

TECHNOLOGY TO THE RESCUE! MAINE'S FIRST STATE COLOURS

David B. Martucci

Abstract :

Here we have the full story of what is possibly the earliest example of copper-engraved four-colour printed flags - the State of Maine's 1822 issue of 100 stands of double-sided Militia colours. These flags were produced in Boston utilizing the talents of a famous painter/designer and local crafts people. The finely detailed design makes these flags unique - an excellent example of the fine printing arts. The author uses data from the Archives of the State of Maine to provide details on the five flags and one pole and finial, known to exist, and on construction and printing techniques.

Maine became a State on March 15, 1820 as a part of the Missouri Compromise, thereby severing its political and territorial association with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that it had enjoyed for more than a hundred years. Besides the task of writing a Constitution for the new State, Maine's leaders also had to negotiate settlement terms with the leaders of the Commonwealth, the territorial settlement being embodied in the "secret provisions" of Maine's Constitution.¹ Other settlement issues that were negotiated included the return to Massachusetts of the flags, drums, fifes, bugles, and other ceremonial items that had been issued to the Militia in Maine.

Article VII of the new Constitution provided for the State's Militia and under this section, the Maine Legislature passed some laws in 1821 which, among other things, authorized the Quarter Master General to procure the necessary replacement items for military use.

Maine was divided into a number of districts or divisions for military purposes, as it had been under Massachusetts administration. Each division contained two brigades of infantry composed of at least four regiments, which, in turn, were made up of the companies of militia raised in each of Maine's municipalities. Under Massachusetts administration, each regiment was issued a flag from the stores kept in Boston, but these were now returned.

On March 21, 1821, the Maine Legislature passed "An Act to organize, govern, and discipline the Militia of this State," which provided, in part

That each regiment of infantry and each battalion of cavalry or artillery shall be furnished with the State colours. ... And the commanding officers of the regiments and battalions shall be responsible for the safe keeping of the colours ... and it shall be the duty of the Quarter Master General to furnish such colours ... and to present his account therefore to the Legislature for allowances.²

What could the Quarter Master General do? He knew funds were short and he had to procure flags for the State's forty-nine regiments of infantry, two regiments of artillery, and one regiment of cavalry along with eight additional battalions of cavalry and seven additional battalions of artillery as soon as he could.

Several technical problems immediately presented themselves. What design would be used? How would the design be applied to the flags and in what colours? How would the flags be assembled and finished? These problems were solved one by one by the ingenuity of the General.

Adjutant General and Acting Quarter Master General Samuel Cony purchased three-quarters of a yard of silk, which cost sixty-nine cents, just ten days later on March 31, 1821, "for the purpose of ascertaining whether the impression of an engraving on silk would answer for the State colours." The test apparently was satisfactory because on January 17, 1822, in addition to reporting on the strength of the Militia to the Legislature, General Cony reported that the estimated cost of obtaining

100 stands of colours for the infantry regiments would be \$1,000 "provided an engraving is obtained," and \$1,600 if they were painted. "Colours for the Regiments of Cavalry and Artillery which must necessarily be painted" would cost an additional \$300. Based on the General's report, on February 8 the Maine Legislature passed a resolve "respecting State Colours and Musical Instruments" for the Militia. The sum of \$3,000 was voted for drums, fifes and for the "purchase of State Colours from engraved plates on the best terms to be distributed among the Regiments & Battalions of Militia, the most destitute"... . As for a design, he didn't have to look very far. On April 6, 1821, a horse was hired for one dollar so that Jonathan McKinney could make a trip to Westbrook "to get the colour of the Lt. Infantry Company in that town to aid in forming a design for the State Colours". The flag was apparently returned to Westbrook on May 24. The Westbrook Light Infantry Company, an elite volunteer corps, had been presented with "an elegant Standard, a generous donation of the Ladies of that place"³ on August 16, 1820.

Cony had a drawing of the design made up and proceeded to engage a famous Boston painter, likely the painter of the Westbrook colours, to make a "specimen" of the flag he had in mind. That specimen, along with the 13 Artillery and 13 Cavalry Standards required, was painted by John Ritto Penniman, a very famous "Original Military Standard, Ornamental Painter and Draftsman"⁴ whose studio was located at "No. 73, Market Street, Boston, Sign of the Red Cross Knight, directly over the Gilding Manufactory of Mr. Stillman Lathrop,"⁵ or who could be contacted at his room at "No. 40, Orange Street, sign of the Painter's Arms."⁶ Penniman had been offering his work to the Maine market for several years and was proclaimed by the *Portland Gazette and Maine Advertiser* to be "The artist ... who, in paintings of this particular kind, stands unrivaled."⁷ Penniman may have previously been a student of Gilbert Stuart and he later worked closely with the firm of William S. and John B. Pendleton, pioneer lithographers in Boston. The firm of Annin and Smith of Boston was selected to make the engraved copper plate and print the panels. William B. Annin and George Gridler Smith were partners in a successful printing business in Boston from 1820 to 1833. Both men had been apprenticed to noted Boston engraver and publisher Abel Bowen. As early as 1815, Annin had made an engraving after one of Penniman's originals and by the early 1820s Penniman was working regularly with Annin and Smith.⁸

The flag blanks were sewn by John R. Penniman and Mary Boardman and the panels were sewn on by Penniman and Eliza Fisher. All of this work was done in Boston. On August 18, 1822, the flags were transported by stage to Portland. The firm of Racklyft and Noyes, on Union Street in that city, was selected to letter the unit designations on each pair of panels for 100 Infantry colours. Nelson Racklyft and Stephen Noyes are listed individually in the 1823 *Portland City Directory* but both are listed as having their shops on the same street. Undoubtedly they worked together in 1822 and later.⁹ There is no record of the manufacture of the poles and finials, but it is possible these were retained from the Massachusetts days and so were not replaced at this time. Five years later, in 1827, Annin and Smith were paid for "printing 42 impressions from standard plate," apparently a second printing of the design. On March 21, 1822, General Cony reported "I find that our system of having them engraved is considered a great improvement and the expense will be short of my calculations." This was true. For both the printed Infantry colours and the painted Artillery and Cavalry standards, General Cony had estimated the costs to be \$1,300. Here is the breakdown of his expenses for the flags:

Three-quarters yard test silk.....	\$ 0.69
Transportation to get the Westbrook Lt. Infantry Colors and return them.....	3.50
Drawing paper for design.....	0.50
Painting 1 Infantry Standard for specimen.....	10.00
Silk purchases.....	625.29
Engraved plate.....	112.50
Printing 214 panels.....	133.75
Lettering the Unit numbers on 204 panels.....	15.00
Painting 26 Artillery and Cavalry Standards...	286.87
For making the 26 Standards.....	23.05
For making 102 Flags.....	25.50
Sewing the printed plates onto 99 flags.....	29.70
TOTAL	\$1,266.35

It appears that these flags may be the earliest examples of copper engraved plate prints on silk, or any other kind of fabric. In making inquiries of art historians, no one seems to be familiar with any earlier examples of this type of fine detail fabric printing. Surprisingly, no multi-colour prints on silk of this type seem to exist until much later. This technology was definitely ahead of its time, at least as far as flags were concerned! A minimum of six of the engraved print copies (representing no more than five flags) are known to exist: 10 They are one of the centre panels of the Second Regiment of Infantry, Second Brigade, Fifth Division, now in the Maine State Museum collection, which has been conserved and has been displayed; the two-sided flag of the Third Regiment of Infantry, Second Brigade, First Division¹¹; the flag of the Second Regiment of Infantry, First Brigade, Fourth Division, still mounted on its original pole with brass finial but too fragile to unroll¹²; a badly deteriorating unnumbered centre panel, ¹³ the last three of which are in the collection of the Maine Historical Society; and a centre panel of the flag of the Fourth Regiment of Infantry, First Brigade, Fourth Division, now hanging in the Office of Special Collections, at the Library of the University of Maine at Orono.

Registering the several colours was a very complex and significant problem to solve. The technology had not advanced very far by 1822; it was to be several more years before a practical and easy to use press was invented that could hold a number of plates in place for exact registration of the colors. Although the records in the Maine Archives are silent on the subject, examination of the extant colours reveals the solution was relatively simple.

The coat of arms panels are printed in what appears to be four colours; black, red, green and blue. However, close-observation (and the Annin and Smith receipt) indicates only a single plate was used in the production of the prints. This is very clear from the flag of the Third Regiment of Infantry, Second Brigade, First Division, ¹⁴ now in the possession of the Maine Historical Society.¹⁵

Perhaps the best preserved of these flags and the only one more or less completely intact with a printed panel sewn on each side, this flag's arms show some ink migration between the four colours, indicating that each of these colours was printed from the same plate. Ink was applied selectively, probably with narrow thin-bladed knives, to different areas of the metal plate before the prints were struck. The fabric was carefully spread over the plate and a roller was used to ensure good contact and transfer of the ink to the silk. The flags, which were made separately, had the panels appliquéd by hand onto each side and appropriate numerals for each of the regiments hand-painted onto each panel of the arms.

The existing intact flag is composed of two complete widths of very thin, sheer woven silk, matching the white fabric of the printed panels exactly, that originally measured about twenty and a quarter inches in width, making the finished width of the flag about forty inches. The finished flag is about fifty-two inches in length from edge to edge, with a pole sleeve composed of the field fabric stitched into the header that measures approximately one and a half inches. All stitching is very fine and small and done by hand. The selvage edge was left on the top and bottom of the flag without any hem and the fly end was finished with a very narrow hem of approximately one quarter inch.

Not much is known of these flags, except that the flag of the Third Regiment of Infantry, Second Brigade, First Division, according to the *Portland Press Herald*, ¹⁶ represented "the local militia in Buxton and Hollis." The Maine Historical Society records indicate the flag may have been originally presented to the Regiment by the Honorable Stewart L. Woodford, U.S. District Attorney

The flag of the Second Regiment of Infantry, Second Brigade, Fifth Division¹⁷ was reputedly used by the Militia of the Gorham area. ¹⁸

The flag of the Second Regiment of Infantry, First Brigade, Fourth Division,¹⁹ now in the possession of the Maine Historical Society, is still mounted on its original pole with brass finial. The pole is a hand-made pole, apparently ash, measuring approximately three-quarters of an inch in thickness, crudely sanded with a brass finial mounted on the top and secured by a brass nail. The finial is of the British military type with an open cross and measures approximately twelve inches in length. There is no ferrule at the foot of the pole, nor does it appear there ever was one. The entire piece -- flag, pole and finial -- was deliberately designed to be extremely light weight and the flag was meant to fly in the lightest of breezes.

According to the records in the Maine State Archives, a second run of the panels was purchased in 1827. The unnumbered panel in the possession of the Maine Historical Society²⁰ has a slight flaw in the printing of the lower border under the "Y." in "Infy." indicating it was probably printed at a time quite different from the others. Assuming the original run was exhausted, the fact that this panel was unnumbered and probably unused would also make it likely that this panel is from the later edition. Other than this small flaw, which indicates some slight damage while being stored, the printing on this panel is almost exactly the same as the others.

It should be noted that since 1786, the Massachusetts Militia Standards were white in colour, with the Arms of the Commonwealth on at least one side; it was this basic design that Maine copied in 1822. In fact, denoting our descendancy from Massachusetts, prior to the American Civil War, almost all of Maine's flags were white. It was the familiarity with the blue Federal Regimental flags of the soldiers who later became legislators after the Civil War that caused Maine to abandon her traditional flag colour.

If it hadn't been for a clever Quarter Master General trying to save money for the new State, Maine would not have used a new flag technology to produce a rarity in the 19th century United States, a uniform flag design! And a beautiful one at that!

Footnotes

1 Article X, Sections 1, 2, and 5. These so-called "secret provisions" are not secret at all but they do not appear in any printed copies of the Maine Constitution because of their extreme length. These provisions may be read in their entirety at the Maine Archives and at the Maine Legislature's Law Library in Augusta.

2 This reference and much of the following material, especially the accounts, can be found at the Maine State Archives for the dates cited in the Military files.

3 *Eastern Argus*, Portland, Maine, September 12, 1820.

4 As advertised in the *Eastern Argus*, Portland, Maine, July 9, 1822.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 Monday, June 10, 1811. The specific reference is to the Standard of the Portland Rifle Company.

8 Maine State Museum *Broadside*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 1994, pages 1 and 2.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Rumour of a seventh panel or sixth flag has reached the author and is currently being investigated.

11 Maine Historical Society accession number 1772. This flag was donated by Mrs. Martha P. Sanborn of Acworth, NH in 1928.

12 Maine Historical Society accession number 1998.1.49. This flag was found in the Maine Historical Society Collection in 1998. Its accession date and donor are unknown.

13 Maine Historical Society accession number 1995.94.3. This panel was donated by the estate of Harriet S. Sherman in 1995. She acquired it during one of the summers she spent at the Reuben Colburn House in Pittston, Maine.

14 See footnote number 7, above.

15 To whose curator, Joyce Butler, I am very much grateful for the opportunity to examine this flag up close and personal.

16 Sat, March 11, 1995, page 7A.

17 Maine State Museum collection.

18 Maine State Museum *Broadside*, *op. cit.*

19 See footnote number 8, above.

20 See footnote number 9, above.

David B. Martucci

A vexillologist since 1966, the current president of the North American Vexillological Association, David Martucci designed the NAVA seal and has created more than 100 flags. He attended his first NAVA meeting in 1967 and two years later presented a paper at ICVIII in Boston.

Dave has worked closely with the Flag Research Center as a contributor, artist, cover designer, and research assistant - and has published three articles in *The Flag Bulletin*, 'Flags of New Jersey', vol. X, No. 2-3; 'The Red and The Black', vol. XIII, No. 3 and 'http://intervexi.net: Flags on the Web', vol. XXXV No. 6 (# 172)

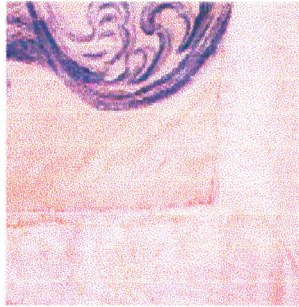
He edits the *New England Journal of Vexillology* for the New England Vexillological Association in which he serves as Secretary/Treasurer.

He continues to lecture on flags and has been involved in various capacities with the Flag Heritage Foundation, Flags of the World (FOTW) list and the FOTW website. And as if this is not enough David also edits ten vexillological web sites on line - <<http://www.midcoast.com/~martucci/flags/>>.

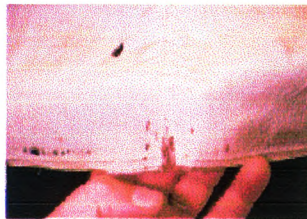
David B. Martucci : Technology to the Rescue! Maine..., Col. Plate I



1. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 2nd Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 5th Division; Engraving on silk, centre panel fragment. Maine State Museum.
2. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 3rd Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division; Engraving on silk, centre panel detail. Maine Historical Society.
3. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 4th Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 4th Division; Engraving on silk, centre panel detail. University of Maine at Orono.



4. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 3rd Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division; Engraving on silk, Moose detail. Maine Historical Society.
5. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 3rd Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division; Engraving on silk, appliqué detail. Maine Historical Society.
6. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 3rd Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division; Engraving on silk, scroll detail with hand lettered number inserted. Maine Historical Society.

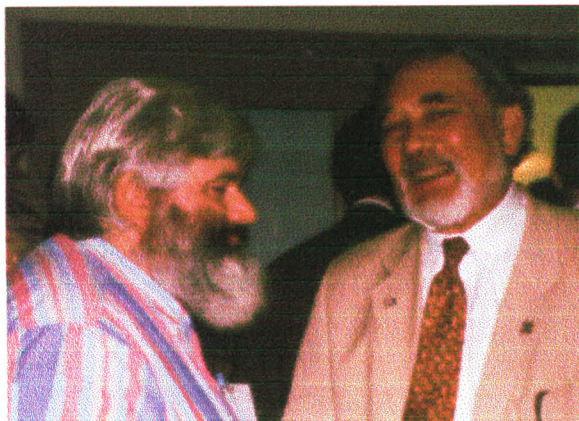


7. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 3rd Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division; Engraving on silk, seam and hem detail. Maine Historical Society.
8. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 2nd Regiment of Infantry, 1st Brigade, 4th Division; finial, brass. Maine Historical Society.
9. Maine Militia Color, 1822, 3rd Regiment of Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Division; Engraving on silk, header detail. Maine Historical Society.

David B. Martucci : Technology to the Rescue! Maine... Col. Pl. II



New England Vexillologist David B. Martucci shows his NAVA presidential banner



Left, NAVA President David Martucci with the late Dr. William Crampton at an earlier NAVA Conference. Martucci, right, with Richard Monahan and (centre) Truman Pope, designer of the ICV 18 Flag (seen on the cover and below in the display window of The Flag Shop, Victoria, B.C.)

