

**FLAG DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL PARALLELISM:
THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES AND THE ARGENTINE PAMPAS**

Kevin Harrington

Outline:

1. The Pampas and the Prairies
2. Conflicts between Power Symbols and Local Identity.
3. Emergence of Emblems.
4. Provincial, municipal and county flags.
5. Original Inhabitants and Newcomers.
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The Argentine Pampas is an extensive plain of 250,000 to 300,000 miles of an ancient sea bed, generally treeless, with an original vegetative cover of coarse grasses. These plains are well-watered by streams flowing to the Parana and the coast. Some water are saline and brackish and there are tracts of desert.

The appearance of the Pampas has been altered by civilization first the introduction of cattle and horses (guarded by gauchos,) then of sheep-breeding and later by the cultivation of cereal and forage crops.

The demand for labour to build the railways and towns induced a strong movement inland of native Argentines and foreign immigrants.

Likewise the Prairies of Canada may be said to constitute a northern Pampas. The open and somewhat dry region, a continuation of the grand North American grasslands, forms a semi-circular arc on the 49th parallel, occupying the southern parts of the Prairie Provinces Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The area of the prairies within the three provinces is somewhat larger than the Argentine Pampas.

The highly fertile soils and a deliberate government policy induced settlers in the late nineteenth century from Europe, eastern Canada and the United States to move, to farm and ranch. Wheat soon replaced the native prairie grasses. Although the river system is extensive, the largest, the Saskatchewan-Nelson system flows east but into Hudson Bay.

Railway-building tied this agricultural hinterland to eastern Canada's manufacturers and to ports on both oceans.

This article will focus on the flags of the Prairies and how flags, devices, colours and other symbols reflect this grassland region. What is more significant geography or history in symbol-making? Where examples allow, we shall refer at the end to similarities and differences between Pampa and Prairie symbols and two nations, the Argentine Republic and Canada.

FLAGS OF POWER: This term will be used to identify flags imposed upon region by a power outside of that region. Rupertsland, later to be called the Northwest Territories from which were carved three Prairie Provinces Manitoba in 1870 and, in 1905, Alberta and Saskatchewan, was granted to a fur trading company by the King of England and under Charter was called the Hudson's Bay Company. The flags flown at the many and various forts and posts trading with the Indian were usually of two types of Union flag or Jack of Great Britain and the mercantile British red ensign defaced in the fly by the conjoined letters "HB Co." At appropriate times the Governor's flag might be in use. This consisted of a banner of arms; a St. George's cross with a beaver in each corner. A rival company operating out of Montreal was the North-West Company. It also flew a red ensign, often from its freight-boats and canoes, but defaced with the letters NW Co. These then were flags of power in the whole region.

The population was composed of 30,000 or more tribal Indians Cree, Black feet, Sarcee and Sioux. Numerous company factors, traders and trappers (mostly Scots and French-Canadians) had lived in the country. They took Indian wives and generated a new race called Métis who as buffalo hunters, trappers and farmers emerged - largely but not entirely French-speaking and Catholic. There were also still a few Scots highlanders, descendants of the failed farming colony of Lord Selkirk on the Red River. Most however were Métis.

When Britain transferred control of this vast territory to the newly formed (1867) Dominion of Canada, the local population was not consulted; they and their title to land went unrecognized. Faced with an influx of settlers from Ontario (Upper Canada) who were English-speaking and Protestant, they rebelled, setting up the Republic of Assiniboia. It is not time here to go into details except for the flag of the new state : simply a white flag with a golden fleur-de-lis in the centre, later modified by the addition of a bison and a shamrock proper. This was the first Flag of Local Identity within the region; apart from the flags borne by Métis buffalo hunters in their annual hunt, a flag of a blue or red field with a white infinity sign thereon. As settlers often Protestant, Anglo-Saxon and Orangemen from Ontario poured into the new province, Manitoba, created from this section of the Territories, they defied the Métis and first settlers by brandishing a Union Flag with the word CANADA on it. Once more a Flag of Power was introduced.

The Union Flag of Great Britain the flag of British and Dominion power was to dominate the skies or poles rather, of this region for the next ninety years.

There are several factors that help explain this predominance of British symbols.

1) The Flag of Canada was the Flag of Empire. English-speaking Canadians felt themselves to be Britons beyond the sea. When the Red ensign appeared in 1892 it was intended only as an identifier of Canadian vessels, a merchant ensign.

2) It seemed most important to cling to these British symbols as a counterweight to American expansion, expressed after the Civil War in the United States as a Manifest Destiny to control the North American continent.

3) Except possibly the armorial banner of Nova Scotia whose early use is arguable, no province or territory possessed a flag of its own. All identity in flags was imperial.

4) City and county flags were unheard although they were present in Britain and other countries. Ottawa's first flag was devised in 1903, Montreal's not until 1939.

5) The Indian, now First Nation peoples, believed in the benevolence of the Great White Mother, Queen Victoria, in whose name and under whose flag treaties were signed. The red flag of the British ensign was a popular device in fact one tribe of western Indians refused to accept Canada's new flag in 1965.

6) To hold the Territory for Canada it was necessary to populate it. The Canadian Interior Minister Clifford Sifton devised an excellent plan to attract would-be farmers by the newly built railways across Canada. He sent agents into rural Europe. Hence there poured into our new west the peasants of the old Empires Russia, Austro-Hungary, Great Britain, the countries of Scandinavia, the Lowlands, Italy. Americans also came in droves; Chinese too (as railway labourers) and even Australians, Icelanders and Syrians entered. Some sects entered in collective groups Hutterites, Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Mormons. The Canadians as well left their foyers in eastern Canada. Since rural settlements then after the turn of the last century arose, composed of as few as one or two nationalities. It behooved the Dominion, territorial and later provincial authorities to advance the English language, the public schools and British democratic and symbolic traditions among the new populace, often referred to as the 'Men in Sheepskin coats'. The process would be a strong unifying force. There were few objections, since land was easily acquired once broken and lived on, and in their homelands were found only poverty, persecution and tyranny.

7) Fear of Bolshevism and labour unrest (often fomented by Russian and Finns) brought the authorities to insist on British symbols alone in public activities such as parades; the flying of red flags was made a criminal offence. The Union Jack had to be at the head of any march or procession. (However in their own halls, churches and labour temples, the ethnic groups kept alive and promote the national symbols that were even forbidden in their old homeland. This was especially true among Poles, Ukrainians and Finns. The flagless Icelanders on the Prairies waved Union Jacks to welcome a governor to their 'republic' of New Iceland in Manitoba.

8) The Royal Canadian Mounted Police force was established to maintain control in these northwest territories. This led to law, peace and good government and no Indian wars throughout our west unlike the American experience of a "wild" west. They also carried their bright red and blue colours and the Union Flag throughout the settlements.

9) Anglicization, perhaps Britannicization is not a word, was successful. The British flags hung in every classroom and the privilege of lowering or hoisting the flag was coveted by the school-children, who, of course, sang God Save the King (Edward VII). Empire Day and Dominion Day (July 1) saw abundant use of the British flags in parades, fairs and other celebrations. This love of things British was personified in one man from the West, a lawyer from the town of Prince Albert who was to become the leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister of the Nation. This was John George Diefenbaker, a son of German immigrants; he stubbornly and viciously opposed the introduction of truly Canadian flags and symbols. He advocated the continuance of a flag with British elements in its design such as the Canadian Red Ensign. He hated such changes as the dropping of the word Dominion in our country's title and the discontinuance of the word 'royal' in our postal system. Thus the Flag of Power had become to many the Flag of Identity.

But compromise between the two concepts had already begun in the granting to the various provinces, one by one, of coats of arms that carried British and colonial or local charges and colours. Manitoba's shield at first has a bison proper standing on a rock, on green, but shows a cross of St. George in chief.

Alberta's proposal for a coat of arms, advanced by a Canadian heraldist was first rejected by the English College of Arms as picturesque rather than heraldic. It shows a cross of St. George in chief with a successive view of the Alberta landscape grain fields, foothills, forest, mountain, blue sky. The Canadian viewpoint prevailed.

Saskatchewan's coat is essentially of a local nature only an extended lion appears in the chief to remind us of imperial connections. The rest contains the wheat symbol - the sheaves or garbs. The colours are green and gold, very reflective of Saskatchewan's geography. So at the beginnings of provincial life two jurisdictions had arms of a local and an external identity. But it would take 60 years for these compromise symbols, with modifications, to appear on a flag.

The period 1964 to 1965 brought about the Canadianization of symbols, flags, anthem, titles, nomenclature. The National Flag was proclaimed Feb. 15, 1965 after a year of bitter parliamentary and media debate.

Soon the old order crumbled and a people's whole perspective on flags changed.

Within five years all the provinces and territories had adopted their own flags (Quebec, however, from 1948, British Columbia from 1960).

Of the three Prairie Province, only one, Manitoba persisted in a British type flag, a red ensign with the provincial arms in the fly. This flag, like Ontario's in the opinion of this writer, was decreed by the Conservative governments then in power, without public input.

It was a of knee - jerk reaction, a slap in the face for the federal Liberal government which had rejected the Canadian red ensign. Was Manitoba simply in denial?

The other two devised news styles of flag design. The Albertan flag, first referred to as the province's banner, shows the shield of arms in the centre of a blue field.

The blue recall the famously cloudless skies of 'sunny' Alberta. Yet it reminds us of many of the state flags in the U.S.A., e.g. adjacent, Montana, which put the state seal on a blue field.

In my perception, this way have well been an unconsciously imitative move remembering the not insignificant American presence among early settlers, Mormons, Texan oil patch people..

Saskatchewan would have pleased the American comedian Mort Sahl, as he thought not having a flag was a good start. The province didn't at first see the need for a provincial flag. But it did want a banner to help celebrate its jubilee year. A contest was held. The design of a nun, Sister Imelda, was chosen a red and green banner with a stalk of wheat at the hoist. Later Saskatchewan followed the example of the others but decided to ask the people for a design and not to impose one. (It is a very socialist province.) The provincial flag is a bicolour of yellow and green. Its floral emblem is a western lily centred on the fly. The shield of arms with lion and wheat-sheaves appears in the upper hoist. The old world connections persisted but in a minor way, so the province's flag-wavers can boast of flying flags of identity. The colours in the flag of Saskatchewan reflect the green northern forest and the golden grainfields of its southern prairies.

A few municipal flags had been adopted probably in the 1950s but the flowers of Vexillology began to bloom everywhere in western Canada cities, towns, villages, municipal regions, school districts, and counties began the process of acquiring flags of identity, still ongoing. At first a few red, white and blue flags prevailed (Red Deer, St. Albert) but increasingly the colour of choice is gold. It is the amber colour of durum wheat and the yellow brightness of the sun. Yellow with green is also popular (Moose Jaw, Brandon, Saskatoon, Glendon, the Fransaskois people's flag). Blue and yellow too (Dauphin, Winnipeg, Viscount.)

After the colours come charges or devices representative of the west. Calgary in its red and white flag places a cowboy's hat, advertising its Calgary Stampede festival. Edmonton has the fur trader. Wheat appears on many flags, mostly in a form of a stalk rather than the heraldic 'garb'. The elements of power are found in a few flags but these are no longer British symbols, but simply the use of the red maple leaf (Estevan, York). Regina alone recalls a British royal connection. The city looked for inspiration in the etymology of its name, 'Queen'. The city styles itself however as Queen of the Plains and the crown is said to suggest the gold of the surrounding wheatfields. This decline in the use of former connective symbols of power need not imply that these devices were wrong, disliked or unesthetic, rather local citizenry is quite confident in their provincial and Canadian identity and does not think in those historical connection, nor do the schools or media place any emphasis on them. This goes as far as resurrecting ethnic items and putting them on display, just look at Glendon's flag with its boast of being the pirogy capital (pirogy is a dough product of Slavic cuisine), the Ukrainian decorated Easter egg on the flag of Vegreville, or Kalmar's use of Swedish (and Ukrainian) colours, and Scottish elements in the flags of Balgonie and Provost! The First Nations have also adopted flags, not tribal but reservation-based.

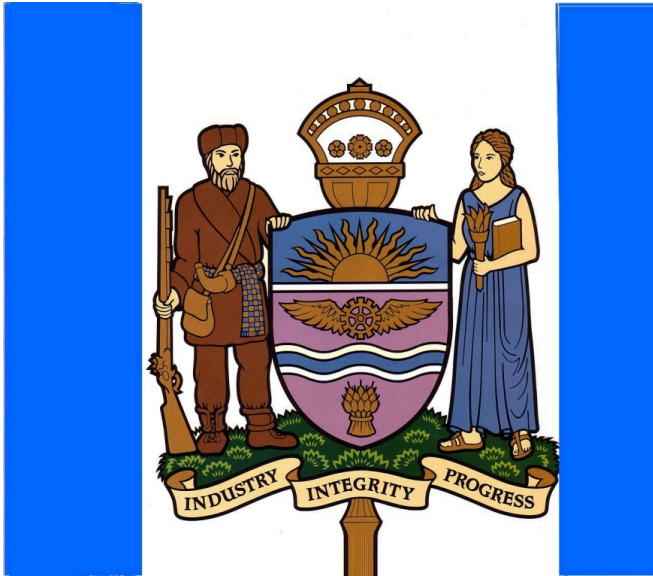
I have not been able to examine recent developments in the symbols of the Pampas of Argentina. I am, however, familiar with Estandarte and earlier publications, even postage stamps, depicting the flags of the plain region. We notice that the federal or central government's insignia have, so to speak, won the day heraldically. In the provincial arms, federal emblems invariably appear:

- the national colours (celeste and white)
- the Sun of May
- the cap of liberty

However even armorially there are expressions of locale in the charges and accoutrements of heraldry, chiefly flora and fauna, but also indigenous peoples, ranchers, gauchos, farm scenes and crops, head or horns of livestock, local leaders, etc.

According to FOTW website, Estandarte, and Gaceta de Banderas flags of provinces and municipalities have begun to appear. For example the designs submitted in a competition for a flag for the Province of Buenos Aires remind me of the process of that resulted in a provincial flag in Saskatchewan. First of all, the contest was public and asked for input from the people. Secondly the designs showed colours bright and dark, reds, greens, yellows, but not, or rarely, the national colours. The charges used on the proposed flag reflected, as do local flags of the Prairies of the Canada, agriculture and ranching in the use of wheat stalks and head of horns of cattle.

This of course, is too little information to make solid or defensible conclusions. But it suggests that there may be discoverable and documentable parallelisms in flag developments in the regions especially in the new world, that are geographically similar. These steps include: an absence of flags (no flags), flags of power imposed from the outside, to a symbolic mixture of power and local identity, finally to a burgeoning of flags entirely, or almost so, of flags and emblems of local character.



Flag of Edmonton, AB



Poster inviting settlers to the Prairies, under the first version of the Canadian Red Ensign (four-provinces shield)



Flag of the City of Regina, SK



Flag of the City of Moose Jaw, SK



Manitoba loyalist flag, 1869-70



Cover of *Flagscan* showing the wheaten-gold flags of the Prairies; row by row from the top, Saskatchewan, Estevan, Winnipeg, York, Stony Plain, Viscount, Brandon, Saskatoon, 'Fransaskois'



Emblem of the city of Drumheller, AB



Election campaign, farmer and worker asked to support John A. Macdonald and the British flag



Settlers come from all corners of the world to farm the rich prairie soils



Province of Buenos Aires



**Town of Sierras Bayas
Olavarría Municipality
Province of Buenos Aires**



**Campana Municipality
Province of Buenos Aires**



**Berisso Municipality
Province of Buenos Aires**



Kevin Harrington, M.A. (T). , Fellow of FIAV (2007)

He is the editor of *Flagscan* (since its launch in 1985), *Banderín*, and other publications of the Canadian Flag Association.

Born on the shortest day of the year 1934, Kevin lives in the Toronto area. He taught in a Scarborough high school for over 30 years - Geography, Italian, History, French, and Library skills. A Sagittarian and devotee of St Sebastian, he has always been curious about symbols. This quite early led him into vexillology and the study of languages. He has attended numerous national and international flag conferences. Kevin is the author of 'Sweden's story in over 450 flags' (2005).