



The Vexilloid Tabloid

Portland Flag Association

“Free, and Worth Every Penny!”

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The 25th Anniversary of 9/11

[this updated article first appeared in
VT 59, August 2016]

By Ted Kaye

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks spurred flag use in the U.S. to an extent unseen since the nation's bicentennial in 1976.

It seemed that in the hours and days after the attacks, Americans had four fundamental responses: they called family members, they went to church, they gave money and blood, and they bought a flag.

On a typical 12 September, Walmart would have sold 6,400 flags nationwide—but on that day in 2001 it sold 116,000. The next day, 250,000. The next day it sold 135,000—then ran out.

Flag stores across the nation saw the same pattern. Here in Portland, Mike Hale and his employees at Elmer's Flag & Banner anticipated the public reaction to the attacks and ordered a vast amount of inventory. They then provided a deeply meaningful experience for the thousands who came to the store—a service few retailers have the honor to deliver.

See Mike's moving recollection on p. 4.

Annin, the country's oldest and largest flag company, quintupled its production in a matter of days. Its peers throughout the industry, such as Valley Forge and Eder, followed suit.

However, in a strange, unexpected consequence, the demand for U.S. flags after 9/11 opened up the market to foreign-made flags. American manufacturers couldn't keep up with the demand, so in 2001 imported flags grew from under \$1 million to over \$50 million (over half from China). Today, as flag manufacturers and politicians struggle to return the country's flag to “Made in America” status, imports are now around \$5 million.

Flag-flying and flag-buying follows cycles, leaving pundits to discuss the ebb and flow of patriotism and the meaning of displaying our country's flag. We leave the discussion of the reasons for those cycles to others. However, every time patriotic flag-use surges, there appears to be a parallel growth in the interest in flags in general, a correlation that only helps advance vexillology.



I always marvel at the Americans versus the Canadians, how much you folks are flag wavers. We're not—except the Acadians. There are Acadians waving their flag all night long.

—Yvon Cyr, Guelph, Ontario

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If you wish to compliment the editor, or to contribute in the future, contact Ted Kaye at 503-223-4660 or editor@portlandflag.org. If you wish to complain, call your mother.

September 2026 Flutterings You Need to Know

In our September meeting, hosted by Graham Houser at his Rocky Butte-area home and streamed via Zoom (with some technical challenges—apologies to those who couldn't join), 12 PFA members enjoyed 3+ hours of flags and conversation.

As host, Graham moderated the meeting with the PFA flag hanging prominently. He began the session showing recent acquisitions, including the new flag of Yucca Valley, California, a series of ADAPT handicapped-access U.S.-variant flags, and 2'x3' PFA flags which he gifted to attendees.

John Niggley unfurled a number of 4'x6' national flags he'd bought at Elmer's for his 20' flag pole, and led a discussion of the appropriate sizing of flags relative to poles.

Elizabeth Peavy, a new member (accompanied by her parents, Jane and Derrick), explained the Girl Scouts "fun patch" for Vexillology she'd created for her Silver Award, with graduated challenges for all ages; she had 83 takers!



Derrick and Jane Peavy admire Elizabeth's flag enthusiasm.



Graham Houser exudes over the new flag of Yucca Valley, California.



John Niggley plays "name that flag" with Chile (not Texas), noting the 2010 ballot-printing flag mix-up in Atascosa County.



Elizabeth Peavy describes the Vexillology "fun patch" she'd created for Girl Scouts to earn in Oregon and SW Washington.



David Koski unfolds a U.S. flag.

David Koski brought two U.S. "casket" flags (5'x9.5") which he thought honored veterans in his family—one with applied stars, the other with embroidered stars; leading to a demonstration of the proper folding technique.

Star Pesetsky described how various Pride flags' color schemes are used in other applications, such as on clothing, sometimes as coded signaling.



Star Pesetsky explains Pride flag use.



Joyce Gifford shows a patch of the new flag of Oregon City.



William Gifford opines on his city's new flag, designed with the help of NAVA members.

Joyce Gifford related the background of the politics and challenges of the recent adoption of the Oregon City flag, a cause smallFLAGS had championed.

William Gifford gave his opinion on Oregon City's design: "absolutely adequate".

Max Liberman, the PFA's delegate to the FIAV General Assembly, gave a full report on ICV 31, the 31st International Congress of Vexillology in Paris in July.



Ted Kaye shows the winter flag of the Republic of Užupis, a community in Vilnius.



Deniz Iyigün streams into the meeting from the Seattle area.

Ted Kaye brought a large number of flags from his recent travels in the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and France (for ICV 31)—including national, regional, municipal, historic, and sports flags—challenging folks to “name that flag” in the fewest unfolds.

Deniz Iyigün, joining from Kirkland, Washington, showed recent flags he'd acquired and described his initiative to create banners of arms for each of the four “houses” at his high school, Lakeside.

Our next meeting, on Thursday, November 12, will be hosted by Ted Kaye at his Willamette Heights home. He took the PFA flag. We expect again to welcome our local members as well as far-flung friends.



Max Liberman reports on ICV 31.

Memories from a Flag Store on the Morning of 9/11

By Michael Hale

Owner Emeritus, Elmer's Flag & Banner

The line began forming even before our store opened on the morning of 11 September 2001.

We were still stunned by what we'd seen on TV—the twin towers collapsing, the thousands of people who died. But we had to proceed.

We had begun sending massive orders for U.S. flags to our multiple flag manufacturers/suppliers early that fateful morning. Our experience during Operation Desert Storm told us we had better order big and hope we would get a ration of the total available.

We ordered a year's supply of flags that morning. It would not be nearly enough...

When we opened our doors, 75 people or more poured inside—we could not move through the store. All ten phone lines were ringing. Every available sales clerk, two outside salesmen, the shipping clerk, the two bookkeepers, and the three sewers all came to help. Soon the line went down the block.

There was a quiet solemnity, and every customer was patient and polite. There were some who said it was the first U.S. flag they had ever owned. Others spoke of loved ones or friends whom they could communicate with who were in the towers. My own daughter was visiting in New York and planned to visit the World Trade



The Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, under terrorist attack the morning of 11 September (9/11) 2001.

Center that day. I saw tears as people held their flag.

Now the line wrapped around the block. My wife tried to call the store; not getting through, she left work and came to help. She stood at the door and metered the flow of people, letting in only 20 or so at a time. Who would have imagined a flag store with a bouncer, and a pretty one at that? We set up an express line leading directly from the front door to the counter and the three cash registers. But some people didn't want that. Some said they had waited two hours—they wanted the full experience of shopping in a flag store.

I walked the line outside several times and talked to people as the day wore on. They were making friends, some exchanging phone

numbers, others leaving and buying lunch and water for those near them in line. Others, who had to leave the line to pick up kids from preschool or other errands, left money—even credit cards—so that total strangers might buy them a flag.

We limited people to one 3x5-foot flag per family, rationing the flags in the hope they would last the week. As one of the largest flag stores in America, we had a large supply. But it was dwindling quickly.

On Day Two we again had a line down the block. As expected, our U.S. flag manufacturers responded that they would only ship us a fraction of our orders. We found a local fabric outlet with a stock of roll goods of printed U.S. flags needing to be cut, sewn, and

grommets. We set our sewers to work. But they could only make 200 a day. We needed double that number.

Then someone checked our on-line orders, forgotten in the previous day's mêlée. Thousands of orders were still pouring in from all over the country.

Across the U.S., most flag stores had closed after that first day. Still other stores' internet sites crashed. We sent the roll goods to the sewing staff at Jantzen Knitting Mills, who were seeing all their swimsuit orders cancelled. They could sew thousands a day! We bought broom handles for poles and air freighted in heavy metal wall brackets.

The line continued each day and would for over a week. This was patriotism, but not the kind where you wave a flag on a pole at a soccer game. It was a kind of quiet determination, a kind of solidarity, a badge of courage—that we were Americans, united, and we wanted to show our pride.

We stopped everything in the store to observe the moment of silence decreed by the president. You could have heard a pin drop if it were not for the weeping. Tears fell again. Our emotions were raw.

So it would continue for weeks on end. We sold every U.S. flag, every sticker, flag pin, flag patch, car flag, and flagpole in the store. We sold two and a half years' supply of U.S. flags in two months.

More flags arrived in time to fill the thousands of on-line orders.



Elmer's Flag & Banner, Portland's iconic flag store—founded by Mike Hale's stepfather Elmer Reider in 1963, and now owned by Dave Anchel.

Everything had been shipped in overnight air. We paid tens of thousands of dollars in overtime pay and temporary help. Our phone bill was staggering.

Customers wore out the carpet, and some staffers developed foot problems from so much time on their feet. But not one staff member called in sick for two months. At year's end we gave them bonuses and matched their 401K contributions to the maximum.

We had sold everything at normal, everyday prices. No one in Portland could have missed the news broadcasts of the lines, the groovy close-ups of the flags being made by our sewers, the interviews with customers. For a brief while, the U.S. flag was at the top of the charts, the star attraction.

One of the results of the millions of U.S. flags sold by all the flag stores across the nation was an increased awareness of the meaning and power of the flag.

Also, the next spring we saw an interesting by-product of the millions of people mounting flag brackets on their homes: many would buy and place decorative house flags on those poles.

That week a new star was born.

Mike Hale retired from Elmer's in 2011 and remains an active member of the Portland Flag Association.

[this article first appeared in VT 59, August 2016]



Flag Specifications in Cultural Context

By Clay Moss

Alden Jencks' article in *VT* 118 described a “mis-manufactured” Burkina Faso flag (with an inverted star), flying in front of the country's embassy in Washington D. C. I suggest the flag may not be mis-manufactured, at all.

I once lived in Malawi and traveled a good bit all over Africa. As a “flag nerd”, I observed African flags closely, in addition to having the experience of getting my own family flag made in Malawi. It was 3' x 6' feet. At the hoist was a white bar, 3' vertically by 18" inches horizontally. On it was a red Latin Cross indicating our evangelical Christian faith. The rest of the flag was a horizontal tribar of blue over white over red (the inspiration was the then-current flag of Mississippi, our home state). Two 5-pointed American flag-type stars in red were placed side-by-side on the white bar. I drew a precise rendition of the flag I wanted and gave it to the lady who would sew the flag.

I returned several days later to collect the flag, only to discover that the stars were 6-pointed mullet-type stars. The lady still had my artwork, and I compared it to the flag, showing that I had drawn 5-pointed stars. She looked at me and said, “You asked me to put two red stars side-by-side on the flag, and I have done just that—I made what you requested.”



**A “mis-manufactured”
Burkina Faso flag flies at the country's
embassy in Washington, D.C.,
in March 2026.**

*(Photo: Alden Jencks, in
“The Flag Vigilante Returns”, VT 118)*

I realized that in a cultural context Africans don't see certain things the same way that we from a western perspective see them.

Later, I would notice certain flags on which stars would not be oriented according to “official” specifications. The first such flag was the old flag of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On more than one occasion I saw 1960–1963 / 1997–2006 DRC flags with the six gold stars at the hoist oriented in every conceivable direction, and the large, middle star might vary in orientation as well.

Furthermore, on the flags of Cameroon, or Senegal, or Ghana (among others), the star not only might be oriented in any direction, it might also have more than five points. Apparently, in an African context that's perfectly normal. It's not that one would often see a 7-pointed star on Senegal's flag, but every once in a while there would be a star that didn't follow the “specs”.

Addressing flag colors in an African context, and really a global context for that matter: I learned that in Zaire flag colors, and the orientation of other emblems, were also of no particular concern. In 1994 I was working between Zaire and Rwanda. In Zaire, national flags flew aplenty everywhere I traveled. Some were apple green (likely the official color). However, I saw an equal number in Kelly green, or a darker green of some kind, or even aqua-like in color. Asked the color of their national flag, Zairians would say “*vert*” (green)—the exact shade of green was of no consequence.

The same could be said for overall proportions. Flags might be square or oblong. I saw an equal number of both. The yellow circle with the arm/torch emblem could be any size. And the arm/torch could face toward the fly, or hoist. It didn't matter. The same also held true in Angola—flag's central emblem could face either the fly or hoist.

So, from my experience, the Burkina Faso embassy flag in Washington, D.C., is official, perfectly reasonable, and makes sense in an African context.

Many such flag anomalies can also appear in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. Having lived in Romania for several years, I can say with authority that Romania could not decide on the shade of blue on its flag. Technically, it was a royal blue, however, I saw many more Romanian flags with dark blue. The blues can also vary significantly in the British Union Jack and the Scottish flag. In all three cases there are robust technical specifications—the blues likely differ not through ignorance but due to the manufacturing challenge of dyeing certain flag fabrics.

I say the same about the U.S. flag. Old Glory Red seems to be very uniform, no matter who makes the flag. But when it comes to Old Glory Blue, there can be considerable variety. I have several “G-SPEC” (Government Specification) American flags in my collection where the blue colors are “dark”, but differ from O.G. Blue. (G-SPEC designates a United States flag manufactured specifically for the federal government).

So in the American context, we are not as close to color or proportional excellence as we imagine. Additionally, regarding fully sewn U.S. G-SPEC flags, the stars aren’t always exactly correct either.



Flags of Penang, Malaysia, showing variations in the shades of blue and yellow.

(author's collection)

The sophisticated machinery required to embroider an array of 50 U.S. stars onto a canton cannot measure out the size of those stars exactly. So each star is either too big or too small, off a millimeter or two. And non-G-SPEC flags often have stars significantly smaller than official specifications.

Furthermore, while the official proportions of the U.S. flag are 10:19, nearly all mass-market flags instead follow the standard manufacturers’ dimensions: 4”x6”, 12”x18”, 2’x3’, 3’x5’, 4’x6’, 5’x8’, and so on—only “casket flags” (at 5’x9.5”) meet the specifications.

In the Asian context, while the closest country to perfection in making its national flag is Thailand, not all meet that standard. I lived in Penang, Malaysia, for nine years. Malaysia is a highly technical, sophisticated, first-world-caliber nation; Penang itself was British for 170 years.

One would think within Penang’s culture, that manufacturers there would do their best to assure that the colors in the state flag would be fairly uniform. But the colors of Penang flags can vary widely. I have several in my collection, each made in Penang or by one of the major flag manufacturers in Malaysia. One (not shown) has the “yellow” bar very close to white—the most pale version of “yellow”, I have ever seen. Culturally, at the end of the day, as in Africa, Penang folk don’t really care.

In a sense, these culturally specific approaches to “specifications” hearken back to heraldry, where the “official” description of a coat of arms or a flag’s design is the **words**, not the **picture**—and any interpretation by the artist or flag-maker that followed the words is acceptable and “correct”.

Flags to Represent Languages

By Ted Kaye

In PFA meetings we have occasionally discussed the challenge of using a national flag to represent a language.

Digital and print media often signal what language can be used by presenting an image of a flag as an icon—think an ATM in Europe, or a multilingual product user’s guide.

Some national flags unambiguously correlate with a language, such as Japan for Japanese or Slovenia for Slovenian—these seem to be one-to-one matches.

However, what should represent Spanish? Spain, the mother country but accounting for only 10% of Spanish speakers? Or the country where the image is displayed, such as México’s flag in México?

I’ve seen English represented by the Union Jack, the U.S. flag, and the English flag. Australians and Canadians are definitely left out!

This topic merits much greater discussion and research, as PFA members well know. However, it’s fun to observe the controversy in action.

The illustration at right is one of many circulating on the internet. It holds some surprises for vexillologists, such as the flag of the Arab Revolt for Arabic and the civil flag of Serbia for “Serbo-Croatia”—a misnomer for a non-language.



A chart using flags to represent languages. (source: Facebook, “Nazza Times”)

The originator, “Nazza Times”, is a popular infographic and data-ranking Facebook page that frequently publishes visual charts about economics, world history, demographics, and flags.

Its choices of flag icons in its charts regularly spark massive debates in the comments sections

over history, colonization, and regional dialects.

Of course, there is also the quibble about “official” languages (e.g., the U.S. does not have one), so another version of the chart may be in order!

2026 Parade Flags in Portland

By Alden Jencks

The Grand Floral Parade, the highlight of Portland's annual Rose Festival, returned to downtown in June from its sojourn on the East Side.

Of course I attended this year's parade, as I always do. Hey, it's the chance to see lots of FLAGS!

Indeed, in those years that Portland's returned Peace Corps volunteers are invited to participate, I carry the flag of "my" country, Côte d'Ivoire.



The flag of the former Republic of (South) Vietnam still flies in the immigrant community here after more than 50 years.

Flags can elicit such diverse emotions. The green, white, and red of the Mexican banner always brings me sheer joy.

And the yellow and red of the South Vietnamese flag, still being waved resolutely by refugee octogenarians? Here I cannot but feel sadness and melancholy for a world that once was and is no more.



México, lindo y querido.



Kaohsiung, our Taiwanese sister city, tries to balance conflicting national flag codes.



Rotary International sponsors exchange students from many countries, marching proudly with their flags.

Roundup



Flag flying at Twillingate, Newfoundland. *(photo courtesy Peter Hayes)*



Exhibit A on why not to put text on flags—seen last year outside the University of Montana football stadium.
(photo courtesy Jim Croft)



Flag patches are displayed for sale at ICV 31 in Paris by local flag store Komorebi.
(komorebiworld.com)



Australia's Parliament House in Canberra mistakenly raised two New Zealand flags among the 44 flags displayed to celebrate Australian National Flag Day on Sept. 3... an embarrassing reminder why one of those countries (at least) should change its flag!



The flag of the Library of Congress, in its James Madison Memorial Building.
(photo courtesy Barry McMillion)



A version of the flag of Alameda, California, shows up as a patch on a backpack during a mid-August school supplies giveaway.
(spotted by Phil Allen)



Flaggy lawn sign on NW 31st Ave.

What's that Flag?

By John Cartledge

Identify these flags and the theme that connects them.



What Was that Flag? Answers to the last quiz

By Ted Kaye

These are the westernmost sub-national elements of their countries.

Congratulations to the solvers:
John Cartledge, Brian Cham, and
Dieter Linder.



Acre, Brazil.



Alaska, United States.



British Columbia, Canada.



Kaliningrad, Russia.



Okinawa, Japan.



Santa Cruz, Argentina.



Western Australia, Australia.

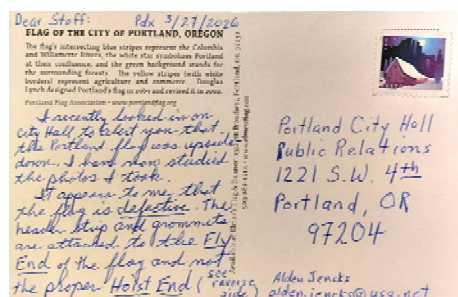


Portland Flag Miscellany



Portland's men's major league soccer team, the Timbers, may well be the greatest contributor to the dissemination and popularity of the Portland flag.

Earlier this year 15,000 fans received Portland flags, courtesy of Bank of America, at a game against Los Angeles (the match tied 1-1).



Alden Jencks, our “Flag Vigilante”, keeps an eye out for mis-hung or mis-manufactured Portland flags.

He uses our postcards to good effect.



A logo for a fictional Portland soccer team in an “Oregon League”, drawn by TheGiantsFan in Corvallis, Oregon.

<https://boards.sportslogos.net/topic/126202-oregon-league-finale/>

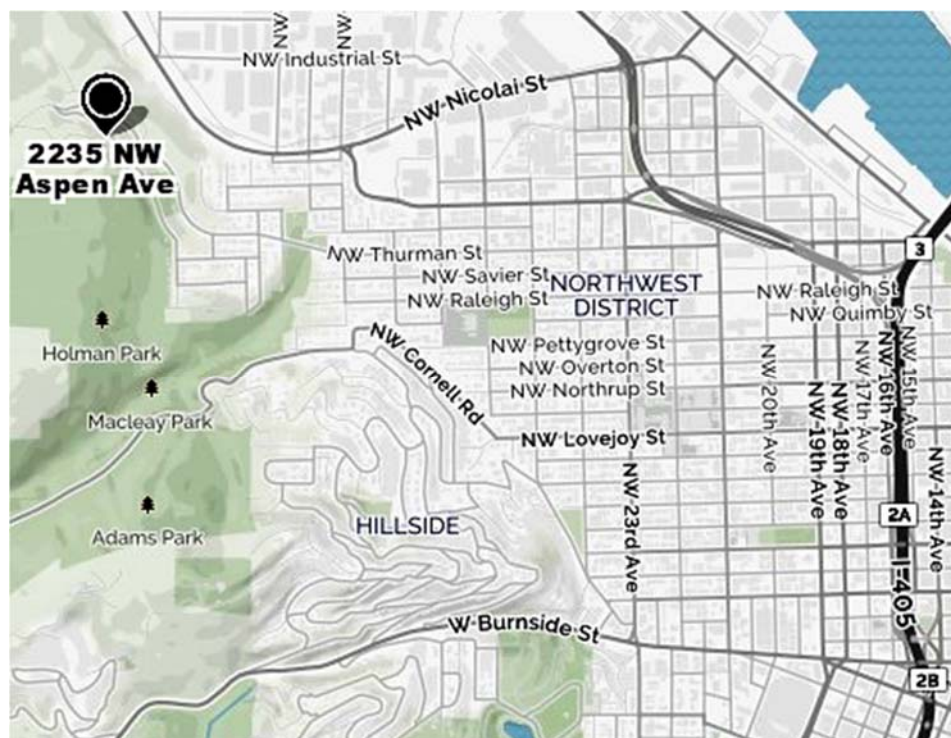
November Meeting

The next meeting of the Portland Flag Association will be at 7 PM, Thursday, November 12, 2026, at the home of Ted Kaye: 2235 NW Aspen Ave., Portland. See map at right.

Those who cannot attend in person should watch for a Zoom invitation.

We look forward to seeing those of you who have missed recent meetings and engaging in provocative flag-related discussion.

Newcomers and friends from around the world are welcome!



The *Vexilloid Tabloid*, founded in 1999 by the late John Hood, is published bi-monthly by and for the Portland Flag Association—Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. Find back issues at portlandflag.org.