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THE BEAR FLAG

By J. N. BOWMAN

The events at Sonoma in 1846 connected with the events which followed caught the popular fancy and fixed the Bear Flag in tradition as the popular state emblem. In 1875, the Native Sons of the Golden West came into being and took over as part of their work the keeping of the traditions of the earlier days using the bear in some form in their various ceremonies. Between this date and 1899 some unknown person conceived the idea of redesigning the flag of 1846 into a more presentable and artistic emblem for the use of the N. S. G. W., and this person or some other unknown person or persons, made the actual replica of the oldest Bear Flag.

Frank S. Christy of Sacramento, present Grand Historian of the Native Sons, and his wife, have been unable to locate any data in the records or traditions of all the Parlors between these dates as to the person or persons who conceived the idea and the design. However, in 1899, the members of California Parlor No. 2, of the Native Daughters of the Golden West, Sacramento, after many months of work presented on September 6th of this year a Bear Flag to Sunset Parlor No. 26 of the Native Sons in Sacramento. This Bear Flag, as shown in the accompanying picture, is the earliest known ancestor of the present state emblem. This “marching flag” is made of silk, 67 x 51 inches, with a silk fringe on three sides. The red stripe is nine inches wide, and it together with the star and the bear’s tongue are of a lighter shade of red than that of the present State Flag. The bear is 26¼ inches from tip of nose to rear heel and his shoulder height is 12½ inches; the color is brown with darker brown for paws and shading; the eye, the nose and the claws are black; of the fangs of the lower jaw the middle one of the five is longer than the others; his head and eye are turned slightly toward his left. The grass plat, 26 inches long, is in light colors and the California Republic is in red letters.

A silk altar flag of this parlor, probably of a somewhat earlier date, is 30 x 20 inches, and is substantially of the same design and colors; the bottom stripe is 3¾ inches wide, the bear is 11¾ inches between nose tip and heel and 5½ inches high. The bear is all brown with white claws, red tongue and eye, and has one upper and one lower fang; his head is straight forward and up.

The bears of both flags have the appearance of a grizzly, and bear a somewhat close resemblance to the Nahl etching of a grizzly of 1855.

The above marching flag is substantially that of 1911 and of the standardized flag of 1953.
The Bear Flag of 1911 as it was draped behind the Speaker's desk in the House Chamber on December 20 when a picture was taken of members in front of the Flag. Freehand reproduction enlarged three times by courtesy of Paul B. Johnson, Division of Architects.
On February 3, 1911, Governor Johnson signed the bill making the Bear Flag the state emblem. Dr. P. T. Conmey, past Grand Historian of the N. S. G. W., reported the following data from the records of the order: at the Thirty-second Annual Convention of the Grand Parlor in Marysville in April, 1909, R. D. Barton, of San Francisco, proposed a measure recommending the Legislature to make this flag the State Flag. What prompted Barton to propose this resolution has not been learned. The new president, J. R. Knowland, appointed a committee with Barton as chairman to present the resolution to the Legislature in 1911. In 1911, however, Barton was given a new committee, with J. B. Holohan, a Senator, as a member of both committees, and J. A. Wilson, an Assemblyman, as a member of the latter. Senator Holohan introduced the bill on January 12, 1911, and three weeks later it became law.

The new flag was first displayed in the Assembly Chamber on December 18, 1911, with due ceremonies, speeches by a number of members, and a photograph of these and other members was taken in front of the flags draped behind the Speaker’s desk. Unfortunately this picture published in *The Bee* two days later is too indistinct for rephotographing, but a freehand enlargement was made for presentation here.
The manufacturers of the early State Flags appear to have followed as near as they could the Nahh Grizzly of 1855 as presented in Hutchings' Magazine of September, 1856, but in the following decades liberties were taken with the design until 1953 when some of the flags appeared to represent other animals than bears, animals with red tongues and red eyes; this change in the animal design is well illustrated by the flags presented in the Blue Books from 1911 to 1950. On August 28, 1952, R. E. Stewart, buyer of flags for the Purchasing Division, Department of Finance, raised the question with Fred Links of a standardized bear for the flag to aid in receiving bids for the flags.

Drs. T. I. Storer and L. P. Tevis, Jr., of the University of California at Davis, long students of the California grizzly, extinct since 1911, prepared the details for the form, stance and colors, which were drawn and painted by D. G. Kelley, of the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco. This bear was presented to the Legislature on March 6, 1953; a few days later the question of standardizing the flag as well as the bear was raised. The suggestion was accepted and after several weeks and many conferences with Stewart of the Purchasing Division and A. S. McLorg of the Emerson Manufacturing Company, San Francisco, representing the manufacturers, all items of the flag were standardized as to size, shape, position relative to the flag dimensions, and as to the colors relative to the standards of the U. S. Bureau of Standards and the Textile Color Card Association of the United States, New York.

On June 2, 1953, Governor Warren signed the standardization of the State Flag.

As a graphic representation of the flag and as a service to the manufacturers, Walter Rank, of the Division of Architecture, drew to scale, without colors, the official draft of the State Flag. It was reproduced in the law and the original filed with the Secretary of State.

The State now has a standardized emblem and laws regarding its display and use.

NOTES
California Statutes, 1953, 4200, Chap. 166, April 10, 1952; 1081, Chap. 165, June 1, 1952; 2248, Chap. 887, May 23, 1953; 2637, Chap. 1140, June 14, 1953; 2785, Chap. 1227, June 19, 1953.
Hutchings' Magazine, I, 106; III, 5; V, 209. Flag pictures, State Library.
Correspondence in Bear Flag folder, State Archives. Blue Books, 1903, 1907, 1909, and 1911 to 1954; the pictures of the flag in the Blue Book of 1911 is not that of the State Flag of that year.
THE STATE ANIMAL

By J. N. BOWMAN

From the provincial days of California until he became extinct in 1911, the bear, probably the grizzly, entered into the sports of the native rancheros, the object of hunting in Gold Rush days, and into legend during the American period. In 1855 C. Nahl made his etching of the grizzly bear, and the following year the grizzly made his first appearance in Hutchings' Magazine. He is supposed to be the bear of the 1846 flag at Sonoma, and when the Native Sons of the Golden West were organized in 1875 the bear, again presumably the grizzly, appeared on their emblems and flags in some form. The students of the University of California accepted the bear for their college songs, and in 1895 he appeared on their flag used at an eastern athletic meeting. But with all his popularity and tradition, the idea of making him the State Animal did not arise until 1953 when Dr. T. I. Storer, of the University of California at Davis, proposed the idea to Fred Links of the Department of Finance as a due return for the service in standardizing the bear for the State Flag. Dr. Storer, as a zoologist, had long been a student of the extinct California grizzly and was of the opinion that the traditional bear should be the grizzly. It was a grizzly that he presented for the standardized flag. Presumably it was a reproduction, with some changes, of the Nahl grizzly of 1855 which appeared on the earliest known flag of 1899 and perhaps on the early State Flags of the 1910s.

Fred Links accepted Storer's proposal. The grizzly of the new state standardized flag was used as a basis and was drawn and colored as the official animal by D. G. Kelley of the California Academy of Sciences. A reproduction of this drawing, without colors, appears in the law, and the original drawing is filed with the Secretary of State.

STATE ANIMAL

The California Grizzly Bear (*Ursus californicus*)

The grizzly of the State Flag and the State Animal bears some resemblance to the Nahl bear of 1855—the position of the head, the turning of the head and eye slightly to his left and up, the relative position of his paws, the hump of the shoulders, the open mouth and fangs—but the shagginess and forlorn appearance has been replaced by a well-fed and presentable animal with a somewhat different neck and lower jaw. The flag as presented in the 1911 Blue Book seems to have only a slight resemblance to the Nahl grizzly of 1855—lower shoulders, no tail, different position of head and of paws. It was not a reproduction of the new flag.