Charting vexillology's brightness

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ABSTRACT: This paper describes the historical development of 'vexillocharting' and discusses current trends in flag chart design.

In my view flag charts are probably the most common way of igniting a person's interest in flags. They are bright, attractive, easy to understand as a quick reference guide, and finally, a flag chart whets the viewer's appetite to research the stories behind the flags shown on it. This, to a very large extent, is how I became hooked to vexillology's halyards. In my case it was the then only Australian-made flag chart — the National Australia Bank's *Flags of the Nations.* I used to obtain this from the bank every 9 to 12 months (so as not to miss any editions and new flags). Little did I know then, in my pre-teenage years, that 15 years later I would find myself researching and editing this very chart.

Flag charts as we know them today started to appear in the first half of the 18th century. Prior to this flags appeared on maps, drawings or paintings as little more than decorations. Their accuracy could not be relied upon. For the next 100 years, flag charts were mostly produced to serve the needs of government agencies and merchant shipping. Little thought was given to the general public. It should be noted that for over 280 years the Dutch have been closely involved in the publishing and development of flag charts.

On the whole, during the first half of the 20th century, the general public gained their knowledge about other flags used around the world from occasional articles published in periodicals such as the *National Geographic Magazine,* in encyclopaedias or school atlases.

In 1965, only three years after the birth of modern vexillology, the world's first 'correct' flag chart was published. Compiled by Klaes Sierksma of The Netherlands and Whitney Smith of the U.S.A., this *Flags of the World* chart
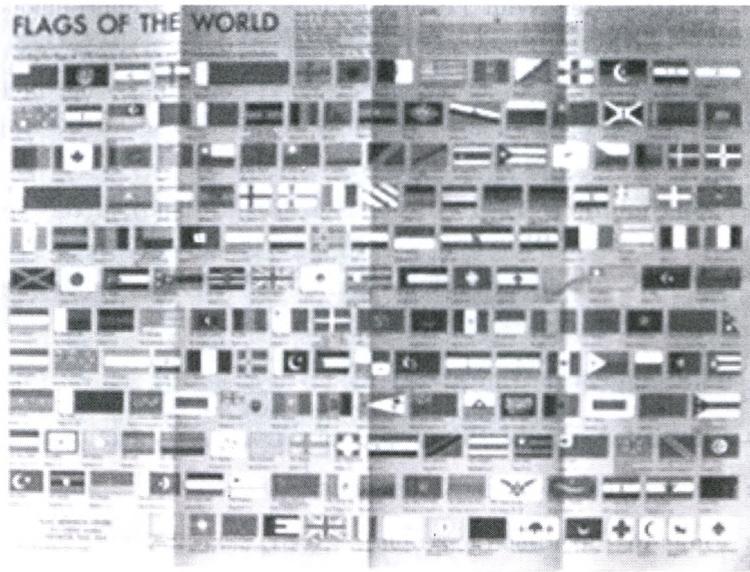
Fig. 1: Flags of the World (1965).

showed 173 national and territorial flags and 15 international organisational flags, all in their correct proportions **(Fig. 1)**. This chart proved to be a great success, selling over 33,000 copies.

Since then 'vexillocharting' has expanded the depth of knowledge and accessibility of flag information not only to us, the disciples of vexillology, but also to the general public. The following is a personal list of some noteworthy flag charts I have in my library:

1965 : Flags of the World (Dutch /U.S.A.)

1981 : World of Flags (England) This Bartholomew chart not only shows national flags, but also regional flags, all in their correct proportions.

1982 : Haack Flaggenkarte (East Germany) This chart is unique in that it shows national flags (all except for South Korea and Taiwan) superimposed upon regional maps. On the reverse side it breaks up all the flags into their design elements.

1987 : Flags of the United Nations (U.N., New York)

1988 : The Flag Shop Catalogue (Canada)

1989 : Flaggen der Welt (West Germany) This is a multi-lingual chart (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish).

1990 : Flags of All Nations (Great Britain /U.S.A.) This chart divides the world between the British Commonwealth of Nations and the rest of the world.

1992 : Bartholomew Flags of the World (Scotland) In this chart the flags group together according to their respective hemisphere, which is also shown.

1992 : Flags of the Nations (Australia)

1994 : The Flagchart (Dutch /U.S.A.)

1994 : Flags of Aspirant Peoples (Australia)

1995 : Flags of the World (Netherlands)

1996 : Flags of Paradise (Australia)

1997 : Flags of the Native Peoples of the United States (U.S.A.)

The above list of flag charts should not be interpreted by anyone as meaning that any other charts are not worthwhile, substandard or insignificant. These are just examples.

In Australia 'vexillocharting' did not really exist until after the establishment of the Flag Society of Australia in August 1983. On the whole, what local flag charts did occasionally appear were seen as novelty items. Examples of these are the 1956 *Melbourne Olympics Participants* (Australia & New Zealand Bank) and the 1970s *Circular World Fact Finder* (Bank of New South Wales).

The exception to this was the National Bank of Australasia's (now National Australia Bank) *Flags of the Nations* chart. Although no one at the National Bank knows precisely when this chart started, it has been recording the changing world of flags since at least the mid-1960s. The oldest edition that I have come across is dated 1 November 1965. In my personal library I have only a colour photocopy as the original resides safely in the personal library of my vexillological compatriot and colleague, Ralph Kelly. As mentioned at the beginning of this lecture, the *Flags of the Nations* chart signalled my entry into the field of vexillology.

In early 1984, John Edwards, co-founder of the Flag Society of Australia, reviewed the *Flags of the Nations* chart for the National Australia Bank. It was then re-published in July 1984. Four years later, in early 1988, I found myself, on behalf of the F.S.A., in the driver's seat of preparing a fully corrected and updated new edition of this flag chart. At this point I decided that I wanted this
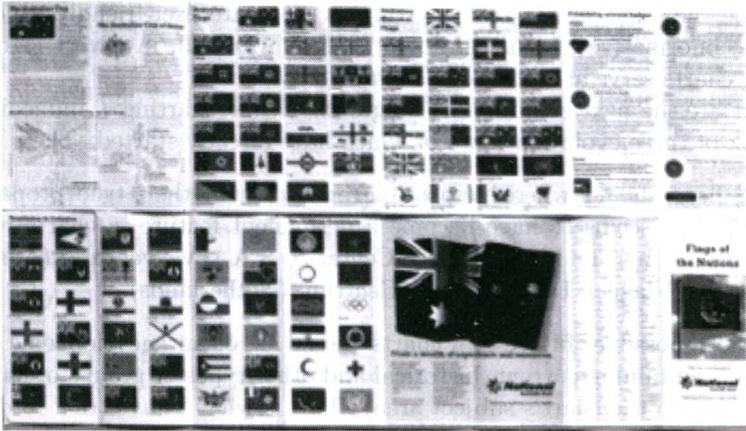
Fig. 2: Flags of the Nations (1992).

chart to become a regular 'living' publication, advancing vexillology in Australia and the world as a whole - thus I needed to convince the National Australia Bank to look at this chart as a permanent part of its activities.

I was very fortunate in my task with the bank's choice of graphic designer to work with me on this chart. Warren Hart, of Hart and Boyd Design in Melbourne, is a professional who carefully listened to what I wanted to do, appreciated the accuracy of flag detail required and explained clearly to me what he required from me to meet my requirements for the new edition of the *Flags of the Nations* chart. Commencing in 1988, Warren Hart and I worked together on three new editions of this chart for the National Australia Bank. The other two editions were in 1990 and 1992 **(Fig. 2)**.

The result of our good, friendly and complementary co-operation is that this chart has been transformed into a comprehensive, user-friendly, and accurate chart, comprising five distinct groups of flags (Independent Nations, Territories and Colonies, Australian Present, Australian Historical, and International Community). The chart itself is designed in such a way that the flags on each side of the printed sheet match up, and no folds go through any flags or text. Also, when folded the chart fits neatly into a standard letter size envelope - thus ensuring minimum postage costs.

My good luck with graphic designers continued in 1994 when John Edwards and I were directed to Donald Porter of D. Porter Design (formerly Anndon Design) in Melbourne, to prepare our *Flags of Aspirant Peoples* chart. I re-

hired him in 1996 for my *Flags of Paradise* chart. We are currently preparing work for future charts I plan to publish.

To me the essence of 'vexillocharting' is to create user-friendly, enjoyable, accurate, informative and inviting flag charts. After all, in a very significant way flag charts serve as vexillology's ambassadors.

What are the next evolutionary stages for 'vexillocharting'? Immediately I can think of three evolutions, two of which have already started. These are:

- All flags should wherever possible be shown in their true proportions. This now seems to have become a permanent feature in charts recently published by The Flag Research Center (U.S.A.), Vexventures (Australia) and the Vlaggen Dokumentatie Centrum (Netherlands).

- Where possible, future flag charts should be of an encyclopaedic nature (*i.e.*, containing current, historical and other types or groups of flags pertaining to the chart's subject area). This is what I have tried to do with my (Vexventures) *Flags of Paradise* chart of the Pacific Ocean region. By including current, historical, subregional, community, royalist, and aspirant/separatist flags all on one chart, my intention is to give the user as comprehensive as possible a view and understanding of flags associated in this case with the Pacific Ocean. Of course it is not perfect; not every flag ever flown in the Pacific region is shown. The physical sheet size can not be so large as to become difficult to use and/or store, and the other restriction is the cost of production. In the case of the *Paradise* chart it blew-out by about 40%.

- Where possible, vexillologists should use computer technology, including the world-wide web, to establish 'vexillocharting' data bases. These data bases would be accessible to view and/or print out, in such a way that the authors of the original artwork are paid. After all, if a whole chart were accessible on a disc or the world-wide web, this would have a significant effect on the financial viability of that chart.

For me, and I hope all of you, charts have lit up vexillology in the past and continue to do so today. I believe they will continue to serve dual ambassadorial and informative roles to the vexillological and wider community. For the future I, via Vexventures, am hoping to publish further charts on an irregular basis, including a special commemorative chart, *Flags of the British Union - 200 Years*, to coincide with the 19th I.C.V. in England, and the bicentennial of the current Union Flag - both in 2001. Thank you for your attention.

Ralph Bartlett

The author of several publications in vexillology and co-designer of several flag charts, Frank Bartlett is a Founding Member of the Flag Society of Australia. He has severed F.S.A. in a variety of capacities, including Editor of the journal *Crux Australis*. He was the Congress Coordinator for the 13th I.C.V. in Melbourne in 1989 and has served as F.I.A.V. secretary-general for congresses.

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