

# The Flags of Recreational Boating: A Preliminary Survey

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## Introduction

For sometime the author has been interested in naval and maritime flags, but on reading Wilson's *Flags at Sea*<sup>1</sup> he was surprised by the scant attention, a mere two paragraphs, that Wilson had devoted to the flags that are flown by yachts. Later the author recalled Smith's statement: "Perhaps the widest usage of associational flags and pennants exists in yachting and other forms of pleasure boating."<sup>2</sup> Thus it seemed that there was a need for further examination of this extensive but obviously neglected branch of nautical flag study.

The first check was with Mark Liss's bibliography<sup>3</sup> where it was noted that of the 344 oral presentations at the annual conventions of the North American Vexillological Association, and the 421 selected articles in their newsletter *NAVA News*, for a total of 765, only 38 could be reasonably classified as pertaining to naval or maritime vexillology, and only one<sup>4</sup> specifically on the flags of pleasure boating. This early finding suggested that, rather

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\* An earlier version of this paper, accompanied by 133 color slides, entitled "Yacht Flags: A Preliminary Survey," was presented at the 1993 annual convention of the North American Vexillological Association in Portland, Maine.

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Wilson, *Flags at Sea* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Whitney Smith, *The Flag Book of the United States* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1975), 276.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Liss, comp., "Subject Bibliography" (distributed at annual convention of the North American Vexillological Association, San Antonio, Texas, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> John Lyman, "Private Signals of American Yachtsmen" (paper presented at the International Congress of Vexillology, Muiderberg, Netherlands, 1975). Subsequently the author has become aware of Barbara Tomlison's paper: "Yachting Flags of the British Isles: Emulating the Navy" presented at the International Congress of Vexillology, Zurich, 1993.

than be presented with a detailed essay on one of the many facets of the wide world of yachting vexillology, fellow vexillologists would perhaps be better served at this time with a brief survey of the various flags flown by those who participate in what Rousmaniere calls the “golden pastime.”<sup>5</sup>

## Yachting History

The terms “yachts,” “yachting,” and “yachtsmen” (and women) can be difficult ones to define; in this essay they refer to the whole spectrum of “recreational boats” including power boats and sail boats, and “recreational boaters,” including those who race, cruise, or fish from boats. As Stephens defines it, a yacht is “a vessel designed, built, or adapted for pleasure use, as distinguished from commerce or war, . . .”<sup>6</sup> Similarly the term “yacht club” is used in this essay to include clubs, squadrons, and associations that race, daysail, cruise, or fish.

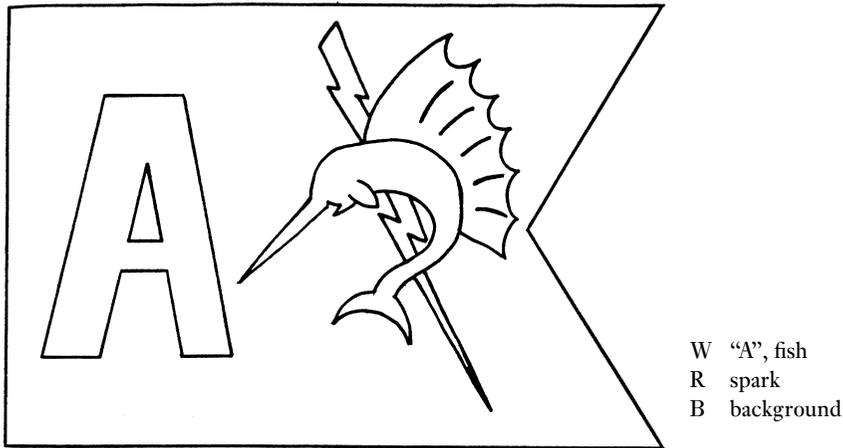


Fig. 1. Ampere Fishing and Yacht Club

The limitations on the length of this essay preclude the setting out of an historical context or timeline; however, even a cursory reading of yachting history suggests that recent writers on the subject<sup>7</sup> tend to agree that there

<sup>5</sup>John Rousmaniere, *The Golden Pastime: A New History of Yachting* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 5.

<sup>6</sup>William P. Stephens, *Traditions and Memories of American Yachting* (Brooklin, Maine: WoodenBoat Publications, 1989), 6.

<sup>7</sup>Ian Dear, Peter Heaton, Peter Johnson, Robin Knox-Johnston, Douglas Philips-Birt, Ranulf Rayner, John Rousmaniere.

are clearly definable periods into which the chronological development of this sport may be divided,<sup>8</sup> thus suggesting a convenient framework for specialized or comparative study of the vexillology of recreational boating.

## Burgees

During the last 275 years thousands of yacht clubs have come and gone and they will continue to do so, but the one thing that all of them have had or now have is a flag, a burgee. In this essay and in the yachting world generally the term “burgee” refers to the distinguishing flag of a yacht club regardless of its actual shape, although the majority are pennants.

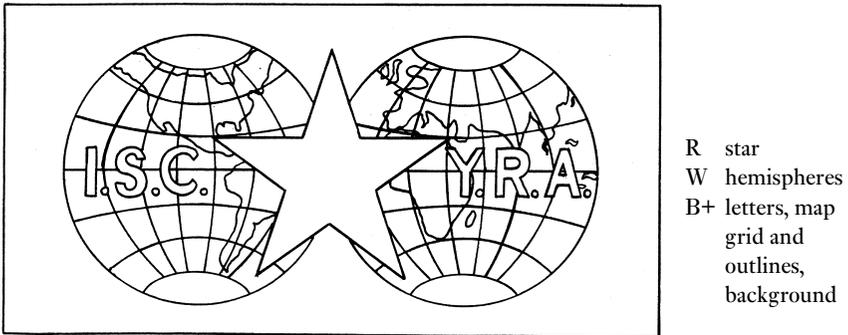


Fig. 2. International Star Class Association

## Burgees: United Kingdom

This preliminary survey only permits consideration of a few of the burgees of the world’s first significant yacht clubs that are listed in the Appendix.

In her history of the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron, Erhard states: “At the time the Halifax Yacht Club was founded [1837], the New York Yacht Club did not yet exist: in fact there were only ten such clubs in the world, none of them in North America.”<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately in her count she, like many authors writing on this subject, omits a reference to the first yacht club to be established in England and three others.

First, but not now foremost in the yacht club world, is the Royal Cork Yacht Club of Crosshaven, Ireland. Erhard comments: “The oldest club

<sup>8</sup>1660–1850, 1850–1890, 1890–1914, 1918–1939, 1945–1960, 1960–1990s.

<sup>9</sup>Nancie Erhard, *First in its Class: The Story of the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited, 1986), 15.

formed to enjoy sailing was the Water Club of the Harbour of Cork in Ireland (the antecedent of the Royal Cork Yacht Club). Founded in 1720, the club had twenty-five members who cruised in company under an Admiral. . . who had his own flag.”<sup>10</sup> The flag has probably been correctly identified and illustrated by Pritchett.<sup>11</sup> The Water Club closed down in 1765 but was revived in 1806; however, it seems to be generally accepted in yachting circles, despite this break in continuity, that this club is considered the world’s first and is thus a respectable 275 years old. Their burgee design of today includes the magic date of 1720.

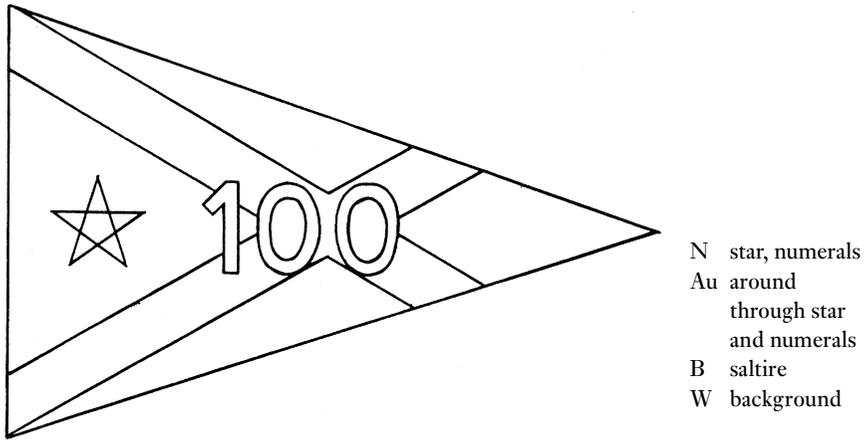


Fig. 3. Manchester Yacht Club 100th Anniversary

The Starcross Yacht Club, established in 1773 at Starcross on the south coast of Devon, was the first yacht club in England (one of the clubs omitted by Erhard in her count: the others were Royal Gibraltar, Royal Swedish, and Royal Eastern); but, for whatever reasons, it is certainly not England’s foremost according to the criteria by which yacht clubs are traditionally judged. The design of its burgee, a yellow five-pointed star centered on a blue St. George’s cross on a white field, was closely followed by others: Royal Thames Yacht Club (design of 1842), Royal Yacht Squadron (gold crown on a red St. George’s cross on a white field), New York Yacht Club, and Royal

<sup>10</sup>Erhard, *First in its Class*, 11. In her preceding paragraph Erhard states: “The first organized yacht fleet in the world was the Flotilla of the Neva, formed by Peter the First of Russia in 1718. The Flotilla had its own flag. . . but it probably was not what we would consider a club.”

<sup>11</sup>The Duke of Beaufort, ed., *The Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes, Yachting*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1894), Frontispiece by R. T. Pritchett.

Gibraltar Yacht Club.

Formal “club” yacht racing was initiated in 1775 by the Cumberland Fleet, an early ancestor of the Royal Thames Yacht Club; the Fleet’s patron at that time was Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland. The development of the club’s burgee from the days of the Cumberland Fleet to the design of 1842, the design still in use today, is clearly illustrated by Philips-Birt.<sup>12</sup> The Royal Yacht Squadron was next to be established (1812), followed by the Royal Dee Yacht Club, in northwest England, in 1815; and three Irish yacht clubs, Royal Irish (1831), Lough Erne (1834), and Lough Derg (1836).

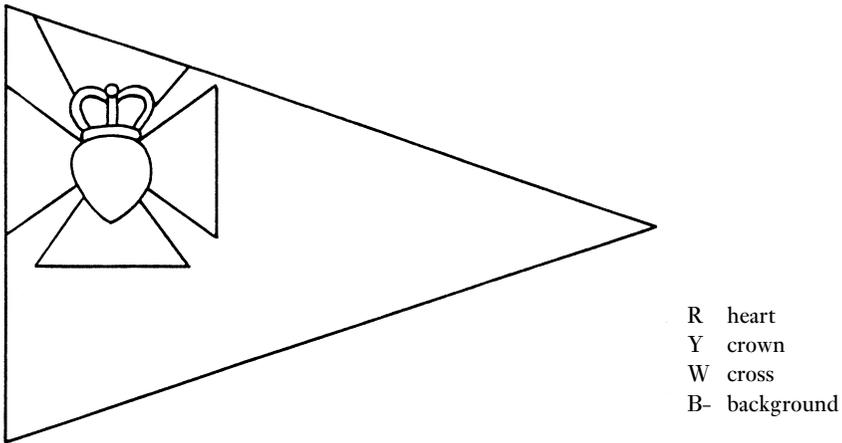


Fig. 4. Royal Halifax Yacht Club (1880)

The Royal Northern and Clyde Yacht Club was originally established as the Northern Yacht Club in Scotland in 1824 with two groups of members, Scottish and Irish; by 1827 these groups had been formalized into the Scottish Branch and the Irish Branch, later known as Scottish and Irish Divisions.<sup>13</sup> By 1830 the club had moved its station to Ireland, leaving some of its Scottish members to form their own club, which, after a number of name changes, became the Royal Clyde Yacht Club in 1872, their Irish friends having become the Royal Northern Yacht Club in 1830. In 1978 the two separate clubs joined together again under the name they bear today, the Royal Northern and Clyde Yacht Club. A wall board in their clubhouse at Rhu, Scotland, clearly shows this complex historical development and the

<sup>12</sup>Douglas Philips-Birt, *The Cumberland Fleet: Two Hundred Years of Yachting, 1775–1975* (London: The Royal Thames Yacht Club, 1978), facing 97.

<sup>13</sup>The Duke of Beaufort, *The Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes*, Frontispiece.

amalgamation which is reflected in the design of its current burgee.

The Royal Western Yacht Club of England (established as the Port of Plymouth Royal Clarence Regatta Club), now famous for its organization of the finish of the Fastnet Race, was established by the year 1827. The Royal Victoria Yacht Club, as far as the author can ascertain, is the only yacht club that was designated “Royal” (by the Royal Warrant of Queen Victoria) from the first day of its establishment in 1844.

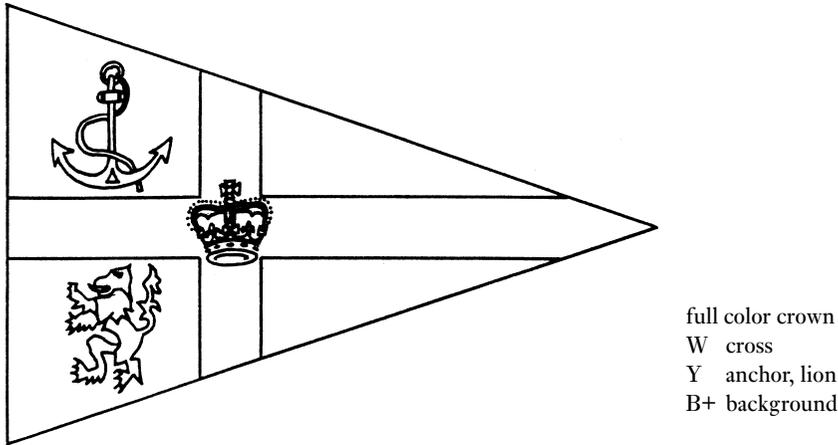


Fig. 5. Royal Northern and Clyde Yacht Club

The Royal Engineers Yacht Club (1846) was the first of many military corps or regimental yacht clubs to be established both in the United Kingdom and in the British colonies overseas.

### Burgees: The United States

Stephens, writing in about 1939, said: “The origin and early growth of American yachting dates back to a period when the followers of the sport were few in number, widely scattered, and the sport itself so limited and inconspicuous as to receive little attention from the press. In view of such conditions it is a difficult matter to piece out a continuous narrative, and much must be left to inference and conjecture.”<sup>14</sup> Stephens then goes on to quote a list of the first twenty-four yacht clubs he found in *Fox’s Yachting Annual* of 1872. This author has found Fox’s listing to be incomplete (leaving too much to inference and conjecture!) and thus prefers to be guided, pending

<sup>14</sup>Stephens, *Traditions and Memories of American Yachting*, 1.

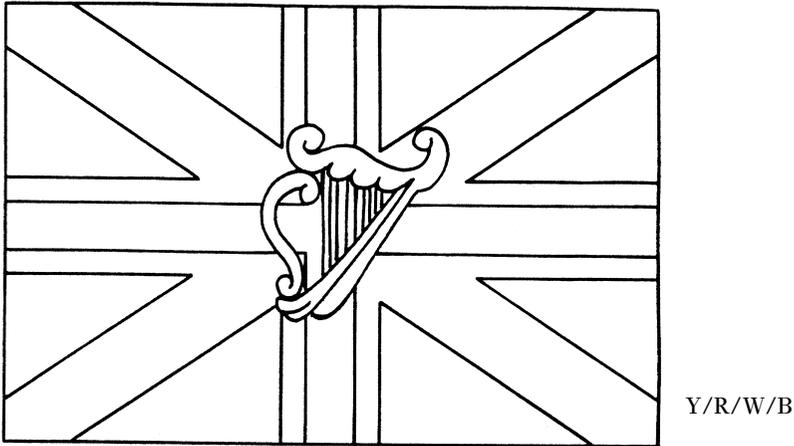


Fig. 6. Water Club of the Harbour of Cork: Admiral

further research, by Manning.<sup>15</sup>

Club yachting in the United States starts with the New York Yacht Club (1844) which had grown out of the Hoboken Model Yacht Club that had, according to Preble,<sup>16</sup> been organized four years earlier. Its burgee is of a simple design (white five-pointed star on a red St. George's cross on a blue field) and in the style of its rival in England, the Royal Yacht Squadron of Cowes, Isle of Wight.

The second club to be established in the United States was the Southern Yacht Club in New Orleans in 1849. In her history of this club, Scheib writes: "The club's first burgee design, adopted in 1849, was a double tail with blue background and white letters SYC in the center, (This burgee was replaced in 1896 with a flag with one flowing point, and blue background with white letters SYC in the center)."<sup>17</sup> The club's current burgee is the 1896 design edged top and bottom with a narrow band of white, but Scheib makes neither mention of this later change nor its date. Perhaps it should be noted here that the burgee of the Sandusky Yacht Club in Ohio (1894) is almost identical except that the narrow band of white is continued on the hoist. The Southern Yacht Club was followed by the Carolina Yacht Club in 1853 with its simple but effective burgee of a five-pointed star on a white

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Manning, *The American Yacht List* (New York: Thomas Manning, 1893).

<sup>16</sup>George Henry Preble, *History of the Flag of the United States of America* (Boston: A. Williams and Company, 1880), 704.

<sup>17</sup>Flora K. Scheib, *History of the Southern Yacht Club* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company Inc., 1986), 29.

field.

The first yacht club in New England was the Boston, established in 1866 and, over the ensuing 80 years, it absorbed a number of other yacht clubs. These amalgamations are well documented by Shanabrook who also carefully documents and illustrates the development of the club's burgee.<sup>18</sup>

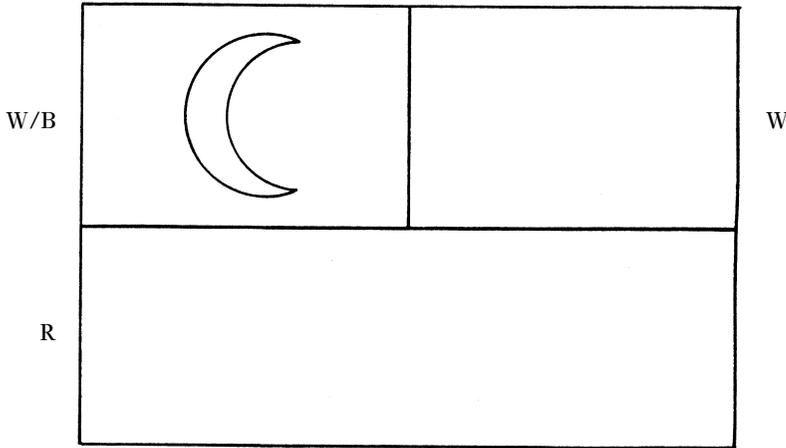


Fig. 7. Lynn Yacht Club

The Lynn Yacht Club, established in 1870 after seven others that included South Boston, Portland (Maine), and Savannah, was the first of a very small number of clubs to have a rectangular burgee—the one that it proudly retains to the present day.

Founded in 1871, the Seawanhaka Yacht Club of Oyster Bay, New York, was the first “Corinthian” yacht club in the world,<sup>19</sup> a pioneer in establishing racing rules, and an important player in the introduction of the Six-Metre boat class in America. Stephens writes in his history of this club: “The design adopted for the Club burgee was the flag of the Admiral of the Brazillian Navy, as shown in *The Flags of All Nations* published by the United States

<sup>18</sup>Paul E. Shanabrook, *The Boston: A History of the Boston Yacht Club 1866–1979* (Boston: The Boston Yacht Club, 1979), 58, 260.

<sup>19</sup>An amateur sailor. “The term ‘Corinthian’, which begins to find its way into the vocabulary of yachting about this period [mid 1850s], dates back to the ancient rich of ancient Corinth. Shakespeare speaks of ‘a Corinthian, and a man of mettle.’ At the outset of the nineteenth century it had a more comprehensive and less complimentary meaning than today [1963], designating gentlemen of the ‘Tom and Jerry’ type, devoted mainly to pugilism, dog fighting, and similar diversions.” John Parkinson, Jr. writing in the Introduction to William P. Stephens, *The Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club, Origins and Early History, 1871–1896* (New York: The Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club, 1963), 4.

Navy Department. Either by accident or design there was a star for each of the twelve original founders.”<sup>20</sup>

In summary, illustrations of early British burgees show a rigid uniformity in design and predominant use of blue, whereas those of early American clubs show a much wider use of color and design elements. A pattern similar to the distinctive American style can be observed in the burgees of the Canadian yacht clubs of the same time period.

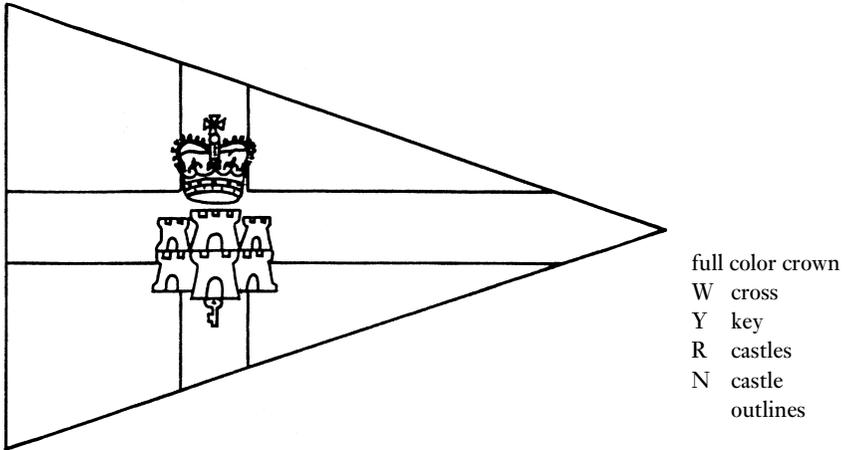


Fig. 8. Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club

### Burgees: The British Empire/Commonwealth and Other Countries

In 1829 the Gibraltar Yacht Club was the first to be established in the British Empire, the founders being the army officers stationed at the garrison; the following year Europe's first yacht club, Kungl Svenska Segel Sällskapet (Royal Swedish Yacht Club), appeared in Stockholm, Sweden. North America was next with the prominent citizens and military officers of Halifax deciding in 1837 that they deserved a yacht club, the Halifax Yacht Club, which eventually merged with the Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron in November 1880, and became "Royal" at the same time. In Europe in 1838 the French established the Société de Régates du Havre and in the same year in Tasmania the Royal Hobart Regatta Association was organized.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>William P. Stephens, *The Seamanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club*, 18.

<sup>21</sup>"The 'Cornwall Chronicle' of 2nd September, 1837, shows that the Tamar Yacht Club owned eight boats, and a regatta was spoken of." E. H. Webster and L. Norman, comp., *A*

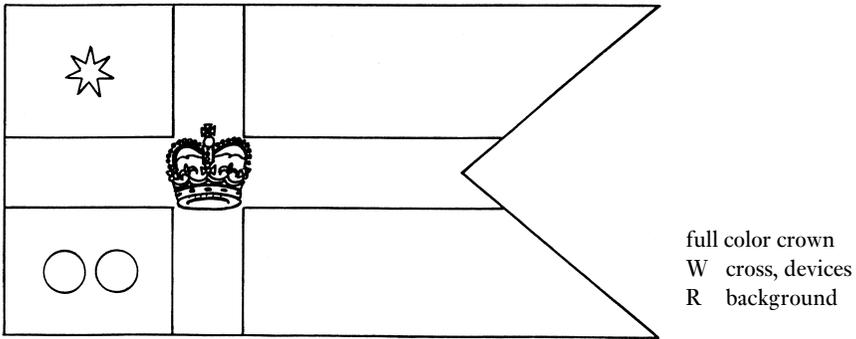


Fig. 9. Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron (Rear Commodore)

The year 1844 was a busy one for yachting with the founding of no fewer than four clubs: The Royal Bermuda (Hamilton) and the Royal Mersey (Liverpool, U.K.) along with the previously mentioned New York Yacht Club and the Royal Victoria Yacht Club then stationed at Ryde on the Isle of Wight. All of these four clubs are extant today, although in vastly different states of affluence and prestige.

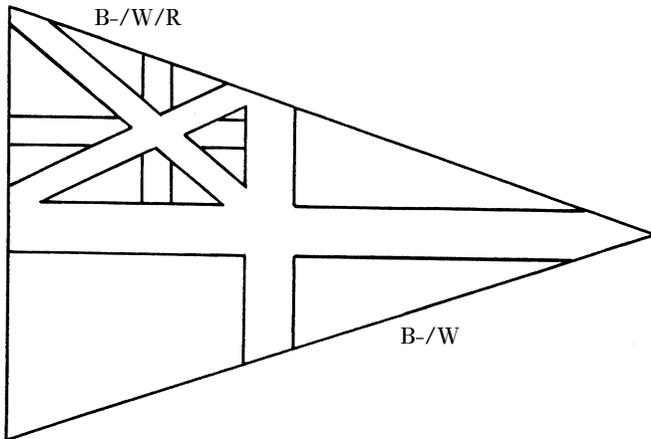


Fig. 10. St. Petersburg Imperial Yacht Club

India's Royal Bombay Yacht Club, another club established by British military officers, and Russia's St. Petersburg Imperial Yacht Club appeared in

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*Hundred Years of Yachting* (Hobart, Tasmania: The Government of Tasmania, 1936), 25.

1846; the Netherlands<sup>22</sup> and Belgium<sup>23</sup> following suit the following year. In 1853 the Port Phillips Yacht Club (now the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria) was started in Australia and three years later a group of naval officers stationed in Lisbon gave Portugal its first yacht club.<sup>24</sup> The Royal Natal Yacht Club was the first in South Africa (Durban, 1858) followed by Denmark<sup>25</sup> in 1866 and Germany<sup>26</sup> in 1868. In 1871, the year the previously mentioned Seawanhaka Club was established, the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron was also founded in Auckland.

Design changes that have occurred in an individual club's burgee through name changes and amalgamations, and the reasons for them, provide endless opportunities for research. Interesting examples can be taken from the Balboa (California) and the Île Perrot (Québec) yacht clubs. The Victoria Yacht Club (British Columbia) changed the design of its burgee on becoming "Royal," as did the Royal Barbados on ceasing to be "Royal." The Commodore of the Hawkstone Yacht Club (Ontario) decided, in 1984, that the letters HYC on a white field should be replaced by a blue hawk on a white disk, all on a blue field.<sup>27</sup>

## Flags of Club Officers and Other Officials

Every association, society, or club has persons charged with overseeing the organization and the everyday running of its affairs; yacht clubs are no exception to this form of volunteer organization, although the individuals' titles may be different. More frequently than not the senior person in a yacht club is the Commodore, who in turn is assisted by a Vice Commodore and a Rear Commodore, and, more commonly today, a Fleet Captain. Traditionally only persons holding these four appointments are known as "flag officers," and flag routines and etiquette may be different for them as opposed to others with designating flags, but not considered "flag officers." In some clubs the past commodores have their own flags and, as in the Port Credit Yacht Club (Ontario), the immediate past commodore and even all the directors. Other clubs may have flags for staff captains and honorary commodores. To confuse the issue, the early clubs established in the United Kingdom were

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<sup>22</sup>Koninklijke Nederlandsche Zeil-En Roeivereniging (Royal Netherlands Yacht Club, Muiden).

<sup>23</sup>Royal Yacht Club D'Ostende.

<sup>24</sup>Associação Naval de Lisboa.

<sup>25</sup>Kongelig Dansk Yachtklub, Copenhagen.

<sup>26</sup>Norddeutscher Regatta-Verein, Hamburg.

<sup>27</sup>Private correspondence with the author, 6 Jan. 1984.

often headed by an Admiral, but this title is now more often reserved as an honorary appointment similar to that of a Patron.

In the United Kingdom the pattern of these flag officers' flags usually follows that of the Royal Navy, that is, taking the basic burgee design and placing it on a broad pennant or a swallowtail, and adding small discs or balls to the design — illogically one for the (senior) vice-commodore and two for the (junior) rear-commodore. An example of this style can be most clearly noted on the flags of the Royal Yacht Squadron. Other obvious examples of this style can also be found on the officers' flags of the Royal Yorkshire Yacht Club, Royal Western Yacht Club of England, and perhaps not surprisingly, Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron, Australia (known as the Royal St. Kilda Yacht Club until 1961).

This "naval" system was adopted in Canada by the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron, but not by the Royal Canadian Yacht Club (1852), which instead chose to adopt flags with elements of the burgee placed on a field color sequence of white, red, and blue for its three flags officers and, as of 1927, an additional flag incorporating all these three colors for a Fleet Captain.<sup>28</sup> However, even the front cover of some bindings of the club's *Annals*<sup>29</sup> shows this flag in an incorrect arrangement of these colors — vexillological researchers beware! The RCYC's color sequence was not followed by the members of that club who broke away and formed the Toronto Yacht Club in 1881 (only to return to the fold in 1889); those members chose a red, white, and blue field color sequence. A different example can be seen in the officers' flags of the Port Credit Yacht Club that use a white, green, red field color sequence and a gold field for the immediate past commodore.

Things were and are different in the United States, particularly in the choice of the field color order of blue, red, white; an order that probably derives from that of the Rear Admirals' flags and Commodores' pennants of the United States Navy.<sup>30</sup> This sequence, backgrounding a fouled anchor surrounded by thirteen stars (white on blue and red fields, and red on white field), was adopted by the New York Yacht Club and by so many of the later American clubs that it can almost be considered a generic form for flag officers' flags. So familiar and pervasive is this design that even new Canadian yacht clubs have been known to use it, that is until the flag manufacturers

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<sup>28</sup>"R.C.Y.C.'s New Fleet Captain and the New Fleet Captain's Flag," *The Evening Telegram*, 28 Nov. 1927.

<sup>29</sup>H. J. Snider, *Annals of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, 1852–1937* (Toronto: Rous & Mann Limited, 1937).

<sup>30</sup>*Flags of Maritime Nations From the Most Authentic Sources* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Navigation, 1882), Plate 2.

decided to change the thirteen star design to ten maple leaves!

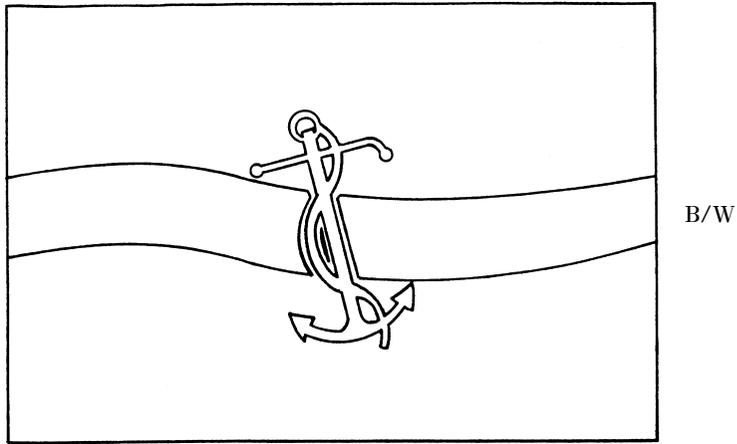


Fig. 11. Cruising Club of America (Post Captain)

The Cruising Club of America uses the standard American color sequence for its officers, but superimposes the anchor and star motif on the “wave” design of their burgee; this club also has an additional flag for its Post Captains. The Savannah Yacht Club has additional flags for those who hold the office of secretary and treasurer.<sup>31</sup> The Great Lakes Cruising Club of Chicago has added a Fleet Surgeon and a Judge Advocate to its list of other officials with flags.<sup>32</sup>

The list of official appointments entitled to flags grows and grows;<sup>33</sup> however, a trend in some larger clubs, at least in Canada, is to dispense with the Rear Commodore appointment and have a number of Vice Commodores, all with the same flag, to cover these additional office-holders. This avoids the lock-step promotional system from rear commodore to commodore and presumably allows the nominating committee and voting membership a wider choice of candidates.

<sup>31</sup>Symbols: Secretary: white oak leaf on blue, Treasurer: white acorn on blue.

<sup>32</sup>Symbols: Fleet Surgeon: blue winged staff of Asclepius on white (in canton), Judge Advocate: blue scales of justice on white (in canton).

<sup>33</sup>James R. Collier, *Yachting Signal Book* (Centreville, Md.: Cornell Maritime Press, 1985), 105.

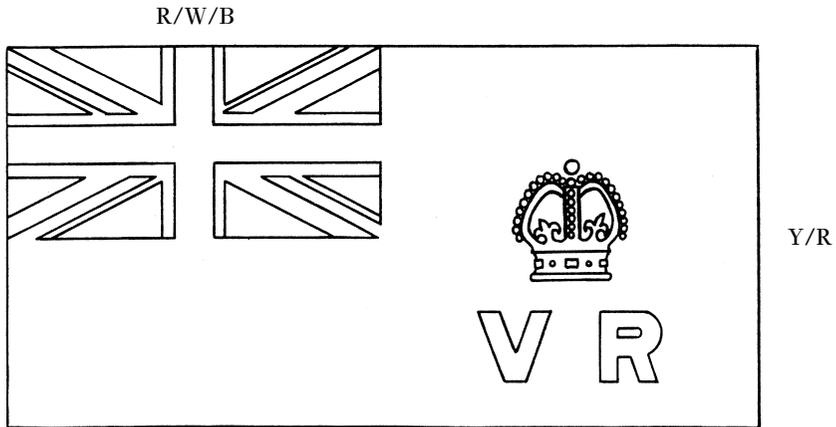


Fig. 12. Royal Victoria Yacht Club (U.K.) Special Ensign

## Special Ensigns

The one criterion that appears to set many yacht clubs apart (often socially), in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth, is the privilege of the club being entitled to fly a special ensign at its station. The privilege of the club's members to have these ensigns, worn by their (registered) boats, is now granted by the club's secretary under certain conditions prescribed by the Department of Defence (originally by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty).

Perhaps the most well known example of a special ensign is the white ensign of the Royal Yacht Squadron, sometimes referred to as the St. George's ensign because of its red St. George's cross. Perrin writes: "From that date [1859] the privilege of flying the white ensign has remained the prerogative of the Royal Yacht Squadron, a privilege enhanced in 1864 by its becoming the distinctive ensign of the Royal Navy." In this 1922 piece Perrin also noted: "At the present day forty-four clubs have the privilege of flying the blue ensign, either plain or 'defaced' with some distinctive badge, and eight are allowed to 'deface' the red ensign with their special badge."<sup>34</sup> However, sixty-seven years later the number of privileged clubs had almost doubled, the blue ensign having been warranted by the Department of Defence to thirty-one clubs, the blue ensign defaced by a badge to fifty-five clubs, and

<sup>34</sup>W. G. Perrin, *British Flags, Their Early History and Their Development at Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 139.

the red ensign similarly defaced to twelve clubs.<sup>35</sup>

The Royal Thames Yacht Club, then known as the Cumberland Fleet, used the original white ensign (without the red St. George's cross) in 1775, but has used the undefaced blue ensign since 1848. The Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club's special ensign is an example of a blue ensign defaced, and the Royal Victoria Yacht Club's ensign (now stationed at Fishbourne, U.K.) is an example of a red ensign defaced. A Toronto Yacht Club's yearbook (c1885) illustrates a red ensign defaced with a gold maple leaf; the author doubts that this was legally acquired. Members of Canada's Royal Hamilton Yacht Club claim that their original blue ensign, defaced by a gold maple leaf and royal crown and now flown on the port yardarm of the club's flagstaff, is their "house flag."<sup>36</sup> A similar approach is taken by the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club whose members' boats also wear the Canadian Blue Ensign at the port spreader.<sup>37</sup>

The Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club of Bermuda is unique in being entitled to fly, but only on its premises, an "original" white ensign (with no red cross) and defaced with a red royal crown surmounting the letters and punctuation "R.H.A.D.C."; this entitlement was granted in 1980. Seven years earlier, approval was obtained by the club from the British Admiralty for their members to fly the red ensign defaced with a white fitted dinghy and a gold royal crown.

American yachtsmen have not been as well served in the special ensign stakes having but one, the United States Yacht Ensign, approved by Congress in 1848.<sup>38</sup> Collier, in reference to this special ensign, writes: "It was originally

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<sup>35</sup>*Navy List*, (London: British Admiralty, 1989), 297.

<sup>36</sup>"... the defaced Blue Ensign, granted to the HYC by Queen Victoria, was worn at the stern by yachts having British Registry. When this was no longer permitted, the Board at that time declared the Blue Ensign to be the official House Flag of the Club and ruled it to be worn at the port yardarm." Harry L. Penny, *Flag Etiquette for Yachts* (Hamilton, Ont.: Leaflet distributed by the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club, 1994). Also photograph in the author's collection.

<sup>37</sup>"The Canadian Blue Ensign, signifying that the RVYC holds a Royal Warrant. . ." In a later paragraph the ensign is assigned to "Position 5: the main upper port yard or spreader." *The Royal Vancouver Yacht Club* (Vancouver, B.C.: The Club, 1993), 171.

<sup>38</sup>It is uncertain whether the United States Power Squadrons' ensign and the United States Coast Guard Auxilliary's ensign should be included: "USPS FLAG CODE. FOOTNOTES <sup>1</sup>A USPS member has the option of flying the U.S. Ensign, the U.S. Yacht Ensign or the USPS Ensign" Lindsay Lord, *Nautical Etiquette and Customs* (Cambridge, Md.: Cornell Maritime Press, 1976), 50. "UNITED STATES COAST GUARD AUXILLIARY FLAG CODE. NOTES #5 USPS Ensign — This is the only "service" organization recognized by this code. The USPS ensign may be flown only from the starboard yardarm of a signal mast, never from the stern staff or gaff." Lindsay Lord, *Nautical Etiquette and Customs*, 55.

designed for use as a signal to designate a documented yacht. However, longstanding usage has broadened its meaning to the point where it is flown afloat in lieu of the U.S. flag by pleasure craft, whether documented or not. The flag is only to be flown afloat.”<sup>39</sup> (It is this author’s opinion that Collier should have added “in U.S. waters only”). The author of this essay is presently conducting a survey among a random selection of American Great Lakes yacht club members to estimate the extent of usage of this ensign on the Great Lakes.

Other countries have special ensigns for members of certain, often “Royal,” yacht clubs; examples are Belgium and the Netherlands, both of which have a number of clubs each sporting a different special ensign. Other countries permitting special ensigns for some of their yacht clubs include Italy, France, Finland, and Switzerland.<sup>40</sup> A recent interesting development in Europe has been the use of the “Euro-Ensign,” the European Community flag with a country’s national flag in the canton. In a recent article Healy denounces the use, particularly by non-British citizens, of the supposed British version of this flag.<sup>41</sup>

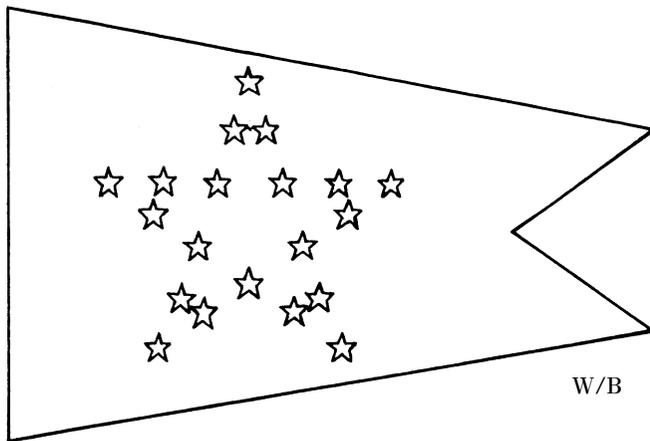


Fig. 13. “America’s” Racing Flag

<sup>39</sup>James R. Collier, *Yachting Signal Book*, 78.

<sup>40</sup>Yacht Club Italiano (1879), Yacht Club de France (1867), Nyländska Jaktklubben (1861), and the Cruising Club of Switzerland (1955).

<sup>41</sup>Michael Healy, “Those Other Blue Ensigns,” *Royal Naval Sailing Association Journal* (Autumn 1992): 77.

## Racing and Prize Flags

The following flags have been grouped together under the above title: “racing flags,” “distinguishing flags,” “private signals,” “distinguishing private signals,” “house flags,” and “battle flags.” Their definitions have been used somewhat interchangeably over the years.

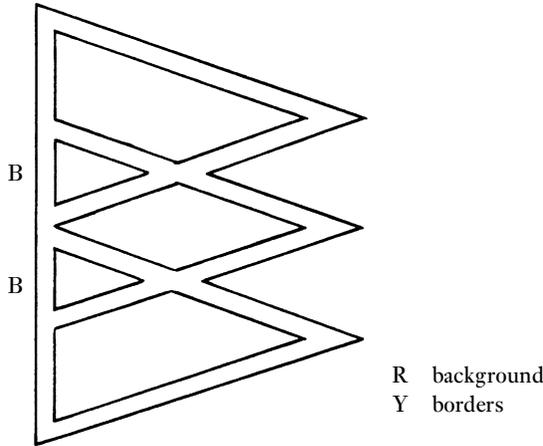


Fig. 14. Penang Yacht Club

In 1831 the Royal Northern Yacht Club issued a distinguishing flag chart with its signal book to assist its members, and also the general spectating and betting public, in distinguishing one yacht from another during races.

In 1851, after her success in winning the Hundred Guinea Cup (later known as America’s Cup) the schooner *America* returned home; purchased by John de Blaquiere, she was sailed back to race again on the Solent under her original racing flag.

Four of J. Pierpont Morgan’s steam yachts, all named *Corsair*, wore his private broad pennant signal: a white moon and star on the red field. A current American example of a private signal is that of Howard B. Keck of Newport Beach, California, owner of the 123 foot Sparkman and Stephens designed ketch *Galileo*.

King Edward VII’s and later George V’s *Britannia* had a racing flag (Prince of Wales feathers on a blue and red vertical field) as did the other “big boats” of the age: *Ailsa*, *Valkyrie*, *Hester*, *Dream*, and *Carina*. HRH The Prince Phillip for many years campaigned his “Edinburgh green” racing flag on a staff (pigstick) at the truck of his boats *Comeslip* and *Bluebottle*.

The private signals of the Gooderham family and of Commodore Aemelius

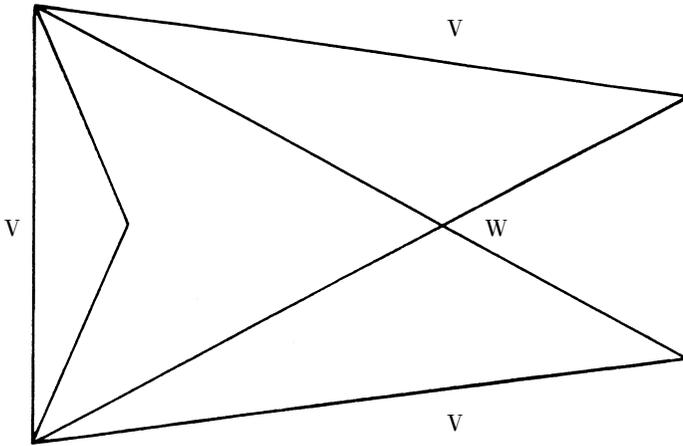


Fig. 15. Howard B. Keck (Private Signal)

Jarvis were well known throughout the Great Lakes for many years. Other Canadian examples of private signals (or house flags) that can be seen today are to be found on the boats of John Black Aird<sup>42</sup> and businessman Lou Massue (*Southwind*).

The 1976 edition of the Royal Swedish Yacht Club's yearbook shows a number of examples of Swedish private signal designs.

According to Johnson, the racing flag is "flown in place of the burgee when racing, but not customary outside the United Kingdom."<sup>43</sup> At the time of the racing of the "big boats," spectator interest was in the boats (and not the owners) which were so similar that the only way they could readily be recognized by those watching was by their racing flags. Johnson was writing in 1972; now all countries follow the racing rules of the International Sailing Federation (originally the International Yacht Racing Union) and have a three letter national designation and a number on the sails of their boats for easier recognition.

A modern trend among the yacht racing fraternity is to fly a "battle flag" to and from the race course and in port during the period of the regatta. These flags are usually worn at the forestay and, therefore, are often of an asymmetrical shape. Examples are to be seen on the Canadian boats *Vision*

<sup>42</sup>While he was Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Aird flew a blue swallow-tailed flag with the coat of arms of Ontario superimposed as his private signal on *The Black Cat*. On his other boats the author understands he flies the old style Lieutenant Governor's official flag as a private signal and the White Ensign at the stern.

<sup>43</sup>Peter Johnson, *Yachting World Handbook* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., Inc., 1972), 258.

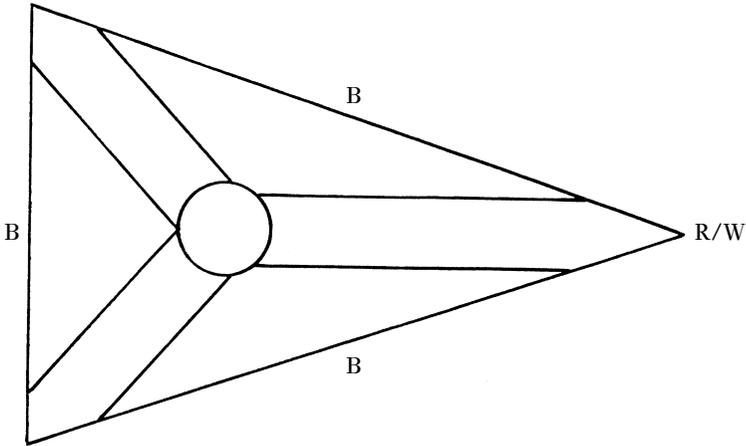


Fig. 16. Inter-Lake Yacht Racing Association

*II*, *Friction*, and *Severn II*, and in the United States aboard *Defiant* of the 1992 *America*<sup>3</sup> (pronounced *America Cubed*) syndicate, the members of which had taken to referring to themselves as Cubens.<sup>44</sup>

Besides the trophies that are awarded for yacht races all first, second, and third placed boats (both overall and within their racing class or division) receive a “prize flag.” Current Canadian practice for these flags is a field color sequence of gold (yellow), red, and blue for first, second, and third place, plus the name of the regatta and/or sponsoring club superimposed.

<sup>44</sup>“This explains the battle flag that was flown from the head stay of *Defiant*. Emblazoned on the flag was a hefty-looking porker and the initials B.P.Y.C. The Flag, of course, is the burgee of the Bay of Pigs Yacht Club.” Charles Mason, “What’s in a Name Sailor,” *Sail* (April 1992): 15.

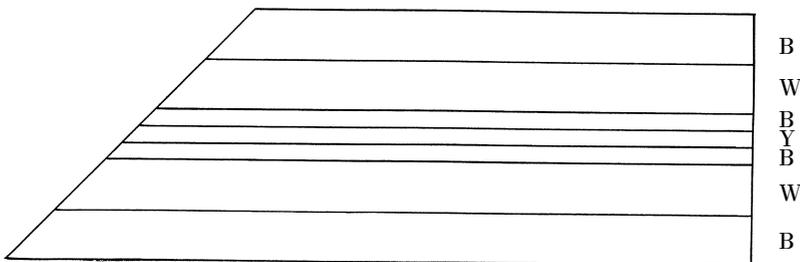


Fig. 17. “Severn II” (Battle Flag)

The author assumes that the American practice is the same as the Canadian. He has not verified what he understands to (still?) be the British system of hoisting a boat's racing flag under the burgee for first place, and under pennants marked with the numerals "2" and "3" for second and third place.

## Some Other Yacht Flags

The Transoceanic Pennant<sup>45</sup> and the Circumnavigation Award of the Cruising Club of America are examples of some of the other flags worn by yachts. Another example is found among the cruising sailors of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club who organized themselves into a formal group in order to have a louder voice in committees, and at the same time they adopted a flag,<sup>46</sup> presumably wishing to be seen better even if they were not heard better.

In 1885 Canadian and American yacht clubs on Lake Erie organized for their mutual benefit within the Inter-Lake Yachting Association. A stained glass window above the clubhouse's main entrance at the Toledo Yacht Club shows the association's flag. A similar group on Lake Ontario, the Lake Yacht Racing Association, celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary in 1984 and issued a special swallowtailed flag for the occasion. Examples of national boating associations with flags are the Canadian Boating Federation with a pennant, and the Royal Yachting Association with a flag and pennant. The Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons<sup>47</sup> and the Canadian Coast Guard Auxilliary are both national associations of sailors (boaters?) with their own flags.

Some yacht clubs on their one-hundredth anniversary choose to celebrate with a special flag, as in the case of the San Francisco Yacht Club and the Rochester Yacht Club, both of which modified the design of their burgees for the duration of their centennial year. On the other hand, in 1967 the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club (Newport Beach, Australia) merely added

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<sup>45</sup>"... a pennant of a length approximately 20% of the overall length of the yacht entitled to fly it, and one-twelfth of its length on the hoist. It shall have a white field, with a waved blue stripe 20% of the hoist in width, running horizontally through the centre from hoist to point." *The Yearbook of the Cruising Club of America* (n.p.: The Cruising Club of America, 1972), 158.

<sup>46</sup>"Cruising Burgee: a rectangular gold swallowtailed flag with a navy blue cross of St. George with the Patron's broad pennant in the canton. Proportions 2:3, swallowtail one sixth of fly." *The Royal Canadian Yacht Club, Year Book* (Toronto: The Royal Canadian Yacht Club, 1992), 203.

<sup>47</sup>It should be noted that most of the squadrons (branches) of the Canadian Power and Sail Squadrons have their own burgees. See Elizabeth Tomlinson, "How Do We Look," *Port Hole* (December 1994): 42.

a small 1 by 2¾ inch label to its burgee to celebrate one hundred years of sailing activity.

Racing and cruising boats of the same type, and of different lengths within types, are referred to and often organize together into “classes”; the Nonsuch class is an example. This class has a rendezvous every two years and incorporates a reference to the host club and the year on their class flag (white silhouette of the sail plan on a blue field). Most commonly class flags display the class sail insignia.

As a fund raiser in support of Canada’s participation in the 1976 America’s Cup series, a pennant was marketed to contributing supporters to be flown from the starboard spreader of their own boats.

Not to be outdone by members of yacht clubs, sailors who keep their boats at marinas often have their own flag; examples are the Newcastle Marina in Ontario and at Scheveningan in the Netherlands. Marina Village in Alameda, California, is a residential marina that has its own flag, a practice similar to many of the waters-edge housing developments of “yacht clubs” in Florida. In a similar way members of and visitors to the Museum of Yachting in Newport, Rhode Island, can purchase and fly the museum’s flag. The Sydney Marine Museum also had a flag of its own, as does its successor, the National Maritime Museum of Australia.

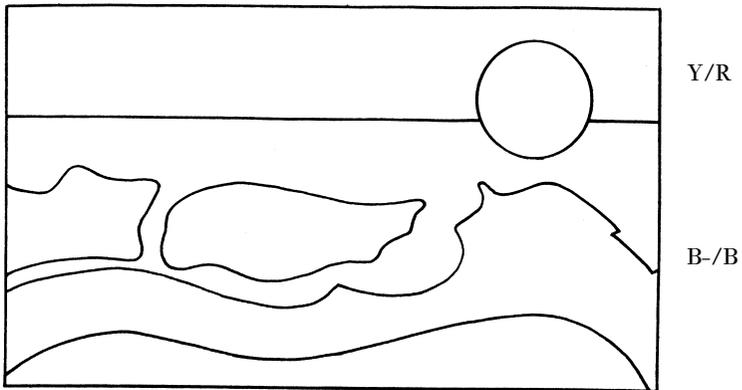


Fig. 18. Toronto Island Community Flag

The residents of Toronto Island, wishing not to be moved to make room for parkland, make their political statement with a flag which some of them fly on their boats. In 1993 a number of Toronto boat owners celebrated that city’s two-hundredth anniversary with a white, green, and black long pennant designed by the Curator of the Marine Museum of Upper Canada

and made available by the Toronto Historical Board.

Boats, having been successful in a race, will often fly the flag of the manufacturer of their sails, instruments, or gear; the flag of the VDO (white letters on a blue field) Company, makers of navigational instruments, is an example of this form of advertising.

A complex tradition that is worthy of serious study by vexillologists is the large number of flags that members of the American Sportfishing Association will sometimes fly on their boats after a successful day on the water.

## A Suggested Classification System

The author's filing system consists of flag illustrations on 3 by 5 inch cards and color print photographs trimmed to the same size, which are all filed alphabetically by yacht club or yacht association name. Data on special ensigns, officers' flags, and other flags are filed with the appropriate club's burgee. The index and cross reference to all the cards is contained in a Microsoft Works 2.4 e program database in a Macintosh SE computer. At some later date the author will give consideration to updating his hardware and to scanning the cards into a color application.

This filing system is satisfactory except when one wishes to go the other way, that is when confronted with an actual burgee, or an illustration, or a description, and the question: "To which club does this belong?" What is needed at this point of course is a classification system which enables one to quickly select the one specific club out of the many thousands on file.

Books on shipping company house flags incorporating classification systems have been published for many years.<sup>48</sup> However, their systems are all arranged on the basis of funnel colors and markings and not on the colors or designs of the house flags themselves.

One of the earliest yacht flag classification systems was used by Summers (for private signals) in the annual editions of his *Who Won?* which he describes as "a practical 'Color', 'Shape' and 'Design' index." Summers divides his colors into five general divisions (blue, red, yellow, white, and green), his

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<sup>48</sup>See *Reed's Flags and Funnels of English and Foreign Steamship Companies and Private Firms* (Sunderland, England: Thomas Reed & Co. Ltd., n.d.); *Lloyd's Book of House Flags & Funnels of the Principal Steamship Lines of the World and the House Flags of Various Lines of Sailing Vessels* (London: Lloyd's, 1912); F. J. N. Wedge, comp. *Brown's Flags and Funnels* (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, Ltd., 1929); Colin Stewart, *Flags, Funnels and Hull Colours* (London: Adlard Coles Ltd., 1953); *Merchant Marine House Flags and Stack Insignia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Navy Hydrographic Office, 1961); J. L. Loughran, *A Survey of Mercantile Houseflags & Funnels* (Wolverhampton, England: Waine Research, 1979).

shapes into three sub-divisions of each general color division, and his design into “many groups in each sub-division.”<sup>49</sup> This system has merit in that it recognizes flag shape as an important element, and does not require the observer to determine which color predominates in the design.

Talbot-Booth describes his system as follows: “The burgees have been arranged as nearly as possible in some form of recognition, grouping those most nearly alike, together.”<sup>50</sup> At the other extreme Stewart arranges the burgees in ten field-color groups and each group is then sub-grouped into nine superimposed designs. Burgees of two background colors are grouped in a different color sequence and a different design sequence. Burgees of three or more background colors are “variously divided.”<sup>51</sup>

Lloyd’s yacht registers<sup>52</sup> organize their burgee illustrations alphabetically by yacht club name, but in their British editions list clubs entitled to special ensigns ahead of those less privileged. Illustrations in Lloyd’s American editions are also organized alphabetically by club, as is the case in editions of their authorized successor: *The North American Yacht Register. The Yacht Owners Register*<sup>53</sup> is also arranged alphabetically by club name. All these volumes do, however, use a color sequence for illustrations of distinguishing flags, racing flags, and private signals. This is most probably because they show many more of these flags, with the resulting confusion, than they do of burgees.

The first edition of *The North American Yacht Register* explains that “private signals are grouped by colors. The main color is the one which occupies the largest area on the flag.”<sup>54</sup> The key to this system is a matrix of nine main colors on a vertical axis and nine secondary colors on a horizontal axis; the point at which the axes intersect provides the number of the page(s) of the group to which the burgee belongs.

In view of the potential for the accumulation of vast amounts of data in this area of flag study, the author is experimenting with a classification system that emphasizes the design components, by employing an expanded version

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<sup>49</sup>James C. Summers, ed., “Who Won?” *The Official American Yacht Record for 1893* (New York: “Who Won?” Publishing Co., 1893), 40.

<sup>50</sup>E. C. Talbot-Booth, *Ensigns and Burgees of Yacht Clubs of the British Empire* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd. [c1938]), 20.

<sup>51</sup>Colin Stewart, *Yacht Club Burgees* (Southampton: Adlard Coles Ltd., 1957), 7.

<sup>52</sup>*Lloyd’s Register of American Yachts* (New York: Lloyd’s Register of Shipping, 1903–1977). *Register of Yachts* (London: Lloyd’s Register of Shipping, 1878?–1980).

<sup>53</sup>*The Yacht Owners Register* (Boston: The Yacht Owners Register, Inc., 1984).

<sup>54</sup>*The North American Yacht Register* (New York: Livingston Marine Services, Inc., 1978), 989.

of Smith's "Mosaic of Symbols,"<sup>55</sup> rather than the color sequence.<sup>56</sup> There is an obvious advantage in not obligating the observer to estimate which color is primary, that is covering the most area of the field, or secondary, (or even tertiary?)—but what are the alternatives? The author would welcome comment, advice, and discussion.

## Conclusion

Those familiar with this subject will have noted that the author has not made reference to yacht signalling, yacht flag etiquette, the use of the International Code of Signals in yacht racing and in dressing overall, the burgees of ice boat clubs or of canoe clubs,<sup>57</sup> or even to "fun flags." They are mentioned now only to suggest that therein lies an additional wealth of material for research and analysis.

In writing this essay and the previous one the author has been surprised, if not overwhelmed, by the extent of the subject matter, hence this "preliminary survey" is but a brief introduction to the subject. Nevertheless, he hopes that it will provide a logical framework for those who are enticed by this fascinating area of flag analysis.

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<sup>55</sup>Whitney Smith, *Flags Through the Ages and Across the World* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 309–313.

<sup>56</sup>This is the opposite of the heraldic tradition of blazoning the field before the principal charge.

<sup>57</sup>Camarada, "A Club Directory," letter to editor *Forest and Stream* (1 November 1893): 277.

## **Appendix: The First Yacht Clubs**

YEAR	UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	OTHER COUNTRIES
1720	Royal Cork		
1773	Starcross		
1775	Royal Thames		
1812	Royal Yacht Squadron		
1815	Royal Dee		
1824	Royal Northern and Clyde		
1827	Royal Western of England		
1829			Gibraltar
1830			Stockholm, Sweden
1831	Royal Irish		
1834	Lough Erne		
1836	Lough Derg		
1836	Royal Eastern		
1837	Royal Southern		Halifax, Canada
1838	Royal London		L'Havre, France
1838	Royal St. George		Hobart, Tasmania
1843	Royal Harwich		
1844	Royal Mersey	New York	Hamilton, Bermuda
1844	Royal Victoria		
1846	Royal Engineers		Bombay, India
1846	etc.		St. Petersburg, Russia
1847	etc.		Ostende, Belgium
1847			Muiden, Netherlands
1849		Southern	
1851		Neptune?	
1853		Carolina (North)	Williamstown, Australia
1856		Hoboken	Lisbon, Portugal
1857		Brooklyn	
1858		Jersey City	Durban, South Africa
1860		Buffalo	
1865		Riverton	
1866		Atlantic	
1866		Boston	Copenhagen, Denmark
1867		Columbia	
1868		South Boston	Hamburg, Germany
1869		Pavonia	
1869		Portland (ME)	
1869		Savannah	
1870		Bunker Hill	
1870		Eastern	
1870		Lynn	
1870		Williamsburg	
1871		Seawanhaka	Auckland, New Zealand
1872		Manhattan	
1872		St. Augustine	
1873			Valletta, Malta

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