



The Maritime Influence on the Municipal Flags of Atlantic Canada

Rob Raeside

Abstract

Over one hundred municipal flags have been recorded from the four Atlantic provinces of eastern Canada. Recognising that not all communities in the Atlantic Provinces “face the sea”, an analysis was undertaken to determine the significance of the major categories of local enterprise, and from that the effect of these enterprises in the design of the flags. The analysis included elements from the arms or municipal seal commonly displayed on the flags. The analysis of these flags and the communities they represent reveals that the flags reflect the industries that dominate the economy of the municipalities, especially those that are coastal communities, chief among which are maritime enterprises.

Flags of coastal communities overwhelmingly reflect maritime industries, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador, where coastal settlement is predominant, and flags featuring maritime symbols comprise 83% of the subset. The opposite extreme is in New Brunswick, where 41% of the communities “face the sea”, but less than half feature maritime symbols. Most of the maritime communities in New Brunswick are Acadian (French) in character and the majority have incorporated the Acadia *Stella Maris* (“Star of the Sea”).



Canada

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Introduction

Over the past three decades many communities across North America have adopted municipal flags. These new flags range widely in style, and include heraldic banners of arms, coats of arms on a simple field, elaborate multi-element designs, illustrations arising from flag-design contests, and stylistic representations. Among municipalities, each community has strived to represent itself in a meaningful and sometimes eye-catching way on its flag, and many appear to have made use of local enterprises and phenomena to do so.

The four provinces of Atlantic Canada have followed this trend of adoption of flags, with over one hundred flags recorded on the Flags of the World website (FOTW, 2011). These provinces are New Brunswick (32 flags), Newfoundland and Labrador (30 flags), Nova Scotia (33 flags) and Prince Edward Island (8 flags).

Analytical Methods

A total of 103 flags were examined in this exercise with the aim to identify the origin of the symbolism used on the flags, to assess the purpose behind this symbolism, and to relate that to the principal industries, enterprises and landmarks. The analysis involved all the cities and major urban areas (population in excess of 20,000), with the exception of Corner Brook, NL, for which only the coat of arms is available (Wikipedia, 2011). It also included all villages, regional municipalities, towns, and counties for which flags could be found.

Some communities in Atlantic Canada have provided on the Internet extensive documentation of the symbolism of their flags; many have very limited or no explanation; for others the flag is only known from a photograph. In order to identify a maritime element, therefore, it was necessary to limit the investigation to obvious symbolism (ships, fish, lighthouses, waves, etc). Colour symbolism was not used (e.g., “blue represents the sea”), as it usually cannot be ascertained what the significance of colours are (if any).

Many flags of municipalities in the Atlantic provinces display in some way the coat of arms or municipal seal. Approximately 80% show heraldic devices, either as the main element of the flag, incorporated as a separate element in the flag, or as a banner of arms. These heraldic features are commonly rich in symbolism that reflects local enterprises, and the elements of municipal heraldry were included in the analysis.

The first step in the analysis involved the collection of all municipal flags that have been reported on the Flags of the World website (FOTW 2011), augmented by my own observations in the Atlantic provinces. For each flag, the location, type of municipality, and basic design (triband, banner of arms, seal on a plain field, cross-shape, logo, etc.) were noted, and the various elements inspected to determine the presence of elements related to local enterprises.

The locations of the selected municipalities were then examined to determine if they “face the sea” – meaning do they have frontage on tidewater? In most cases, this is relatively

simple, as such communities are known to be ports, but in some cases it was necessary to inspect 1:50,000 scale maps to assess the extent of the municipal boundaries. Almost all municipalities identified as facing the sea have some sort of port facility also. At the same time, vexilliferous communities that lie inland were examined to determine if they also have a tendency to use local enterprise as a theme for their flags. The results of these analyses are presented here.

Elements of Flag Design

Maritime elements in the design of flags of the municipalities are very variable. By far the most common element in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador is the appearance of a ship. These range from small inshore craft (e.g. Grand Manan, NB, Fogo, NL) to large ocean-going ferries (e.g., Lewisporte, NL), and include historical examples (e.g. Miramichi, NB, Bonavista, NL) and heraldic ships (e.g., Rothesay, NB, which reuses the Duchy of Brunswick galley from the provincial flag as a canton, or Cape Breton Regional Municipality, NS) or many-masted sailing ships (e.g., Rexton, NB, Halifax, NS, Summerside, PE), and in the case of Lunenburg, NS, the famous fishing schooner, MV Bluenose. An extreme example might be the drill rig featured on the shield on the flag of Bay Roberts, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The next most common maritime element of flag design is the fish, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador, where fishing is a mainstay of the economy. The fish is commonly shown on the arms (e.g., Avondale, Burgeo, McCallum, NL, Bathurst, NB) or the municipal seal (Lockeport, NS). Other communities (e.g., Carbonear, Fortune, NL) use a banner of arms, showing a fish. In most cases the fish is identifiable as a codfish, cod traditionally being the staple fish of much of the Northwest Atlantic fishery until the imposition of a moratorium on fishing cod in 1992.

Lobster and shellfish fishing today is a dominant aspect of the local economy of all four provinces, and not surprisingly lobster features on some flags. It is incorporated as the crest in coat of arms of Kensington, PE, as the central element on a wavy field on the shield of Shediac, NB, and more whimsically is the dominant element in the non-heraldic flag of the Municipality of Barrington, NS, which proclaims itself as the “Lobster Capital of Canada.” Other marine wildlife depicted on flags are seals (Fleur de Lys, Brigus, NL), sea birds (McCallum, NL), and a heron feeding in a coastal marsh (Charlo, NB).

Miscellaneous fishing-related equipment is also prominent on many flags. Items such as oars (Rothesay, NB, Burin, NL), a net (Ste. Marie-St-Raphael, NB), an anchor (Avondale, Flatrock, NL), a ship’s wheel (Lewisporte, Marystown, NL), compass rose (Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove, NL), and a sextant (Portugal Cove, NL) can all be found. An unusual maritime indicator is provided by the saltire in the flag of Borden-Carleton, PE. This cross is made of two diagonal stripes, one per bend made of ten alternating black and yellow patches, the other per bend sinister of five intertwined black and yellow patches. The ten patches represent the railroad, but the five intertwined patches represent the sub-sea cable first deployed from Prince Edward Island at Borden-Carleton.

The lighthouse, although now disappearing from the coastlines, is traditionally seen as a symbol of safe passage, and is widely used on the municipal flags of the Atlantic provinces, as seen in Rexton, NB, Baddeck, Yarmouth, and Yarmouth County, NS, and Souris, PE. In some cases (Yarmouth County, Souris) the lighthouse is incorporated into a coastal scene as a main element of the shield.

The final item identified as providing a maritime connection is the presence of waves. Commonly these are found on a shield, either as a series of horizontal stripes or as a field boundary, but invariably are used to exhibit a maritime influence. Examples include schematic waves in a ship scene (Miramichi, NB), wavy field boundaries in a shield (Rothesay, Ste. Marie-St-Raphael, Shediac, NB) or flag (Dover, Glovertown, NL, Annapolis Royal, Dartmouth, Pictou, NS), or are shown as wavy markings on a shield (Burin, NL, Shippegan, NB). The shield on the flag of Souris, PE, uses a line of white waves to separate the blue of the sky from the same blue of the sea. Waves also lend themselves to highly stylized graphic interpretations, as seen on the logo on the flag of Beaubassin-Est Rural Community, NB, or the display of the text “*sur la baie by the sea*” on the flag of Charlo, NB.

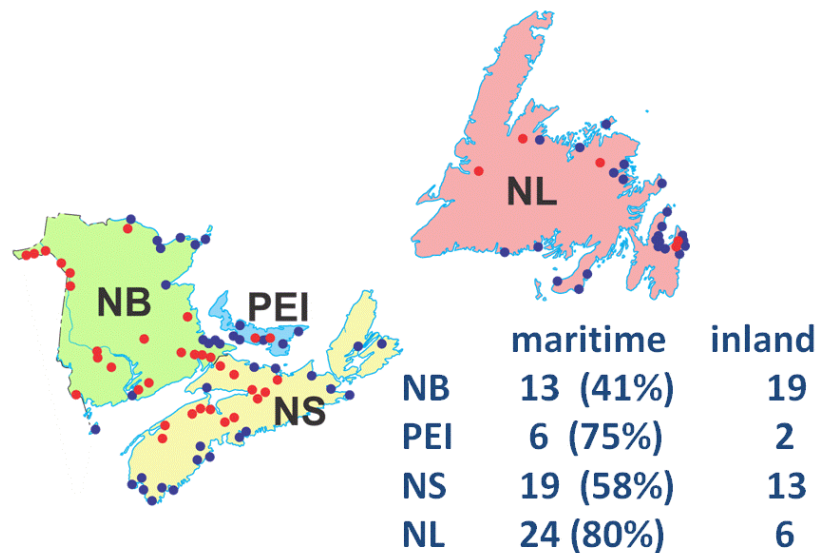


Figure 1. Location of vexilliferous communities in Atlantic Canada. Blue dots refer to maritime locations, red dots to inland locations. Inset table shows the number and percentage by province of maritime vexilliferous communities (blue) and the number of inland vexilliferous communities (red).

Analysis of Maritime Municipal Flag Design

A map showing the location of all known vexilliferous municipalities in Atlantic Canada is presented in Figure 1. Communities that border tidewater dominate in Newfoundland and Labrador (80%) and Prince Edward Island (75%). In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick maritime

locations represent 59% and 41% of the vexilliferous municipalities, respectively. In the analysis, distinction was made between maritime municipalities that have a maritime reference on their flag, and those that do not. Similarly for non-maritime municipalities, an attempt was made to identify if they exhibited evidence of local industry (agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, transportation) on their flags. These data are plotted as pie charts on Figure 2.

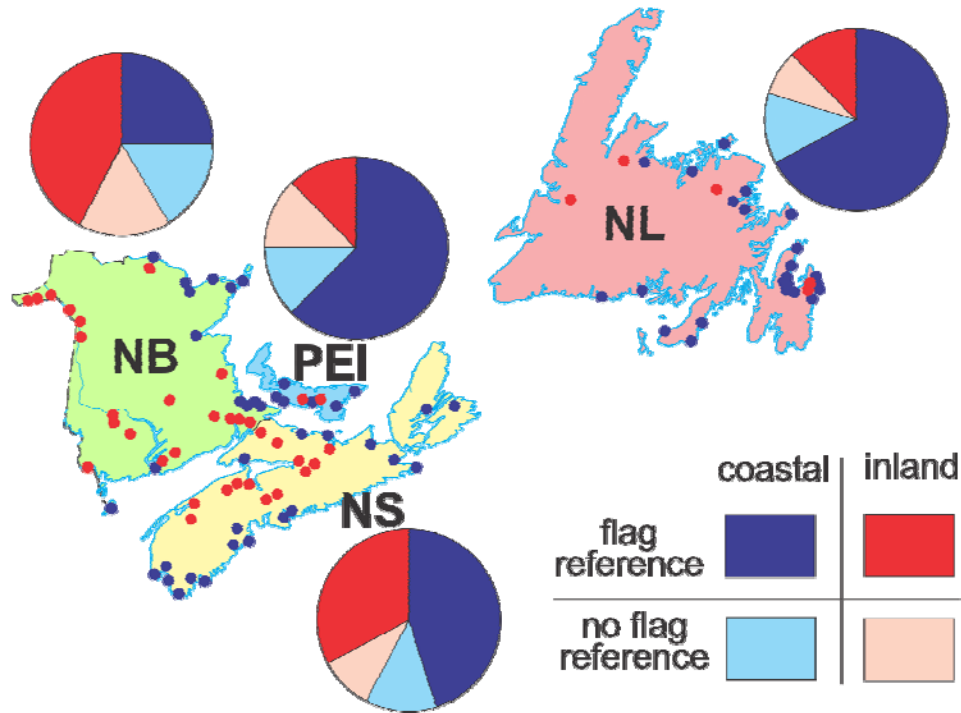


Figure 2. Preference for maritime design elements. Blue represents maritime vexilliferous communities and red, inland vexilliferous communities. Darker shades represent that fraction that employs symbolism on the flags that symbolize local enterprise.

The two provinces that are predominantly maritime by nature of the location of their cities, towns and villages (75% or more) also dominate in the display of maritime features on their flags. These are Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador, which display maritime symbols in 62% and 67% of their municipal flags respectively, and in both cases 83% of the time on flags of coastal municipalities. Nova Scotia has 59% of its communities in coastal locations, and likewise, 83% of these communities employ maritime devices on their flags.

New Brunswick alone appears to defy the trend of about 83% of the flags of coastal communities bearing maritime symbols. There, only 58% of the maritime communities use sea-faring elements. A comparison with the inland communities shows that the strong preference there is to employ symbols of local industries, so the low proportion of maritime communities doing so appears unusual. Although the overall numbers are small (12 coastal communities), further analysis reveals a possible cause. New Brunswick has two coastlines – the Bay of Fundy

on the south (two vexilliferous communities) and the Northumberland Strait-Gulf of St. Lawrence-Bay of Chaleur on the east. While the Fundy coast is dominated by anglophone communities, the east coast is dominated by francophone Acadian communities. Nine out of the ten vexilliferous communities on the east coast are dominantly Acadian. Many of these French communities have chosen a symbol to represent their ethnicity rather than their industry – the *Stella Maris*. This is displayed as a yellow star in the upper hoist of a French tricolour to make the Acadian flag, which is widely seen in all the francophone areas of the Maritime provinces. The term *Stella Maris* can be translated as *Star of Mary* or as *Star of the Sea* and as the latter locally refers also to the sea urchin which, when seen by fishermen returning to shore first alludes to the shallowing of the sea, and in turn demonstrates that the harbour is nearby. The *Stella Maris* on the Acadian flag has been used by the Acadian people for over 100 years, being adopted in 1884 (Biddiscombe, 1990). Visible on six of the east coast Acadian communities' flags, the *Stella Maris* appears to have usurped the place of other maritime elements on these flags.

Flags of the Major Cities

The major cities of the region have adopted symbols that generally predate the recent 1980s to 2000s introduction of municipal flags. These are Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John, New Brunswick, the Halifax and Cape Breton regional municipalities (HRM and CBRM) in Nova Scotia, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. All but Fredericton are maritime in character, but most have simply employed the municipal coat of arms on a plain field (Saint John, Fredericton, Moncton, and St. John's). Designed by the Canadian Herald, these coats of arms commonly display historical devices, some of which are maritime in source (galley, sailing ship, fish, waves). Charlottetown employs Queen Charlotte's coronation crown on a chequered field with a chequered fringe, to mimic the provincial flag. Only HRM and CBRM directly allude to their maritime connections on their flags. CBRM employs a sloop surrounded by a maple leaf-adorned tressure, representing the sea-faring nature of the region and the eight municipalities that amalgamated to make up the regional municipality – and, as relatively new constructs, might be considered as recently designed flags. Halifax Regional Municipality comprises four previous municipal units – the cities of Halifax, Dartmouth, the town of Bedford and Halifax County. Elements of the heraldry of each of these entities were used to make the distinctive HRM flag: the St. Andrew's cross to celebrate the Scottish heritage and to mimic the provincial flag, symbolizing the municipality's status as capital of Nova Scotia; the kingfisher for the City of Halifax, the ships for the City of Dartmouth, the wavy blue bars (seen only on the coat of arms) for the County of Halifax, and the broad arrow for the Town of Bedford. The blue field represents the harbours, the sea generally, as well as lakes, rivers and canal. The broad arrows refer not only to Bedford, but recall the long involvement of the authorities of the Sovereign in defence and the presence of the forces, both land and sea-based. The broad arrows point in four directions, symbolic of the naval tradition, and indicating connections with all corners of the world; the two sailing ships refer to the naval

tradition of Halifax and the history of settlement. The kingfisher is a symbol of industry and is placed in the centre, in part as it is the oldest symbol specifically created for a public government in the capital region (1860).

Table 1: Use of maritime symbols on flags of Atlantic Canada

Element	New Brunswick	Pr. Edward I.	Nova Scotia	Nfld & Labrador
Ship	10%	12%	25%	33%
Fish	3%	12%	3%	27%
Sailing equipment	6%	-	-	20%
Waves	3%	25%	6%	33%
Other items	lobster	undersea cable, bridge, lighthouse, lobster	lighthouse, lobster, harbour view	drill rig, seal, iceberg, island view, Neptune

Values represent the percentage of all known vexilliferous flags in the Atlantic Provinces that employ the symbol.

Summary

Maritime communities dominate in the Atlantic provinces of Canada, and where these communities have been known to adopt flags, the overwhelming majority (83% in three of the four provinces) have employed some sort of maritime symbol – a ship, fish or other marine wildlife, sailing equipment, lighthouse or wave. This matches the rate of adoption of symbols representing local enterprise (forestry, agriculture, industry or transportation) in inland communities. The one exception is the collection of Acadian francophone communities in New Brunswick, where instead of a maritime theme, the majority have employed the yellow *Stella Maris* (Star of the Sea), derived from the well established Acadian flag, to demonstrate their Acadian status.

References

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About the Author

Rob Raeside, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada

Director of Flags of the World website (1999–present)

Editor on Flags of the World website (1996–present)

Professor of Geology, Department of Earth and Environmental Science, Acadia University, Nova Scotia (1982–present)

