparently for many years flew only at the municipal sewer plant. Stung by its flag’s rating as the worst in the country in NAVA’s 2004 survey and by the negative publicity spurred by the Roman Mars TED Talk, several community members organized in August 2015 and approached Mayor Brian Blad to ask for change. The flag had also received negative national attention from outlets including CBS Sunday Morning with correspondent Mo Rocca. Logan McDougall, the city’s public information officer, led an effort launched publicly in January 2017 which brought in 709 entries, categorized as Professional, Ages 18+, Ages 13–17, Ages 7–12, and Ages 1–6. The City of Pocatello...
Flag Design Ad Hoc Committee narrowed the submissions to 330, then to 19, making changes to some of them. It presented the final six designs to the public, asking the people to rate them on a scale of 1–10 (actually, a scale of 0.5 to 5.0 stars in increments of one-half). On July 20, 2017, after a public comment period lasting four weeks, the city council adopted the committee’s recommended winning design. The new flag rose officially on September 19, 2017.

Conclusion

By examining recent U.S. municipal flag-change efforts, we vexilologists can identify major factors contributing to their success or failure. By documenting these efforts and systematizing our learning, we can contribute to future flag design and adoption efforts in the U.S. and beyond. Just as vexillology helped improve the quality of flag design in recent years by articulating the basic principles of flag design, it can now help improve the success of flag adoption in the coming years by articulating the basic lessons of flag change.

4 Roman Mars, “Why City Flags May Be the Worst-Designed Thing You’ve Never Noticed”, TED, 2015, https://www.ted.com/talks/roman_mars_why_city_flags_may_be_the_worst-
designed_thing_you_ve_never_noticed
5 Ibid., at 9:03”, 16:25”, 16:34”, 15:04”
6 A frequently updated list of city flag change efforts is found at “Municipal Flag Improvement”, Portland Flag Association, September 2017, https://portlandflagfiles.wordpress.com/2010/05/05/exilid-tableo-06.10.c16.pdf
9 Peter Ansoff, in conversation with the author.
10 Roman Mars, Why City Flags”, at 12:57”
11 Ted Kaye, “A Theory of SOB Flags”, The Vexilloid Table no. 67 (December 2017): 1
12 Steve Kosi, “The People’s Flag of Milwaukee”, People’s Flag Initiative, July 2015, http://www.milwaukeeflag.com. ARKA is the American Institute for Graphic Arts; Ink to the People provides t-shirt printing services for non-profit organizations to raise funds and public awareness; 89.9 Radio Milwaukee, also called WYMS, is a non-commercial radio station.
new-city-flag-997251211-379541551.html
14 The Aberdeen Revitalization Movement is a non-profit organization that promotes economic development and beautification of the downtown district.
17 The Albuquerque Flag-Redesign
18 The Columbus Design League sponsors design programs and events in the region. One Columbus for Arts and History is a non-profit organization formed to support and promote tourism; Columbia Museum of Art, “Design a Better Columbia Flag!”, January 2017, https://www.columbusmuseum.org/support/become-member/affiliates/columbus-design-league/
19 Proud to Be Pocatello

Figure 19. Former flag of Pocatello, Idaho (adapted 2001), and new flag adopted 2017.

Ted Kaye compiled Good Flag, Bad Flag (NAVA’s guide to flag design), led NAVA’s surveys on city and state flag design, edited NAVA’s books on city flags, and consults broadly to flag redesign efforts at the city, state, and even national level. This article is adapted from papers presented at the 27th International Congress of Vexillology in London, August 7, 2017, and at the 51st Annual Meeting of NAVA in Boston, October 14, 2017.
52nd Annual Meeting / 52e Réunion annuelle • Québec City, Québec • 12–14 October 2018

NAVA 52 Attendees

Tyler Amick
Mary Ansoff
Peter Ansoff
Amber Atteberry
Carmen Barcena
Luc Baronian
John Bertrand
Doreen Braverman
Susan Braverman
Jim Brown
Carmen Calder
Shayne Campbell
Al Cavalari
Alan Cooper
John Cooper
Rhonda Cooper
Jim Croft
Patrice de la Brosse
Fred Drews
Pat Edwards
Xing Fei
Jim Ferrigan
Elizabeth French
David-Roger Gagnon
Terry Gallagher

Daniel McCloskey
Timothy McCloskey
Ted McNabb
Joan Merrington
Nichola Merrington
Paula Merrington
Rich Monahan
Carlos Morales-Ramirez
Tristan Ng
Rachel Phelan
Annie Platoff
Michael Platoff
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Peggy Rose
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Ryan Sharpe
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Greg Slayden
Charles Spain
Gwen Spicer
Alexander Spinelli
Julie Spinelli
Ron Strachan
Gus Tracchia
Bill Trinkle
Steve Wheatley
Cindy Williams

Raven—Call for Papers: Deadline: Feb. 15

Vexillologists are invited to submit papers for consideration by Raven: A Journal of Vexillology. Raven seeks works of original research, analysis, or synthesis of existing ideas and knowledge. Submissions are due by February 15, 2019. For inquiries, contact the Raven editor in care of NAVA or by e-mail to raven@nava.org.

Send articles to the Raven editor in electronic form in Microsoft Word, with a minimum of formatting and with high-resolution images sent as separate files. Do not use the footnote/endnote function. Articles are subject to an annual juried review and accepted based on criteria set by the Editorial Board. Authors of accepted articles must sign a publication agreement assigning copyright to NAVA and affirming that the material is original and not previously published elsewhere. Articles will be edited for style, consistency, and length.

NAVA Election Results

In the electronic election held between September 10 and October 1, 2018, the members of NAVA chose the following officers for 2018–2019:

• President: Peter A. Ansoff
• First Vice President: Steven A. Knowlton
• Second Vice President: Stanley K. Conrades
• Secretary: Edward B. Kaye
• Treasurer: James J. Ferrigan III
• Nominating Committee: Christopher Bedwell, David B. Martucci, William J. Trinkle

The proposed budget for 2019 and the minutes of the 2017 annual business meeting (held at NAVA 51) were approved.

Raven 25 • Vatican Flags

Volume 25 of Raven appears this year as the monograph Vatican Flags: Keys & Crowns Since 1800. The book reflects decades of research by long-time NAVA member Rev. William M. Becker, Doctor of Sacred Theology, who serves as a Roman Catholic priest in the Diocese of Winona-Rochester (Minnesota). Much of the research was conducted during Father Becker’s studies at the Vatican. This first-of-its-kind volume documents in detail the flags of the Papal States and today’s Vatican.

Scrupulously documented and richly illustrated with over 160 images in full color, its 192 pages describe the many forms of the bandiera pontificia—civil, state, and war ensigns; war flags; cockades; infantry and guard colors; and civil/state flags—over two centuries. Sources include museums, libraries, and extensive literary resources.

Vatican Flags follows the tradition of past book-length Raven volumes (Flags of the Native Peoples of the United States, American City Flags, Russian Regional Flags, and Canadian City Flags). Dozens of NAVA members contributed to the extra $7,000 needed to fund the book’s publication in color. Scott Mainwaring, Raven editor, chose an eye-catching metallic gold ink for the cover. All NAVA members receive a copy as a benefit of membership; the book is for sale on the NAVA website and on Amazon.com.