Unusual City Flags of the United States of America.

John M. Purcell

In order to talk about some of the unusual city flags of the United States, it is probably useful to describe briefly what might be considered usual with respect to American city flags. In the United States, city flags have typically developed rather late in the city's history. Rarely does a city adopt a flag at the time of its incorporation, but rather will do so at some later point in its history, often to mark a significant anniversary, such as a centennial. The flag designs are - frequently the result of a contest among the citizens of a city, with the result that the designs are sometimes rather unartistic or too - elaborate.

By far the most common design in use among American cities is the same that one finds amoung the majority of the state flags of the United States: a plain field embossed with a symbol of authority. In the case of the states, this is a coat-of-arms or the great seal, but in the case of the cities it is usually the civic seal. Boston, Massachusetts, is a good example. The favorite color of the background, as here, is blue, although one finds civic flags that use red, white, yellow, or green also. Note that the seal on the Boston flag is very elaborate, as is usually the case, since the purpose of the seal is not to be put on a flag, and so such flags become expensive to manufacture because of the intricacy of the seal's design.

The second most common design is that of the vertical tricolor, as exemplified by my home city of Cleveland, Ohio. Because the national colors are red, white, and blue, these colors appear very often in city - flags. Next in frequency of design is the horizontal tricolor, represented here by Santa Barbara, California. No doubt the vertical and horizontal tricolors were inspired by the frequency of these designs among national flags.

When I speak of unusual city flags in the United States, I refer to flags which deviate considerably form these three patterns and the commonly - used colors. I have arbitrarily created four categories in which to group the flags, in order to show some commonalities. These categories are color, design, shape, and attractiveness.

To begin, some examples of American city flags that are unusual because of their color. The first flag in this group is that of Lima, Ohio. The unusual aspect of this flag is the two-colored border. Borders are found with some frequency on city flags in the United States, but they are almost always of one color. The next example is the flag of Dubuque, Iowa, which appears to have two borders. The juxtaposition of the - green and blue borders surrounding the yellow center give the flag a -- unique appearance. The green and dark blue of Two Rivers, Wisconsin, also create an unusual flag. The design reflects the blue of the two - small rivers that give the city its name flowing through the green countryside to Lake Michigan. The flag of Fresno, California, is next. - Once again we find blue and green juxtaposed, although this time vertically, and with the addition of the color brown, a very rare colour on American city flags. Here it represents the fertile soil of Fresno, a major agricultural area. Brown also appears on the flag of Ocean City, New Jersey, representing a sand bar between the waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

Montgomery, Alabama   has an unusual flag because of the color grey, also seldom found in U.S. city flags. Here it commemorates the grey uniforms of the soldiers of the Confederate States of America, 1861-1865. (Montgomery was the first capital of the Confederacy). The northwestern city of Spokane, in the state of Washington,   has chosen the unique field of lilac for its flag, to remind viewers that it is known as the "Lilac City". It is not a flag one is likely to forget easily! One is not likely to mistake the next flag, either, the last one in the category of unusual colors. The city of Massilon, Ohio ,   chose to honor its high school's famous football team by adopting the school's colors of black and orange. Black occurs with some frequency in U.S. city flags, usually with yellow, however. Pairing black with orange is decidedly - unusual.

The next category of flags is also the largest, that of an unusual design. The first flag in this category uses the black and yellow colors just mentionned, but with an unusual effect. The city of East Chicago, Indiana   has a modernistic geometric design suggestive of the symbolic signs used by governments to give some cautionary notice concerning a hazard. The next flag, that of Overland,Park, Kansas   has an interesting blend of unusual design and color. The letters "O" and "P" have been stylized to suggest a tree. It is somewhat regrettable that the rather dramatic stripes on the fly have been defaced with the name of - the city, although this is a common practice with American city flags, because their designers believe (correctly, I might add) that the flag would be unrecognized by most viewers without the addition of the city's name. The city of Provo, Utah ,   contents itself with only its initial letter in giant size, together with the year of the city's founding, 1849. Another city in Utah, that of Springville   announces on its flag that it is a national center of painting, with a notable museum of art. The unusual shape of the blue portion of the flag represents -- the geographical shape of the State of Utah.

The city of Cape May, New Jersey ,   has a flag of nautical design, indicative of its status as a favored seaside resort. Its city seal on the flag commemorates the fact that the entire city is a national historic - landmark, so named because of its restored niniteenth-century buildings. Another city that alludes to its geographical location is St. Louis, - Missouri ,   which depicts the city's setting at the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers in this unique design.

The sunny island city of Key West, Florida ,   southernmost in the - United States, has a bold design that suggests its tropical location. ' The stars represent the islands, or "keys", at Florida's southern tip. The conch shell is typically found on the island and gives the islanders their nickname. Another bold design is that of the city of Kettering, Ohio .   The figures in white around the city seal represent - brotherhood of the residents. The city of Canton, also in Ohio   - shows the city's and state's initials dramatically linked in the flag's center. The seventeen stars represent the fact that Ohio was the seventeenth state admitted to the Union (in 1803), but most unusual is the white-on-white depiction of President William McKinley's memorial. Dixon, Illinois ,   the birthplace of the present American president, Ronald Reagan, emblazons petunias on its city flag to represent its - nickname as "City of Petunias".

The city of Knoxville, Tennessee   is the first example of the next series of flags in this category which shows the over-zealousness of - their designers to include too much symbolism. In this flag the blue - and red squares were added to depict loyalty and bravery. Black and -- white represent the coal and marble industries of the region. Jacksonville, Florida ,   likes to be known as "Gateway to the South", shown here by the "gateway" pillars adorned with the southern poinsettia. De-

troit, Michigan,   attempts to show the city's past on its flag, ─-
with references to former ownership at different times by the French -
and British. The seal commemorates the destruction of the city by fire
in 1805. Milwaukee, Wisonsin,   . displays the city's major indus--
tries, beer-brewing and shipping, against the city's skyline. Note that
the flag is often displayed as a banner. Pawtucket, Rhode Island,
actually displays a photograph of the city's historical center to give
a most unusual effect. The small city of Franklin, Ohio,   wants, -
apparently, to be sure that it can be found: the road routes leading -
into the city are shown on the flag, along with a depiction of Benja-
min Franklin, an early American patriot for whom the city is named.

The next city flag really qualifies in two categories. It is unusual
in design, but it also serves to introduce the next brief category of
flags unusual because of shape.Tampa, Florida,   using the colors -
of its state flag, as well as the national colors, has a design unlike
any other flag, and its shape is so unusual that one finds it difficult
to describe. The ship on the seal, the "Mascotte", commemorates the fact
that in 1889 it was an important.link between Tampa and Cuba for the im
portation of tobacco for Tampa's cigar industry.

Because the State of Ohio has the only state flag that is swallow-tailed,
a great many of Ohio's city flags are also swallow-tailed. Here are just
two examples: Euclid, in northern Ohio,   and Fairfield,   in the
southern part of the state. This shape is very rare in city flags outsi-
de Ohio, but the city flag of Nantucket, Massachusetts,   once a great
whaling center, also does use this shape.

Our final category shows some of the more attractive designs among city
flags in the United States. For example, the city flag of Corpus Christi,
a Texas seaport,   shows the ubiquitous seagull encircled by stars re
presenting the city's major industries. The very attractive city flag of
Denver, Colorado,   . suggests the Indian heritage of the region as -
well as the fact that Denver is located in the Rocky Mountains. The ca-
pital city of Iowa, Des Moines,   alludes to its location on the Des
Moines River with this striking design of three bridges. Ocean City, -
Maryland,   cleverly combines the city's initials as part of the o--
cean's surf, while Orem, Utah,   displays the fact that it is a green
oasis in an arid region. The final example, and my personal favorite, is
the flag of Louisville, Kentucky,   which shows both its French and
American heritage in a graceful blend of color and design.

The flags you have seen today represent a part of vexillology that as -
much as any other, springs form the spontaneaous feelings of the people.
City flags are embued with attributes that the citizenry of those cities
regard as making their homes unique, and as important for the rest of the
world to recognize. One might say, in a critical sense, that some cities
are more successful than others in the production of a final flag design,
but as a part of vexillology, all city flags are an instructive and valua
ble addition to our field of knowledge. Would that they were more widely
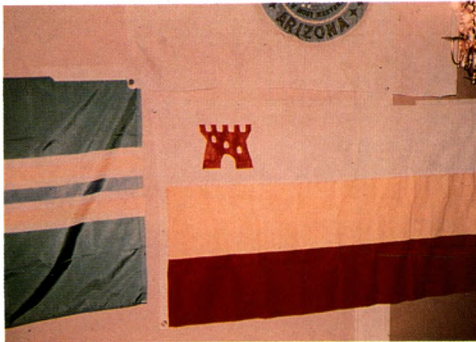recognized.

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UNUSUAL CITY FLAGS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BOSTON, MA.

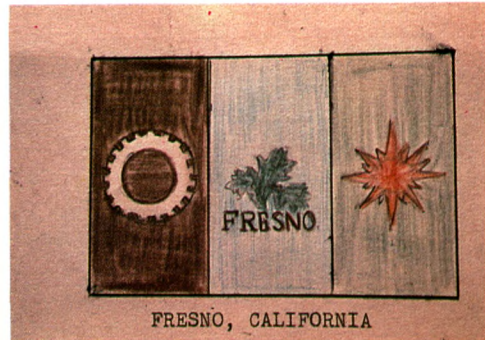CLEVELAND, OHIO

SANTA BARBARA, CA

LIMA, OHIO

DENNISON, TX; DUBUQUE, IOWA; EASTON, PA;
ELKHART, IN.

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA
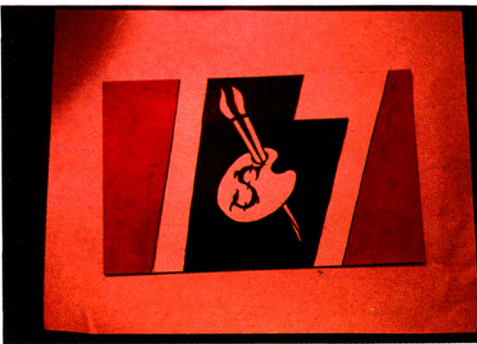
FRESNO, CA.

MONTGOMERY, AL.

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON.

MASSILON, OHIO.

PROVOI, UT.

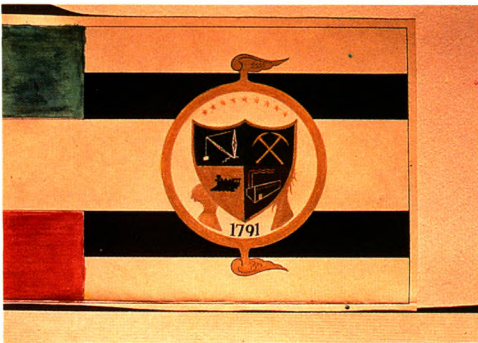SPRINGSVILLE, UT.

ST. LOUIS, MO.

KEY WEST, FL.

KETTERING, OHIO.

CANTON, OHIO.
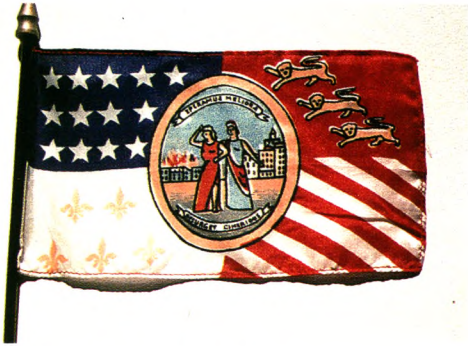

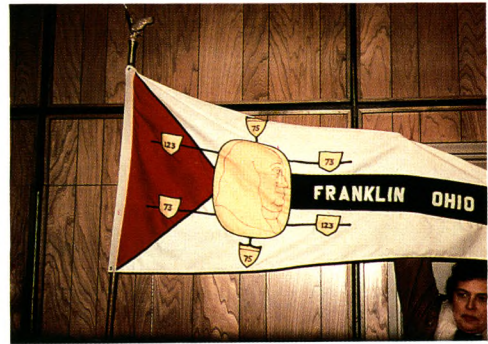
DIXON, ILLINOIS.

KNOX VILLE, TENN.

JACKSONVILLE, FL.

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

OTTUMWA, IOWA; OWENSBORO, NY; VALPARAISO,
IN; PHILADELPHIA, PA; PITTSBURGH, PA;
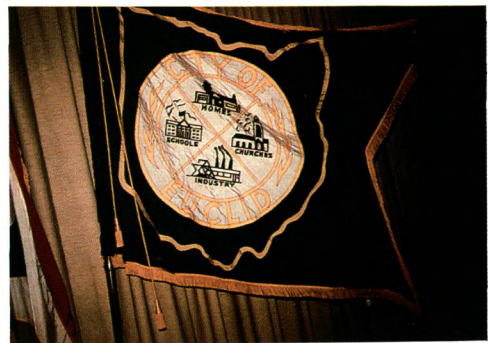PAWTUCKET, R.I.; PEKIN, IL; WICHITA, KS.

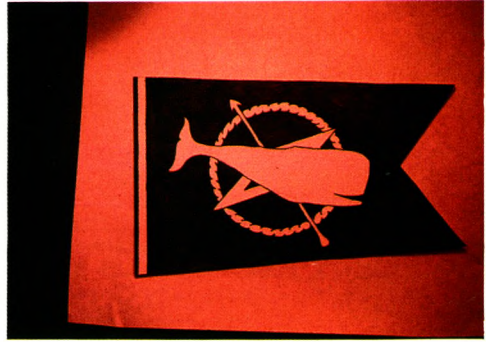FRANKLIN, OHIO (Forma de corneta)
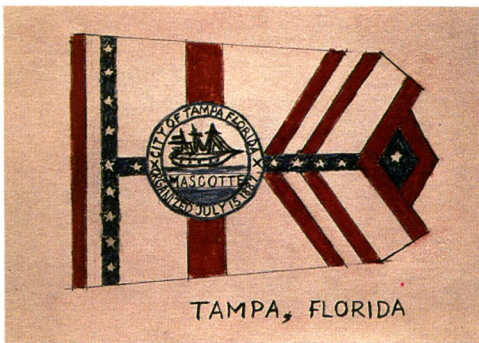
TAMPA, FLORIDA

EUCLID, OHIO.
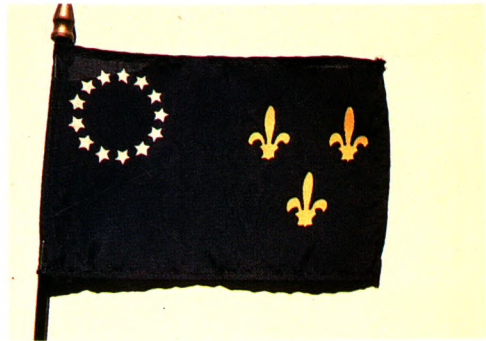
FAIRFIELD, OHIO

NANTUCKET, MA.

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO; COLUMBUS, OHIO;
CORPUS CHRISTIE, TX; DENVER, CO.

DALLAS, TX; DES MOINES, IA; DE KALB, IL.
(Antigua y moderna)

OCEAN CITY, MA; OCEAN CITY, NJ; 2 RIVERS,
WI; OKLAHOMA CITY, OK; OREM, UT.

LOUISVILLE, KY.