City Flag Redesign

By Ted Kaye

The radio/podcast host Roman Mars, of “99% Invisible” fame, delivered a TED Talk last March which galvanized the world of flag design—at least for U.S. cities.

“Why city flags may be the worst-designed thing you’ve never noticed” has been viewed over 2 million times and inspired dozens of efforts to upgrade municipal flags across the country.

Among them: Albuquerque; Austin; Billings; Birmingham; Bloomington; Bowling Green; Columbia, Mo; Columbus, Dallas; Fargo; Grand Rapids; Los Angeles; Lowell, Mass.; Manlius, N.Y; Milwaukee; Minneapolis; Pocatello; Raleigh; Rochester, Minn.; Salem, Ore.; San Francisco; South Bend, Ind.; Sunnyvale, Texas; Syracuse; and Tampa.

Roman Mars himself is a flag enthusiast—he has devoted two of his design-related podcasts to flag topics (#6, focused on flag design and #140, “Vexillonaire”, on Portland’s flag), quoting liberally from Good Flag, Bad Flag.

We watch eagerly as proponents of improved city flags navigate the political and public-relations challenges before them. As Peter Ansoff, former president of NAVA and city-flag-design veteran, often says: “Designing the flag is the easy part”.

However, it’s tremendously gratifying to see the five basic principles of flag design, as presented in GFBF, quoted early and often in flag-development debates, contests, and judging.

The effort begun in 1999 at ICV 18 in Victoria has borne fruit!
In our November meeting, hosted by Michael Orelove with pizza at his home in Gresham, 10 PFA members enjoyed a lively evening of flags. As the host, Michael led the introductions and moderated the discussion with aplomb.

Ted Kaye showed a large number of flags he’d acquired in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada after attending ICV 26 in Sydney and NAVA 49 in Ottawa.

David Anchel related how Elmer Reider, founder of Elmer’s, bought department store Meier & Frank’s entire flag inventory in the early 1960s, and showed a U.S. flag with an original 1951 price tag. He then described the experience of putting the Confederate Battle Flag behind the counter at Elmer’s: the press attention and customer responses. Elmer’s now sources the flag from Alabama Flag & Banner, donating the profits from its sale to anti-hate groups.

Keryn Anchel has been going through the old stock at Elmer’s, and showed several “finds”, including variant Dominica flags and U.S. flags made of “Nylannin”—a 75% nylon / 25% wool blend.

David Koski read Jack Handey’s hilarious 2008 *New Yorker* description of his personal flag.

Fred Paltridge, a veteran himself, celebrated Veterans Day with a “Flags of the United States” t-shirt. He’s now working at Division Hardware.

Keryn Anchel brought examples of several Georgia state flags.

David Anchel shared this Dettra flag with a Sept. 1951 M&F price tag: $2.50.

David Koski reads “The Symbols on my Flag (and what they mean)” by Jack Handey, a *New Yorker* writer.
Max Liberman gave a full report on ICV 26 in Sydney and was duly re-elected PFA’s delegate to FIAV at ICV 27 in London in 2017.


He also shared a 1970 flag chart a former teacher had given him, with 72 flags relating to U.S. history (from *The Flag Book of the U.S.*).

Inveterate letter-writer Michael Orelove reported how, for a recent cruise on Holland-America Line, he asked in advance for flags of the ports of call—and showed a flag of Boston given him (see p. 4). He handed out copies of the American Braille Flag (see *VT* #39) and described the Gresham city flag he acquired when moving here.

Patrick Genna generously gave away several of his latest thrift-shop-acquired flags, including the Bahamian civil ensign and a Gadsden Flag. He showed off the flag of his home town of St. Louis, Missouri.

Scott Mainwaring led a discussion on the proper orientation of flags hung vertically. In honor of Armistice Day, he shared images of unusual WWI-era flags, including the Whipple Flag and the mostly-forgotten practice of placing white borders around national flags to turn them into “peace flags”. He also gave a detailed report on the many flag initiatives flourishing across the U.S. (see p. 1 and [http://wp.me/pVZxf-RI](http://wp.me/pVZxf-RI)).

Our next meeting will be at the home of Jessie Spillers on Jan. 14th. Michael will deliver the Portland Flag Association flag to Jessie; one host to the next.
When I take a trip, I pack clean underwear, my toothbrush, and some flags. I also pick up more flags along the way. In October Kathleen and I took a 10-day cruise through New England and Canada on a Holland America ship.

New York: Portland Flag Association flag...Our flag gets around. “Give me your tired, your poor…”

Boston: Portland (Oregon) city flag...The Samuel Adams statue in Boston represents the Revolutionary patriot, clad in the citizen’s dress of the period, standing erect, with folded arms and a determined look in his finely-chiseled face.

Aboard the Eurodam: Boston city flag...Holland America presented me with a city flag of Boston (or should I say “Bostonia”?) as we sailed away.

Rockland, Maine: Rockland Yacht Club burgee...When we got off the cruise ship in Rockland I saw the Rockland Yacht Club. Since I don’t have its burgee, Kathleen took my photo so I could send the club an image with a request for an old burgee.

Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia flag...The province has over 160 historic lighthouses. Peggy’s Point Lighthouse is one of Nova Scotia’s best-known lighthouses and may be the most-photographed in Canada. Located in the quaint fishing village of Peggy's Cove, the lighthouse was built in 1915.

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island: Prince Edward Island flag...Holland America presented me with the P.E.I.’s provincial flag as we left Charlottetown.

Saguenay, Quebec: Québec flag...Inside the Arthur Villeneuve house museum I spotted a Québec flag flying proudly.

I use the flags that I acquire on these trips, as well as those sent me by governments and other entities, when I give flag talks to school and community groups.
Field Report — Australia

By Ted Kaye

Attending the 26th International Congress of Vexillology (ICV 26) provided an opportunity for travel around Australia and see flags!

Flags adorn a Sydney hotel—although the Vietnamese flag is upside-down.

Ralph Bartlett displays an Australian sporting flag in his ICV presentation.

The flagstaff on Sydney’s Observatory Hill provides a decoder to ID the flags.

The New South Wales and Australia flags fly on the Sydney Harbor Bridge.

The flags of Australia, Queensland, and Brisbane adorn the city hall there.

The original Eureka Flag, Australia’s origin flag, is conserved in Ballarat.

Flags adorn a Sydney hotel—although the Vietnamese flag is upside-down.

Another hotel flies the Aboriginal flag prominently among other nations.

The 21’x42’ national flag flies on a 266’ pole above Parliament in Canberra.

The flag of the governor-general of the state of Victoria uses a yellow field.

An unexplained Raven flag tops the Beechworth Bakery in Ballarat.
Mystery Flags

Recently colleagues have contacted us asking for help identifying flags. One such flag appears multiple times in the image/detail at right. We learned of a new resource serving the vexillological community when vexed with such challenges. Flags of the World, the preeminent flag-information website, maintains an active section devoted to UFEs (Unidentified Flags or Ensigns):

http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/ufe15c.html

FOTW encourages anyone stumped by a flag to submit an inquiry with an image, a brief description, and any other pertinent information. The UFE is then posted for vexo comment and discussion, and the results are often successful. A full list of UFEs appears on FOTW, with entries marked “Positive ID”, “Tentative ID”, and “Some Speculation”.

Since 2002, almost 600 UFE have been submitted; nearly half of those have been identified. Beyond those, FOTW has links to other unidentified flags throughout the site.

Vexillology Wiki — State Flag Designs

In 2001, NAVA (the Northern American Vexillological Association) asked members and visitors to rate the design qualities of 72 U.S. and Canadian state, province, and territory flags.

On a scale of 0 to 10, more than half failed to score above 5. In response, the creators of “Vexillology Wiki” began collecting proposals for new subnational flags for North America.

http://vexillology.wikia.com/wiki/Vexillology_Wiki

The result: a wonderful compilation of varied and exciting prospective flags, submitted by a great many vexillographers. Anyone can add a design. How wonderful to see so many all in one place!

For example, the entry for Oregon not only displays the 10 finalists from the 2009 effort sponsored by The Oregonian, but 40 other designs, including the six below.
What's that Flag?
By David Ferriday
Can you name these seven flags, and identify the theme that links them?
Answers in the next issue…

What Was that Flag? Answers to the last quiz
By Scott Mainwaring
These seven flags, of course, each have a 5-pointed star on a blue field. For more on Japanese flags with a star, see Flags of Hokkaido Charged with the Shining Polar Star, Miru Takano (ICV 23).

City of Asahikawa, Hokkaido, Japan

City of Kushiro, Hokkaido, Japan

City of Tanabe, Wakayama, Japan

City of Houston, Texas, USA

Somalia

Bonnie Blue Flag (or West Florida)
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