

Historic Flags of South Africa.

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Although the South African National flag as we know it today, was only introduced in 1928, South African flag history goes back five centuries to the early days of the voyages of discovery. The Portuguese were first in the field, with much of the inspiration and planning for their early voyages coming from Prince Henry, second son of their King, who has gone down in history as "Prince Henry the Navigator". A man of proven valour, Prince Henry had been placed at the head of the Military Order of Christ which, together with the King and Church, owned much of Portugal. As such he was able to utilise revenues of the Order to plan and finance the voyages of exploration which were ultimately to open up the sea route from the West to India.

The "Cross of Christ", symbol of the Order, was displayed upon the sails of the Portuguese caravels. Whether or not these early ships also flew flags, is not certain. If they did, it could only have been flags with the cross of the Order, or else flags bearing the arms of the King, for national flags as such did not then exist.

Virtually unchanged for centuries and still in use today, although Portugal is now a Republic, the arms of the King consisted of a red shield charged with a white inescutcheon. The red shield bears golden castles, usually seven in number, added by Alphonso III after his marriage in 1252 with the daughter of Alfonso the Wise, King of Castile. The white shield of the House of Braganza, charged in turn with five blue shields, arranged in the form of a cross, each of these shields bearing five roundels in saltire. These shields commemorate the great victory of Alfonso Henriques in 1139 over the five Moorish princes at the battle of Ourique, while the five white roundels are said to symbolise the five wounds of the Saviour in whose strength he defeated the infidel and became the first King of Portugal.

It was these self-same arms which the Portuguese carried southwards with them as they slowly moved down the coast of Africa exploring it as they went. It was the custom for Portuguese captains to mark the extent of these journeys by planting crosses at strategic points, partly as landmarks for the return journey and partly as beacons for their successors.

On these stone "padraos" as they were called, were usually engraved the arms of the King under whom the voyage was being undertaken. Since it was customary for the Ruler to be represented by the arms he bore, further description was unnecessary.

The fourth padrao erected by the explorer Diogo Cao on his journey southwards, still exists in a well-preserved state. It was erected in 1486 on the dry and desolate coast of South West Africa, at a place now known as Cape Cross. Here it was found standing in 1893 by the Germans, who were then in control of South West Africa. This padrao is clearly inscribed with the "Quinas de Portugal" or inner shield of the Portuguese Arms, but without the outer bordure of Castile. This was quite a historical find and the padrao was removed from where it had been planted and was taken to the Institute of Hydrography at the University of Berlin. A replica has, however, been erected near the original site. The first padrao in what is now

the Republic of South Africa, was erected by Bartholomew Dias on his viyage around the Cape in 1487-88.

Following in the steps of Diogo Cao and Bartholomew Dias, Vasco da Gama eventually reached India in May 1498 via the Southern Africa sea route. His journey signalled the beginning of the rapid rise of the Portuguese Empire in the East.

Despite having pioneered this route, and Dias having named the Cape "Cabo da Boa Esperanca", or the Cape of Good Hope, The Portuguese tended to avoid the Cape coast. The rough seas and storms they invariably seemed to encounter about the southern tip of Africa, soon led them to refer to the Cape as the "Cabo das Termentos" or "Cape of Storms". This, combined with the death of Dom Francesco de Almeida, first Governor and Viceroy of the Portuguese possessions in India, with sixty-five of his entourage at the hands of the Hottentots in Table Bay in 1510, led the Portuguese to steer well clear of the Cape, despite their prior claim to it. They preferred instead to call at St. Helena and at their small outposts in what are now Angola and Moçambique, on their way to and from the East.

Once the Cape route had been established as a feasible proposition, the Portuguese used it extensively, but losses in both life and cargoes were heavy. Even so, the Portuguese Empire slowly expanded until Philip II of Spain annexed Portugal in 1580, following the death of the Portuguese king. With Spain more interested in the West than in the East, profits from trade with the East dropped, and slowly the ships of other nations - particularly English and Dutch - found their way into Eastern waters via the Cape.

In contrast to the Portuguese who feared the "Cape of Storms", English mariners who passed by and recorded their impressions, tended to comment favourably on the Cape. Sir Francis Drake who sailed past in 1580, for example, reported: "We ranne hard aboard the Cape, finding the report of the Portugals to be most false who affirme that it is the most dangerous Cape in the World, never without intolerable storms and present dangers to travellers which come near the same. This Cape is the most stately thing and the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the Earth."

However, the English were also more inclined to busy themselves in the West than in the East, and although ships of the Royal Navy and the English East India Company still regularly called at the Cape, it was to the Dutch that mastery of the sea route to the East was to pass.

They had long had an indirect interest in the Eastern trade. The Portuguese had considered it sufficient to bring the spices from the East as far as Lisbon, but had scorned the European retail trade. With the Dutch being a sea-faring nation and the Netherlands so strategically placed, much of the distribution of the spices through Europe had thus passed into Dutch hands.

In addition, the Netherlands already had political links with the Iberian Peninsula, for in 1548 Charles I of Spain (who was also the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V), had annexed his territories along the North Sea to the Duke of Burgundy, whose flag is of course commemorated in the flag of this Congress. But despite this Burgundian overlordship, local cities and rulers in these territories took pride in their ancient traditions and authonomy, for the outside suzerainty was of a fairly loose nature. Later that century under Philip II, Spanish control was, however, tightened and repressive measures of a religious nature were introduced.

Philip had left his Dutch territories in the hands of William I, Prince of Orange, but eventually William turned against his master, in protest at his cruelty. When William was elected Stadholder of the Seventeen United Provinces of the Low Countries, the Dutch cause seemed hopeless, for behind the Spanish arms lay the wealth of the Holy Roman Empire. When Dutch Nobles petitioned for their historic rights they were dismissed as "a bunch of beggars". It was from this derogatory remark which was taken as an honour by the Dutch sailors fighting the Spanish on the open seas that the term "Water Beggars" evolved. With the Prince of Orange as their Admiral, their war cry became "Orange Boven" or "Orange on top", which applied equally to their feelings and to their flag.

The smouldering conflict between Spain and the Netherlands broke into open revolt by the seven predominantly protestant northern provinces, led by William of Orange, who formally repudiated their allegiance to Spain in 1579. The flag of revolt flown by the "Water Beggars" was known as the Prince's flag (in honour of William) and its horizontal stripes of orange-white-blue were to play a significant part in South African flag history.

In 1580, following the death of the Portuguese king, Philip II of Spain had also annexed Portugal, which placed him in an even better position to act against Dutch trading interests. He consequently outlawed William, set a price upon his head and closed the port of Lisbon to Dutch shipping. This Spanish embargo, which came at the time of Drake's voyage around the globe, forced the Dutch to turn their attention to the East if they wished to survive as a sea-trading nation. Their logical route to the East was around the Cape.

In 1595 Cornelis Houtman, with four ships, called at the Cape on his way to Java, and took on water and fresh meat. Three years later a score of Dutch ships, equipped by a number of small trading companies, made a voyage to India. Thus, long before the weary struggle with Spain ended in 1609, the Dutch had well and truly embarked on the East Indian trade.

Economically the United Provinces were well equipped to undertake this trade. Although they were a small country, they were an industrious, well populated and geographically well situated seafaring nation. Furthermore, Amsterdam had become the banking centre of Western Europe. Ships, men and capital were thus available for the Dutch voyages.

The political and economic structure of the United Provinces was reflected in the Dutch East India Company. There were at first four rival companies in Amsterdam trading with India, two in Rotterdam, and others in Middelburg, Delft, Hoorn and Enkhuisen. Cut-throat competition and the prospect of safety in numbers eventually induced them to come together and the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie) received its first charter in 1602. This was then renewed every 21 years. Control was by a governing Council of Seventeen, the "Heeren-Zeventien".

Like the United Provinces, the Company was a federation and the original companies survived in the chambers into which it was divided. Consequently, in addition to the Company flag which, as that of a chartered company was based on the National flag with a VOC monogram on the centre stripe, the various chambers also flew their own distinctively striped flags, each with its own monogram.

A contemporary painting showing the flags of the Chambers of the

Dutch East India Company, that of the Dutch return fleet at Batavia in 1648, hangs in the Gemeente Museum at Alkmaar.

It is against this background, and with the Cape as the one point at which both the outgoing and in-coming fleets could conveniently make landfall, that a permanent refreshment station was established at the Cape by the Dutch East India Company in 1652.

In this the Dutch were nearly anticipated by the English East India Company, which had been chartered by Queen Elizabeth I in Dec. 1600. This Company was responsible for setting down the first - though probably not very willing - white settlers at the Cape. This was in 1615, when ships under Sir Thomas Roe put into Table Bay on their way to the East. With them on board were eight criminals condemned to death at the Old Bailey, whom King James I of England had granted their lives on condition that they went exploring and thereby gained much-needed time for repentance.

As it happened, the settlement was shortlived. One of the eight was killed by Hottentots, four tried to escape on a raft and were drowned, while the survivors were eventually taken back to England by passing ship, only to be hanged for crimes they committed after their return.

It is doubtful whether these eight criminals would have been flag conscious, but as it happens, the first flag officially planted on South African soil, was an English flag, the cross of St. George. This was in July 1620, three months before the "Mayflower" set sail from Plymouth for America with the Pilgrim Fathers on board.

Hearing a rumor that the Dutch East India Company intended to establish a settlement on the shores of Table Bay the next year, two visiting ships' captains of the English Company, Andrew Shillinge and Humphrey Fitzherbert, who were then bound for the East, hoisted the cross of St. George on Lions Rump (St. James Mount), on the 3rd July 1620, and proclaimed English sovereignty over the Cape. However, the rumour proved to be unfounded and since the government in London was not interested in acquiring the Cape as a Colony at that stage, the annexation was not confirmed. In any event, most English ships, with their distinctive red and white striped company flags, with at first the cross of St. George, and later the "Great Jack" in a canton at the hoist, preferred to call at St. Helena on their way to and from the Orient. The way was thus left clear to the Dutch to establish a settlement at the Cape 32 years later.

This settlement was set up under the command of Jan van Riebeeck, a former ship doctor, who with his men, set foot ashore on the 6th April 1652. The primary purpose of the settlement was to grow and furnish passing company ships with fresh provisions on their long voyages to and from the East. Out of these small beginnings as a company halfway station, has grown the present Republic of South Africa.

Over his little fort Van Riebeeck would raise the Dutch flag of his day. It is well-known that from the time of William I this had been of horizontal Orange-white-blue stripes, but for some years the Orange had gradually been changing to red. Certainly by the time Spain recognised Dutch freedom in 1648, a red stripe was taking the place of the original orange of the Dutch flag. A number of the other Dutch flags were also flown at the Cape.

As the years passed, the settlement grew and contact between Cape Town and the farmers on the frontier weakened. After the bulk of the

Cape garrison was withdrawn in 1791 when the company ran into financial difficulties, the position deteriorated still further. The farmers on the Eastern border, in particular, objected to control by a company which neither defended them nor permitted them to defend themselves in the usual fashion of frontiersmen.

The upshot was a rebellion against Company rule in 1795 by the districts of Graaf-Reinet and Swellendam, both of which set up local republics. In both cases the flags raised were the red-white-blue, as used in the Netherlands. This was also a time of rebellion and revolution in Europe and as will be remembered, the colours of the revolutionary flag of France were also red-white-blue, but in vertical stripes. Despite this difference in the direction of the stripes, there must have been feelings of a kindred nature between those of the French revolutionaries and of the frontier farmers. Certainly, French influence was on the increase and only months earlier, in the winter of 1794-95 the armies of France invaded the Dutch Republic, forcing the Stadholder William V to flee to London.

In order to prevent the settlement at the Cape falling into the hands of France, with whom they were at war, the English occupied the Cape in Sept. 1795. Although essentially of a temporary nature, this occupation which lasted until Feb. 1803, left its mark on South African flag history.

With the British forces came British flags. The first was the "Great Jack" (1606-1801) comprising the English red cross of St. George and the Scottish white saltire of St. Andrew on a blue background. This was flown until Union with Ireland in 1801, when the red saltire of St. Patrick was added to make up the Union Flag or "Union Jack", as it is more popularly known. This then, was flown for the remainder of the first British occupation.

Ships of the Royal Navy were stationed at the Cape for defense purposes, so the Naval Ensigns would also have been in evidence at the Cape at this time.

In 1803, in terms of the provisions of the Peace of Amiens, the British handed the Cape back to the Dutch.

Following the French Revolution, those in the Netherlands who had favoured the establishment of a Republic on the French model, were known as the "Patriots". When French troops overran the Netherlands in 1794-95, these "Patriots" had come to power and a Batavian Republic, based on the French Republic and under French influence, had been proclaimed. On 14 Feb. 1796, it formally adopted the red-white-blue tricolour, in the first official Dutch Flag Law. While the civil ensign was the plain tricolour, the war ensign included a white panel on the red stripe near the hoist. On this panel appeared the symbolic figure of Liberty, a woman, holding a staff with a liberty cap, and accompanied by the traditional Dutch lion.

It was to this Dutch "Batavian Republic" that the Cape was handed back in 1803, and although the red-white-blue tricolour which was already well-known at the Cape, was retained as the civil ensign, the Batavian Republic War ensign was also added to South African flag history - but only for three years. In 1806 war again broke out between England and France, and the British re-occupied the Cape. Once again the British Union Flag (of 1801), was hoisted and was flown uninterrupted over the Cape until 1957. Whereas the first British occupation was of a temporary nature, this second occupation proved to be more permanent, for in terms of the peace treaties, the

Cape officially passed into British hands in August 1814, thus confirming the occupation of 1806.

Flags of the Cape Colony and of the Colony of Natal, which were introduced in the 1870's, followed the standard British Colonial pattern, being based on the red and blue ensigns, with the arms of the colony in question on a white roundle in the fly.

An interesting variation on this theme, which actually predated the Cape and Natal flags by a few years, was that of the short-lived Diggers' Republic established on the diamond fields near Kimberley in 1870. Many of the diggers were of British origin and the flag they designed was largely similar to Colonial Flags of that period, with a white horse in the fly. It is said that the white horse, the trade mark of a famous brand of whiskey, was about the only thing all diggers could be expected to recognise! Whether there in any particular significance in the fact that its tail was towards the Union Jack, I could not say.

In the flags of the Boer Republics, on the other hand, one finds a strong Dutch influence. These Republics were established largely because of the Dutch-speaking inhabitants' wish to escape British Imperialism, by trekking into the interior of the continent.

The Trekker themselves flew a red saltire on a blue field in which one might possibly see measure of Burgundian influence. The first of their Republics, Natalia (1839-1843), flew a flag of that's Colours but of an interesting design, with the white forming a triangle based in the fly.

The flag of the Republic of the Orange Free State, introduced in 1854, was actually designed in the Netherlands and not only had the Netherlands flag in the canton, but Orange stripes as a reference both to its name and to the House of Orange.

These Trekkers who moved into the interior, were men of an independent nature, who did not take easily to discipline, consequently there was a proliferation of little Republics in what is now the Transvaal Province of South Africa.

One of these, the Republic of Lydenburg, flew the Red-White-Blue Dutch Flag (1857-1860), before been incorporated into the South African Republic (of Transvaal), while the Soutpansberg Republic flew the old Trekker saltire (1857-1860) before its incorporation.

The Transvaal's own flag, known as the Vierkleur (four colour), was also based on the Flag of the Netherlands, having three horizontal Red-White-Blue stripes, but with the addition of a vertical green stripe at the hoist.

This flag was flown from 1857 to 1902, with a short break when President Burgers introduced a variation of the Trekker Flag, on which the saltire was fimbriated white. However, no sooner had the President left the country on a trip to Europe, then the old Vierkleur was re-introduced.

The Vierkleur, in turn served as a model for the flags of the short-lived New Republic, in which the green and blue stripes were reversed, and Republic of Goshen in which the vertical strip at the hoist was again green, but the other three colours Black-White-Red.

Republic of Stella, however, followed a pattern of its own, with no less than three flags, to bearing a star, as reference to its name,

and another the shield of arms - all in a period of three years.

In 1910, eight years after the Anglo Boer War, which brought the whole of South Africa under British control, the Union of South Africa was established. Although the Union Jack remained the official flag, distinctive South African flags, on the British Colonial pattern, similar to that which had been followed in the Cape and Natal, were introduced. These were based on Red and Blue ensigns, with the shield of the National Arms in the fly.

Although the Union of South Africa secured its own National Flag in 1928, the Union Jack continued to be flown alongside this National Flag until 1957, while the Red ensign variant continued as the Merchant Navy Flag of South Africa for many years.

The National Flag, introduced in 1928, is virtually a summary of South African Flag history until then. It was based on the old Dutch Orange-White-Blue "Prince's Flag", with the addition on the central white strip of the Union Jack and the flags of the old Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, so arranged that none of these flags have precedence over the other two.

This was achieved by placing the Free State flag vertically in the centre, but reversed, so as to have the flag in the canton nearest to the upper hoist or the main flag. From this flag, the Union Jack is spread towards the hoist thus also in a reversed position, while the Vierkleur, which is furthest from the hoist, is spread correctly towards the fly.

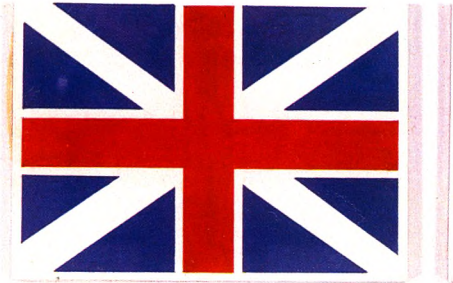
As such, the design and composition of the flag must be considered as something of a vexillological wonder.


STATE HERALD

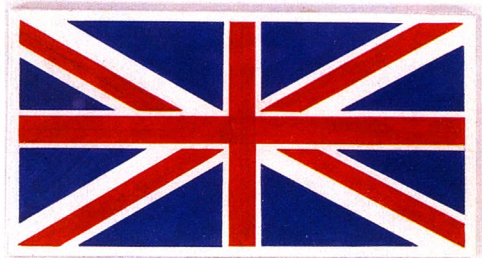
HISTORICS FLAGS OF SOUTH AFRICA



LYDENBURG	1857-1860	k.	LAND (
GRAAFF-REINET	1795	a.	1882-18
SWELLENDAM	1795	c.	
NERLAND	1654-1795 1803-1806		



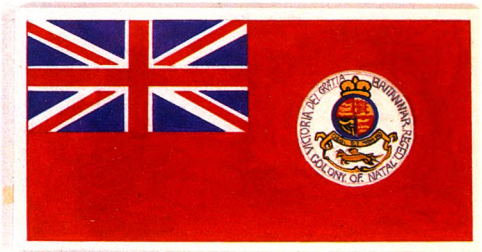
b. GREAT JACK
1795-1801



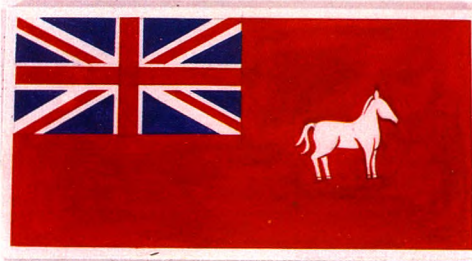
UNION JACK
1801-1803, 1806-1910, 1928-1957



b. CAPE COLONY
KAAPKOLONIE
1875-1910



e. NATAL FLAG
NATALSE VLAG
1870-1910



f. DIGGERS
REPUBLIC

DELWERS REPUBLIEK
1870



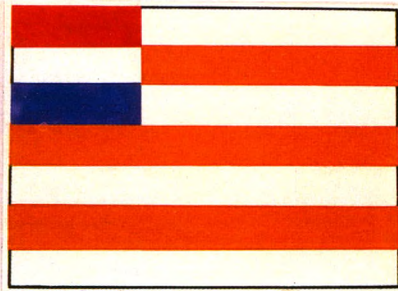
j.

VOORTREKKER VLAG 1836-1840
SOUTPANSBERG 1857-1860



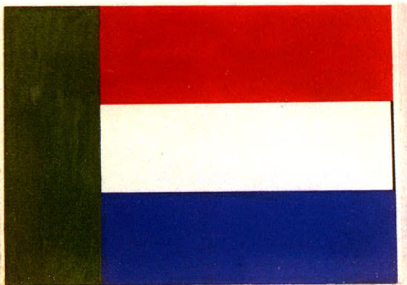
e.

REPUBLIEK NATALIA
1839-1843



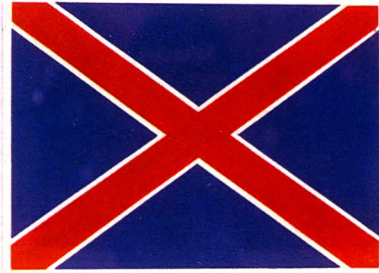
O.V.S. REPUBLIEK
1854-1902

d.



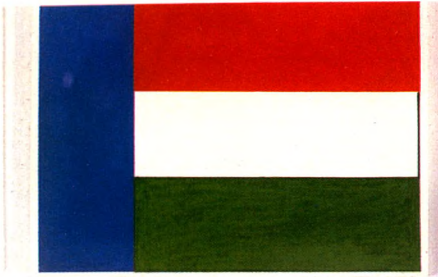
Z.A.R. 1857-1902

i.



i.

Z.A. REPUBLIEK
1874-1875



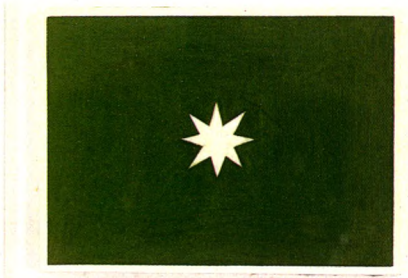
NUWE REPUBLIEK
1884-1885

l.



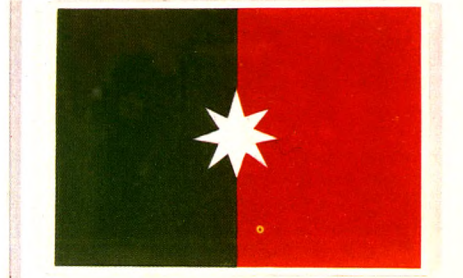
LAND GOOSEN
1882-1885

h.



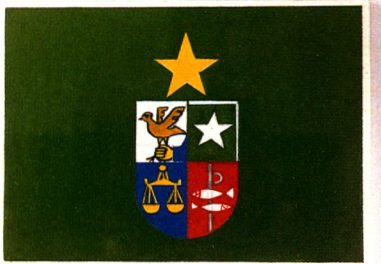
STELLALAND
1883-1885

g.



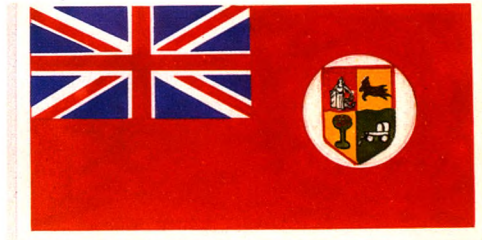
STELLALAND
1883-1885

g.



STELLALAND
1883-1885

g.



S.A. FLAG

S.A. VLAG 1910-1928
HANDELSVLOOTVLAG 1928-1951
MERCHANT NAVY