The Municipal Flag of Chicago

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References


“The Tribune offers a prize of $100 for the best suggestion of a color or combination of colors for a ‘municipal color’ for Chicago. The suggestions will be judged by a committee of artists, and the conditions will be announced later on.”


The Tribune announces the winner of the “municipal color” contest: Alfred Jensen Roewad, engineer and architect working in the World’s Fair Bureau of Construction. The Tribune modified Roewad’s “red and white” winning entry to “terra-cotta and white”. Prominent in this article are illustrations by F.D. Millet of the Y-device applied to shields, pennants, and flags. Also, a short biography of Roewad.


“A silken banner and Flag will drape the front door if the elements be propitious – Mr. Roewad, winner of ‘The Tribune’s’ $100 prize, makes some useful suggestions telling how properly
proportioned flags can be made – Combinations of the Colors suggested.”


“Flag, Shield and Banner in Terra-Cotta and White Flung to the Breeze – First Unfurling of the Municipal Emblem Which Resulted from ‘The Tribune’s’ Prize Contest – Suggestions for Various Uses of the Chosen Colors – Favorable Comment by Local Newspapers.”

[5] Terra-cotta, White; chicagoans see the “municipal colors” and approve. Chicago Daily, page 3, October 3, 1892.

The Tribune reports with enormous self-satisfaction on the widespread acceptance of its proposed colors and device.


More self-congratulation from the Tribune. A sketch of A. J. Roewad is included.


Plans are made to decorate city property in the municipal colors.


A report on the municipal colors contest. Millet illustrations are re-printed, this time with the captions, “Chicago’s Municipal Flag” and “Chicago’s Municipal Banner”. However, no evidence is given that these designations are in any way official.


A long report on the events attending the opening of the WCE. No special mention of the proposed colors or the Y-device is made.


Millet describes the use of flag, pennants, and banners at the WCE itself. No mention is made of the proposed colors or the Y-device. The two original banners described are based on Columbian and Spanish themes.


Bears a stamped date of December 12, 1916. Enumerates eleven rules to govern the competition. The authorship of the rules is unattributed.


Eight “suggestions” for the competition.


The report of the Municipal Flag Commission is ordered published. The meanings of the twelve points of the stars are enumerated and explained, along with the symbolism of the other flag elements.


The ordinance proposed by the Municipal Flag Commission is passed unanimously. The exacting dimensions in the report of the commission are supplanted by more ambiguous instructions.

Short note on adoption of new city flag by council.

[18] Mr. Rice’s flags are your flags, and my flags! *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 14, February 27, 1918.

Summarizes lecture by Rice at Art Institute on Feb 26, 1918.


A brief correction to earlier article by Louise James Bargelt: colors of Illinois Centennial Flag are white and blue; not red, white, and blue.


A long quote from an unknown source makes up the vast majority of this article, which explains in great detail the origin of the Chicago Flag. Refers to Rice as the origin of the rules of the competition.


A brief letter to the editors, inquiring as to the symbolism of the blue stripes.


Rice addresses an irate letter to Chicago’s Corporation Counsel, fuming about the proposed change of the flag’s stars from six points to five. He attached a five-page essay on the historical uses of five-pointed stars in both heraldry and international flags, and elaborates on his reasoning in creating an original six-pointed star for the Chicago flag. He mentions that the angles of the points should be 30 degrees.


The Tribune notes Rice’s opposition to the proposed change in the flag.

The ordinance to change the shape of the stars from six points to five is proposed and summarily, unanimously approved.


The Tribune notes that many Chicagoans are noticing the city's flag for the first time. State Street stores have chosen it as decoration during the Century of Progress World's Fair. The flag is described as having "two red stars" on the "left of the center white bar." No information about the shape of the stars is given.


A short article explaining the significance of the Chicago flag.


Contains a brief, entertaining, (if uninformative) biographical note on Wallace Rice.


Report that Mayor Kelly will present a new three-star Chicago flag to Rufus Dawes, president of the Fair. Does not mention the shape of the stars.


The accompanying photo shows a flag with six-pointed stars.
REFERENCES


The illustration shows three 60-degree stars on the flag.


The director of a North-side Boy’s club group contacted Wallace Rice and, with a delegation of boys, called upon “Chicago’s masculine Betsy Ross”. A friend of the club then constructed a flag upon Rice’s lines. A photo is included, credited to ‘Brown photo’, of a three-star, 30-degree star flag. This appears to be the original of the Tribune’s stock Chicago Flag photo.


Obituary of Wallace Rice, designer of the Chicago Municipal Flag. “In manner and style, he was a sophisticate. In writing he was a purist and a stickler for the finer shadings and phrases.”


The ordinance refers to the existing code as having ‘three bright red stars with sharp points, six in number’ and modified this to ‘four bright red stars with sharp points, six in number.’ It also adds additional language specifying what the stars represent.

[38] Fort Dearborn gets a star on Chicago’s flag. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 18, December 22, 1939.

Recent events in City Council are reported upon. The Tribune’s stock flag photo is modified here: four stars, close to the mast, with the fourth off-kilter.


Mayor Kennelly has started a one man crusade to teach Chicagoans, first, what the flag of their city looks like, and second, what it stands for. Visitors to his inner office nowadays are greeted not only by his warm smile, but also by an outstretched hand bearing a colored postcard depicting the city's flag. The mayor keeps a large stock of them in his drawer.

“I didn’t know what the flag was until I was elected,” he said yesterday, “and I didn’t learn what it meant until recently when I presented one to the Art Institute. I think it’s a fine thing for buildings to fly the city flag.”

The flag, incidentally, has a white background with two horizontal blue bars (representing the two branches of the river) and between the bars four red six pointed stars (representing Fort Dearborn, the 1871 fire, the Columbian exposition, and A Century of Progress exposition.


Full text: Lloyd Schumacher raised a Chicago flag outside his hardware store at 3634 N. Central Av. a month ago and since then has been busy answering questions.

Few people recognize the city’s flag, Schumacher said, and have mistaken it for everything from the flag of Israel to that of one of the Scandinavian countries. It’s gotten to the point, he said Monday, that he’s so busy answering questions there is little time left to sell tenpenny nails or a brace of carpenter’s tools. Schumacher said he is displaying the Chicago flag because he is a booster of the city and doesn’t think the flag is seen often enough. He plans to keep flying the flag.


REFERENCES

Illustration shows stock Tribune four-star flag with stars near mast. In contrast to 1939 appearance, ribbon and masthead have been removed, leaving flag floating free. Additionally, flag has been rotated from hanging-down position. Letter to editor proposes fifth star for “beginning of the atomic age”, in 1942.


Daley describes the fifth star for “beginning of the atomic age” idea as interesting.


Stock Tribune flag photo appears again, hanging down. Letter from Rice explains first 1st, 2nd star points. Refers to “memo from reference librarian” explaining 3rd, 4th star points.


Photo shows very large flag, with large pointy stars.


Photo on second page shows flag with centered, but smallish, possibly 60 degree stars.


[53] It's a grand old flag, but it could be grander. *Chicago Tribune*, page G34, August 15, 1976.

Heise argues against the current meanings of the four stars on the flag, and proposes 10 new ideas for stars: first public school, 1835; opening of the Illinois and Michigan canal and the first railroad, 1848; nomination of Lincoln, 1860; founding of Hull House, 1899; reversal of Chicago river, 1900; imprisonment of Capone; construction of O'Hare; first sustained nuclear reaction, 1942; reopening of Auditorium Theatre, 1969; European tour of Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 1971. Artwork consists of Tribune stock 4-star flag illustration, with off-kilter fourth star.
