

Seven Cities in Search of a Flag.

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Municipal or civic flags, with only one exception (1) it seems, are only a recent development in Canada. Perhaps as many as one hundred municipalities have adopted or plan to adopt a civic flag. In a poll (2) of 92 cities and towns of over 20,000 population on this question, only twelve responded in the negative.

These flags began to appear in the 1960s. In nearly all cases their adoption of flags did not predate the parliamentary debates 1963-1964 which led to the proclamation of Canada's national flag on the 28th day of January, 1965. Their appearance was also in the wake of the adoption by provinces of distinctive provincial flags.

This presentation will explore how and why municipal flags developed in Canada by focussing on the seven flags flown within the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. The seven flags are of Metropolitan Toronto itself, the cities of Toronto, North York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, York, and the borough of East York. Metropolitan government - a two-tiered system - was a reasoned and successful answer to the post-war problems of rapid urbanization. The area was home to thirteen municipalities when Bill 80 was passed in 1954 federating these municipalities. In 1967, consolidation occurred reducing the number of components to six - the city of Toronto and five boroughs. In the 1980s all but one of these boroughs opted for city status.

Three factors seemed to favor 'vexillological events'. In 1965, the Province of Ontario adopted a provincial flag. Secondly, the Federal Government of Canada was promoting through cash grants the celebration of Canada's centennial year, 1967, stirring up interest in local history and civic events. Thirdly, the need for visual identity arose as municipal responsibilities were divided between a Metropolitan and a borough or city government. To pay for these obligations, municipalities had to compete for tax dollars, i.e. to attract industry. To do so, they had to be known to industry; banners and other insignia including logos were developed for this purpose. Between 1968 and 1978, all seven municipal governments had adopted official flags and other insignia.

York, the smallest, was the first municipality to hoist a flag, 1968, - having prepared its insignia in 1967 during preparations for Canada's centennial celebrations.

Scarborough's mayor, Albert Campbell, in 1968 was trying to develop a corporate image for the borough and its handsome flag was officially dedicated in August, 1969. North York designed a flag to mark its fiftieth anniversary in 1972; Toronto, its 140th anniversary, in 1974. Metropolitan Toronto's government introduced a logo and flag in 1978 on the 25th anniversary of its formation. East York (3) introduced its flag also in 1978. And, Etobicoke had developed an array of insignia - 'arms', crest, and flag - in 1977 through the efforts of Mayor Flynn's visual identity program.

Two patterns emerge on how the flag designs were arrived at. The City of Toronto launched contests generally open to all residents. Toronto received 700 entries (5), many of them from school children; tiny East York's contest drew 200; and the Metro contest for a logo had 1,125 entries. -

The winning contestants (6) reflected not only the ethnic diversity of the population of Metro, but also the maturity of graphic design in our city. Renato de Santis, son of immigrants from Frosinone, Italy and David Stramba of English and Czechoslovakian descent, were both students of graphic design at the time. Raymond Taylor, winner of the East York flag contest, is a third-generation Canadian of British background, and also a commercial artist. Chris Yaneff, a leading Canadian graphic designer, developed the Metro flag using Stramba's logo.

In the other four cities, the mayor and council, or council committees, sought out designs, sometimes in co-operation with local experts and - with flag manufacturers or other private firms. Dominion Regalia contributed ideas from English heraldry for York's flag and insignia (7). Clém Wade (8) of Canada Decalcomania and his graphic designer, Hubert Greene - a speech-and-hearing-handicapped employee produced the unique 'bluffs' design for Scarborough. This design was further developed by local artist educator Doris McCarthy. Mayor Albert Campbell then took this design and deftly steered it to adoption by council in a way that avoided any dissension and opposition such as that which prevailed four years earlier in the Canadian flag controversy (9).

What are these flags like? Three flags contain 'logos' - the contribution that graphic design has made to vexillology - East York with its initials in upper case and a Canadian maple leaf, North York with its initials in lower case and fourteen golden spheres (10) representing the wards of -- the city, and the flag of Metropolitan Toronto with its logo - six interlocking circles. The quartered flag of York reproduces its 'arms'. Etobicoke emblazons its crest on its flag of three vertical strips - an alder leaf protruding through a Canadian civic crown. The Etobicoke flag was - designed by city clerk Roger Cloutier. Unique stylization occurs in the flags of Scarborough - the bluffs and waves of Lake Ontario at their base; and Toronto - a 'T' that recalls the appearance of its City Hall -- (the 'new' one designed in international competition by the Finn Rewell and built in 1965). Both these flags contain the Canadian Maple Leaf. - North York alone has seen fit to include its name on the flag.

Royal blue, not usually defined further, is found on five of the Metro - flags and seems appropriate in a country which considers itself a monarchy. The traditional colours of patriotism in Canada, and the English-speaking world generally, red, white and blue, are used on the flags of Toronto, East York and Scarborough. North York uses royal blue and white. Etobicoke has green and gold or yellow (in use on its arms). York chose green (for growth) and white. Metro Toronto adds a strip of bright green below the royal blue, chosen by designer Chris Yaneff (11). These colours, he knew as a flier, were the outstanding colours of Metro Toronto - its lakeshore, parks, islands and ravines.

A few words further about the devices on the flags may help the reader. York's flag contains the lion and rose of York, England, the beaver as an alternate Canadian symbol to the maple leaf and also a reminder of fur trading on the Humber River in early days, and the dove to represent peaceful progress and the former town of Weston, now part of York.

Scarborough Bluffs are an unrivalled scenic attraction above the shores of Lake Ontario. These great cliffs - a mass of till, varved clays, and interglacial sands tower abruptly some 350 feet above the lake. Their presence reminded the wife of the first governor of Upper Canada, John Simcoe, in 1793, of Scarborough, in Yorkshire, England, which also boasts of great grey cliffs (12).

The Metro Toronto logo, used without typography, in white, symbolizes - in its interconnected loops or circles, the 'six area municipalities,

independent, yet interdependent forming a union whose strength is greater than that of its individual parts (13).

The Canadian Maple Leaf seen in Toronto, East York and Scarborough flags is the stylized red maple leaf with eleven points, as on the national flag. The leaf, then, stands for Canada, and also for the familiar leaf of the hard sugar maple known to the Indians, United Empire Loyalists and Ontario citizens to this day, for whom it has produced furniture, beauty, food and fuel. In the Toronto flag, the maple leaf's location is also significant. It is a focal point at the base of the towers that represent the new city hall, and at this base stands the heart of Toronto to city government, the council chamber.

The alder leaf of Etobicoke's flag refers to the Ojibway Indian name for the area 'Wadopikand' or 'A-doo-be-kog' (14), the 'place where black - alders grow'. This refers to the alder tree (alnus rugosa) common to the area. The leaf protrudes through a Canadian civic crown 'embattled of six maple leaves or', although one sees only the two half leaves, one on each side and two full leaves in the middle.

It is common practice for these municipalities to distribute flags to city departments (e.g. fire halls, ambulance stations, recreation centres), service clubs (e.g. Lions International), and marching bands. Apart from these locations and, of course, at city halls, the civic flag is rarely seen and many citizens would be unaware of its existence. On the other hand, the Scarborough flag is flown throughout Scarborough and has won wide acceptance. From private homes, gasoline service stations, car sales lots, and even at summer homes on lake sites distant from the city the flag is to be seen.

Perhaps the popularity the flag enjoys is due not only to its simple, easily identified element of the Bluffs, in a flowing design of traditional colours, but also to the affection in which its initiator, Mayor Albert Campbell, was held.

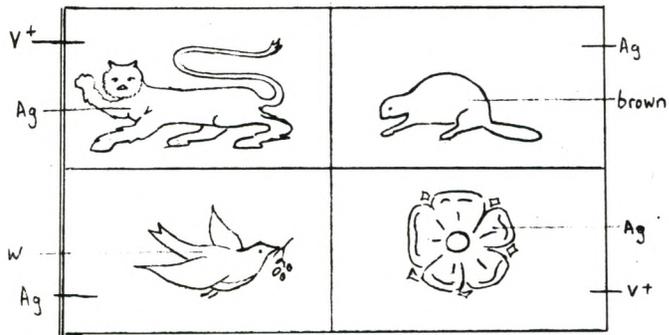
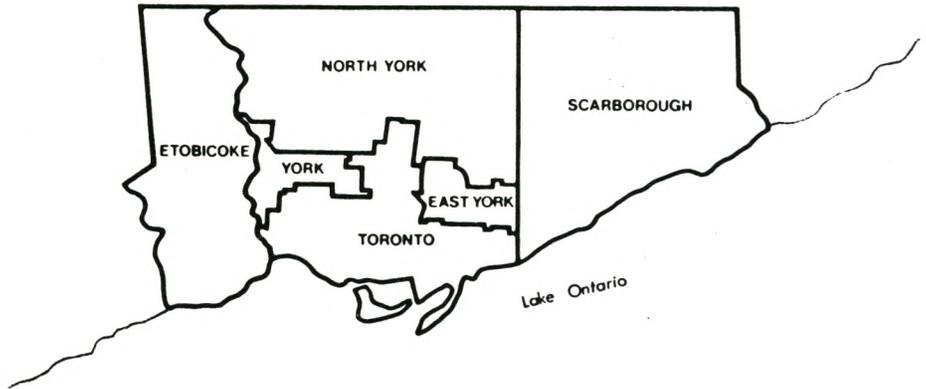
Across urban Canada throughout the seventies to the present, civic flags unfurl, for reasons similar to those of Metro Toronto municipalities. It is not the intention to provide details on many of these flags here, but a few words may suffice. Most of these municipal flags are neither attractive nor original in design, consisting of 'coats-of-arms', in full often unauthorized arms at that, on a white or blue field, e.g. flags of St. John's, Moncton, Sault Ste. Marie, Mississauga, London, Oshawa. A few are quite remarkable with designs obtained through competition by artists and graphic designers, e.g. Thunder Bay, Prince Albert. Many municipalities have arranged for authorization of their arms in England or Scotland, and have attractive flags developed from their heraldic achievements, e.g. Cobourg, North Vancouver, Guelph, Barrie, Halifax. Montreal's flag, which does not seem to have been officially adopted, is also a quartered flag developed from its arms. A third pattern observed is the design - that the city logo; the versatile logo that is equally at home on letter head or garbage-truck door. Calgary makes use of this type of design but Quebec municipalities have chosen it overwhelmingly, e.g. St. Hubert, St. Leonard, Laval, Lachine, Granby.

Lastly some very unusual design elements should be noted - the telephone on Brantford's flag, a sleeping giant (Thunder Bay), a moose head (Moose Jaw), the bee hive (St. Catharines, Newmarket) and a trumpeter swan (Grande Prairie).

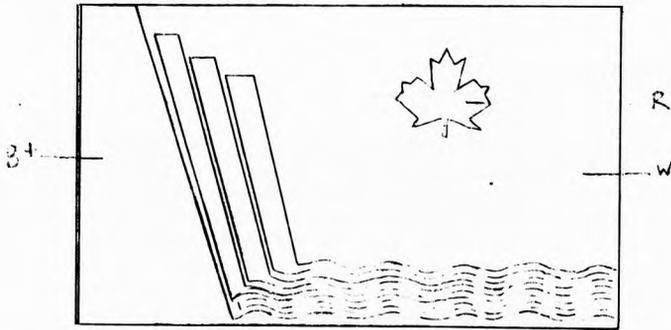
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FOOTNOTES:

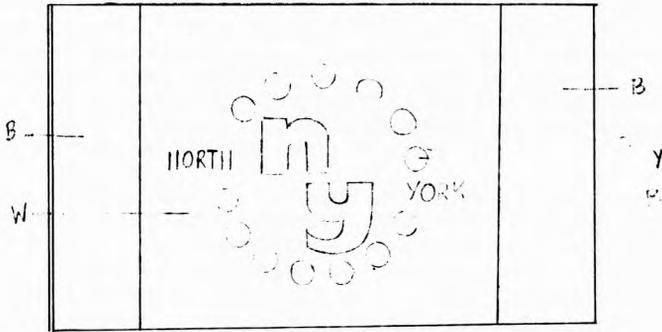
- (1) : Montreal's flag was in use during the Royal Visit, 1939, of King George VI and his Queen to that city. Communication from archivist, Yvon Leblanc, April 3, 1985.
- (2) : In March, 1985, this researcher wrote to 120 Canadian municipalities of 20,000 or more population (in most cases), and received replies from 92.
- (3) : Interview with Mayor Alan Redway, August 7, 1979.
- (4) : Telephone interview with Etobicoke City Clerk Roger F. Cloutier, April 18, 1985.
- (5) : Preserved on microfilm, courtesy of Elizabeth Cuthbertson, archivist, City of Toronto Archives.
- (6) : Telephone interviews with Messers de Santis, Stramba, and Taylor, April, 1985
- (7) : Minutes of the Legislation and Property Committee, Borough of - York, June 8, 1967.
- (8) : Interviews with Clement E. Wade, April 16-17, 1985.
- (9) : "Dedication of the Scarborough Municipal Flag", in The Municipal World, September, 1969.
- (10) : According to Robert Yuill, North York City Controller, the flag design emerged accidentally. The logo that the Council had commissioned was enhanced with a blue border before being framed. This inspired Yuill to go one step further and develop a flag. Telephone interview, April 18, 1985.
- (11) : Telephone interview, April 18, 1985.
- (12) : Robert R. Bonis, A History of Scarborough, Scarborough, 1968, pp. 38-39.
- (13) : "Message from the Chairman" (Paul Godfrey, Metropolitan Toronto Chairman), Design Manual, the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, 1978, pp. 2.
- (14) : Esther Heyes, Etobicoke - from furrow to borough, Etobicoke, Ontario, 1974, pp. 15.



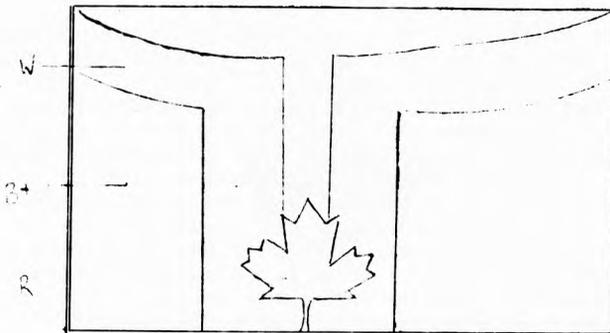
YORK 1968



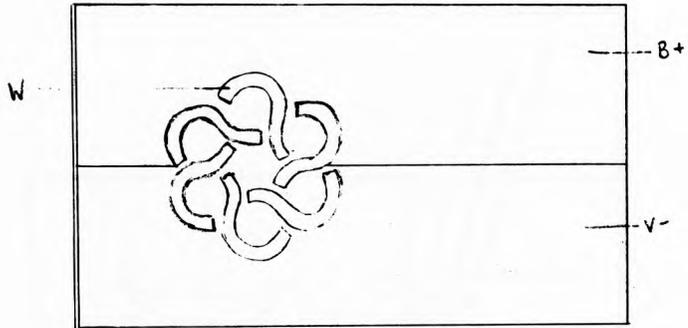
SCARBOROUGH 1969



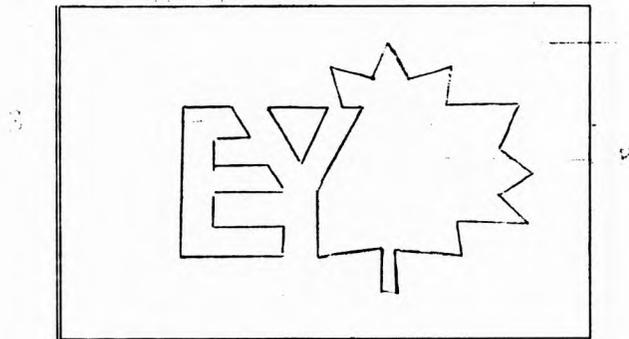
NORTH YORK 1972



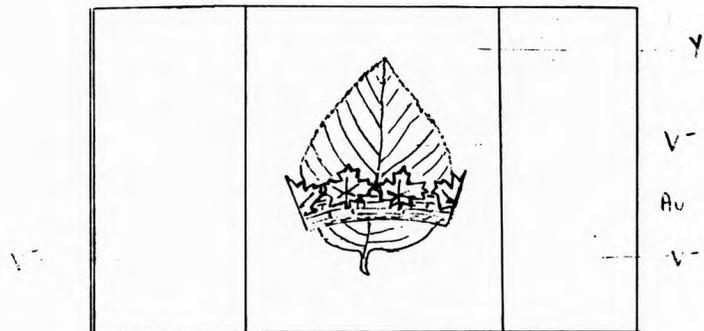
TORONTO CITY 1974



METRO TORONTO 1978



EAST YORK 1978



ETOBICOKE 1977