THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FLAG
by Dr. Whitney Smith

Today any collection of the flags of the states and territories of the United States shows — amid the great mass of dark blue flags with complicated designs in the center — a few distinctive banners, easily recognized and remembered. Two of these in particular are in the strict heraldic tradition — the neighboring flags of Maryland and the District of Columbia. The latter consists of two horizontal red stripes on a white field with three red five-pointed stars at the top, described heraldically as “argent two bars gules in chief three mullets of the second.”

This coat of arms had been used by George Washington and his family in England at Sulgrave Manor (Northampton County) and before that at Washington Old Hall (County Durham). Originally it seems to have been an adaptation of the Lancaster family arms.

The presence of the colors white and red and the common sense description of the shield as being composed of stars and stripes give the immediate impression that the Washington coat of arms may have been the basis for the Stars and Stripes, first adopted as the American national flag at the time George Washington was commander of its army. Indeed this story was promoted (principally by Britons) at the time of the Centennial of the United States. No reputable historian who has written about the history of the United States flag accepts the suggestion as likely.

The heraldist Arthur E. DuBois found justification, however, for an armorial banner of the Washington arms when he and others worked on a special commission (established by Public Law 650 of the 75th Congress) charged with the responsibility of designing a flag for the District of Columbia. It was pointed out that as early as 1792 there had been an association between the Washington family arms and the city named after George Washington. (Incidentally, it should be noted that the capital of the United States is not the city of Washington, but the entire District of Columbia.) The Plan of the City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia ceded by the states of Virginia and Maryland to the United States of America, and by them established as the seat of their government after the year MDCCC shows the Washington arms. The map was engraved in Philadelphia by Thackara and Vallance.

The flag of the District was approved on 15 October 1938. Previously, a number of proposals had been made for a flag. One of these designs was based on the Washington arms: it consisted of a red flag with two white vertical stripes in the center and three white five-pointed stars near the hoist. This design, reversing the colors of the Washington arms and turning the whole design sideways, was developed by Captain Ward of the Office of the Quartermaster General and his wife. Earlier, the seal of the District of Columbia (which has nothing to do with the Washington arms, although it includes a representation of George Washington in statuary form) had been shown alternatively on a dark blue flag or on a buff flag bordered in white and dark blue. The District of Columbia Militia had a headquarters flag of blue with its name and the...
legendary axe that Washington had used to cut down the cherry tree in Parson Weem's story. Later this was replaced by the crest developed by the army for the District of Columbia, namely a representation in white of the dome of the Capital surmounting a rising sun in gold, all placed on a torse of red and white.

Suggestions for a District flag were sent to the Commissioners during World War I. A bill for establishing such a flag was first submitted to Congress in 1920 at the request of the Washington Board of Trade. The Fine Arts Commission and the Our Flag Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution became involved in the movement to create a flag. Although there were hopes that a flag might be adopted in time for the centennial of Washington's birth (in 1932), in fact it was not until 1938 that approval was given.

Americans, accustomed to having very explicit symbolism for colors and designs, frequently asked that the two stripes and three stars in the District of Columbia flag stand for. It is frequently assumed that three stars are for the Commissioners who administer local affairs, the two stripes being for the two houses of Congress who have ultimate authority over the District of Columbia. In fact there is no special significance; the whole design simply represents the District of Columbia because it came from the personal arms of George Washington who, in turn, inherited it from the family whose intention in choosing the colors and patterns can never be known.

REFERENCES:
The Flag for the District of Columbia approved, October 15, 1938 n.p., n.d.)
Jenny Girton Walker, "City Flag May Fly on George Washington's 200th Anniversary," The Sunday Star Magazine Section, 20 February 1927
NAVA MEMBER DESIGNS FLAG FOR CITY

Adrian, Michigan, the Maple City, has adopted as its official flag one designed by NAVA member, Robert J. Kidd who is pictured above with the flag.

You are invited...

to make NAVA NEWS an interesting vehicle of vexillology by sending to the editor items of interest regarding flags. Original tear sheets from newspapers, magazines and other sources will be much appreciated and returned if you so indicate. Please be sure to note the source of the information and the date of the publication. Also, original essays are encouraged and solicited.

Thank you for your cooperation!

VEXILLOLOGICAL CARTOON

I HAD TO DO IT OR IT WOULD HAVE TORN ITSELF APART!

From The Toronto Sun via the Canadian Flag Institute

THE FLAGSTAFF

NOTES FROM JOHN M. PURCEL NAVA PRESIDENT

As we are looking forward to the annual meeting in Pittsburgh October 8, 9 and 10 this year, I wonder if you have given any thought to giving a talk at the meeting on some aspect of vexillology? When I have asked some of our members in the past about giving a talk, not infrequently I am told something like, "Who, me? Gosh, no, I'm no good at giving talks!" Well, you may be better than you think; the trick is primarily in organizing your remarks. Following are some tips that might help make you our next star speaker:

1. Decide on your topic. What aspect of vexillology do you have a special interest in, or have you done some interesting research that you would like to share with the membership?

2. Narrow the focus. Decide on some part of the topic which you can discuss (preferably with photographic slides or other visual aids) in about 30 minutes.

3. Make an outline. Arrange the material you are going to talk on in a logical order so you can move from point to point without having to backtrack and say something like, "Oh, I forgot to mention..."

4. Be succinct. In 30 minutes you can't hope to be very detailed, so omit irrelevant information that the listener does not have to know to understand your topic, and avoid being too detailed about any one point to allow enough time for your other points. Resist the temptation to make many asides, such as those comments that begin, "That reminds me of the time...

5. Practice your talk. Give a "runthrough" of your talk (with the slides or visual aids you plan to use) to a friend or relative, or just go through it aloud, keeping an eye on the clock, to see how it goes. This will give you some confidence by way of rehearsal, and will help you to revise any points that didn't go as you had planned. If it turns out that your talk is too long after all, maybe you have enough material for two talks, so give us one this year and one next!

If I've convinced you that giving us your talk is a good idea, be sure to let us know. Send the title of your talk, and approximate time it will take (up to 30 minutes), and whether you will use slides, to:

Mr. George Cahill
NAVA-16 Program Chairman
National Flag Foundation
Flag Plaza
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Museum Tries To Save The South's Tattered Flags

By LEW POWELL
Observer Staff Writer

The N.C. Museum of History in Raleigh owns 80 Civil War battle flags. The U.S. War Department returned most of these regimental colors to North Carolina in 1914; a few more came back in 1963.

Why so long? “As late at 1914, there was still some animosity, and these were battle trophies,” says John Ellington, museum administrator. “The 1963 batch was probably ones that got stuck somewhere and nobody knew about them.”

That’s fairly typical of the life of flags: intense feeling, followed by decades of indifference. Fort Macon’s 6-foot by 20-foot Confederate national flag came home in 1979. “It turned up at an auction in Maine,” says Ellington. “We got wind of it and got it back.” (Price: $950, paid by the state parks department, which operates Fort Macon, near Morehead City on the coast of North Carolina.)

1979 was also the year the museum brought in a textile conservator to examine its long-neglected collection. Margaret Fikioris, conservator at the Winterthur Museum in Wilmington, Del., found it “of national importance... one of the largest collections in the country.”

She also found it deteriorating rapidly and, in many cases, irreversibly.

Fikioris’s report gave a new push to efforts by the Museum of History Associates, a 4,000-member statewide support group, to raise money to save the flags.

Race Against Deterioration

Storage improvements were made, and a staff conservator hired. “If we hadn’t gotten under way,” says Eve Williamson, executive director of the Associates, “some of these flags would have been completely lost in the next 10 years.”

The collection numbers about 320 flags and banners: from political campaigns, churches, home-front efforts during World War I and II, Confederate reunions, the Bicentennial, the U.S. cruiser Raleigh.

But the heart of the collection is the battle flags from such Civil War units as the Cleveland Guards, the Lexington Wildcats, the Charlotte Grays, the Ruth­erford Volunteers, the Buncombe Riflemen and the Perquimans Rangers.

Of particular note is the flag of North Carolina’s “Bloody Sixth” regiment, made from a shawl embroidered with the state seal. Raymond Beck, historical researcher for the restoration of the capitol, recently discovered that the legislature had authorized a state flag in 1845, 16 years before the adoption of the flag in use today. Beck and museum officials believe the “Bloody Sixth” flag and several similar battle flags in the collection may be the only surviving examples of this early design.

Collection Gems

Also included in the collection are flags from:

- The Battle of Guilford Courthouse In the Revolutionary War, 200 years old and probably the most valuable piece in the collection (although no appraisals have been made). More than 8 feet long, it bears 13 blue, eight-pointed stars and 12 alternating red and blue stripes. Fabric tears indicate it may originally have contained 14 or 16 stripes.
- The Philomathesian Literary Society at Wake Forest, about 1857.
- The Confederate prison at Salisbury display at the Rowan Museum.
- The 3rd North Carolina Volunteers, an all-black regiment mobilized in the Spanish-American War. (The war ended before it reached the Cuban battle zone.) Hand-painted silk with a gold silk fringe.

- The First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte. Service flag recognizing soldiers in World War I.

Even if these flags had been carefully preserved, they would today be none too sturdy. Folded away while soiled and then half-forgotten, they have seriously deteriorated.

The Museum Associates are trying to raise $86,000 to complete stabilization of the collection. A simple restoration might include washing in mild soap, multiple rinsings in distilled water, vacuuming through a fine screen and attaching to a stretcher. For display the flags will be protected from fading by ultraviolet-shield plexiglass.

No cost estimate has been made on the project’s final and most challenging phase, restoration of those flags made of silk. Two years ago conservator Fikioris ventured a “ballpark figure” of $1,000-$3,000 per flag. “Restoring silk,” says Harold Langley, curator of the national flag collection at the Smithsonian Institution, “is like trying to sew corn flakes.”

Local women typically made these flags from their shawls or skirts for presentation to the troops. These “weighted silk” garments contain additives that have hastened deterioration.

The silk colors of the Cleveland Guards and the Goldsboro Rifles are in such bad condition that the museum has decided against unfolding them even to photograph. The bold red stripe in the Lexington Wildcats flag has almost completely faded.

“One good thing,” administrator Ellington says of the early, attic-like treatment of the collection, “is that they have not been exposed to the fading effects of ultraviolet daylight and fluorescent lighting.”

The Smithsonian’s Langley calls the restoration project “worthwhile,” although he cautions against overreaching.

“They’re a one-of-a-kind thing,” he says of the Civil War flags. “All of them were produced in one four-year period. They’re a part of your heritage. But under the best of circumstances they will deteriorate in time. All flags have absorbed pollutants—the smoke of battle, theoot of campfires. They’ve been carried through the rain. Economics may dictate that you can only afford to try to preserve 20, and just get the rest properly photographed and measured.

“Are 80 Confederate flags worth preserving? That’s a basic historical question. Presumably there was a time when people who visited the museum would have spent time examining every one of those flags, and talking about how the battle went and who the colonel was. Now people might say, ‘That’s a Confederate flag. They all look alike, so why save all of them?’”

By spring, the museum hopes to have perhaps a dozen flags in condition to display in the legislative building on Flag Day, June 14. Then they will go on exhibit in the museum lobby.

Want To Help?

Make out your tax-deductible check to the N.C. Museum of History Associates and designate it for “Save the Flags.” Send it to N.C. Museum of History, 109 E. Jones St., Raleigh, N.C. 27611.

If you have information about these or other historical flags, the museum would like to hear from you.

Call (919) 733-3894, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.
Friends,

Those who are unaware that all of the officers and chairpeople of NAVA are unpaid volunteers are always astounded to learn that our organization, with its scattered membership, is able to produce a high quality newsletter, publish literature of vexillological value and hold annual meetings.

About the only legitimate complaint which we receive is that NAVA NEWS should be published more often. Would that we could! Alas, printing costs have kept up with other inflationary increases. This is one reason that the winter and spring issues of NAVA NEWS will be somewhat abridged. We have to be realistic as we continue ways and means of offering service and information without sacrificing quality.

Your Executive Board has been seeking and will continue to seek ways in which to best promote vexillology, attract new members, and serve the needs of its present constituents. You, in the meantime, can help the members of the Board, yourself, NAVA and the world of vexillology by making sure that your dues are paid on time and even thinking of giving a gift membership to a friend or your local library. The latter would be tax deductible and an excellent means of introducing NAVA to countless thousands. Think about it!

Also, it may not be totally out of line to include NAVA in your will. What better way to perpetuate your appreciation for the innumerable hours of pleasure vexillology has brought you and the number of friends gained through NAVA?

Thank you for your on-going cooperation, understanding, interest and help!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

JRBS/ram
ALL MEMBERS, PLEASE NOTE ...........

DUES FOR 1982

According to the Bylaws, Article III Membership "Dues ..... will be payable before the first day of a calendar year for membership during that year."

( ) ACTIVE MEMBER $12.00

( ) ASSOCIATE MEMBER $4.00

Spouses of Active Members and full-time Students

( ) ASSOCIATE MEMBER $7.00

Foreign ... persons not residing in North America.

( ) ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBER $25.00

Note from the Treasurer: NAVA dues are for the calendar year regardless of the date on which you joined. Those who have joined recently and so designated will become members with the forthcoming year. Some few members have already paid 1982 dues; you know who you are and we know who you are. Thank you, this notice is not for you!

If your membership is as an individual, please do not send your check in the company's name. It is very difficult to credit this. Only organizational members are listed alphabetically by company name. Active members are by individual's name.

Mail to: Grace Cooper, Treasurer, NAVA
509 68th Street
Holmes Beach, Florida 33510

* ON THE BACK OF THIS FORM, PLEASE WRITE YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS AND ANY NEW NEWS TO NAVA.

Thank you!