

The Municipal Flag of Chicago

T. E. Whalen
4745 N. Ravenswood

January 3, 2006



References

- [1] Colors for Chicago; “The Tribune” offers \$100 for the best suggestions. *Chicago Daily*, page 1, September 11, 1892.

“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.”

- [2] Terracotta, White; “The Tribune’s” suggestion for “municipal colors”. *Chicago Daily*, page 1, October 1, 1892.

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.

- [3] Terra-Cotta-White; Monday “The Tribune” will display municipal colors. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 5, October 2, 1892.

“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.”

- [4] Colors for the city. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 2, October 3, 1892.

“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; chigoans 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.

- [6] Terra-cotta, white; Wabash Avenue block to wear “The Tribune” colors. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 6, October 5, 1892.

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

- [7] Roewad colors on city buildings. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 9, October 11, 1892.

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

- [8] Chicago’s municipal colors. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 10, April 27, 1893.

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 the these designations are in any way official.

- [9] World’s Columbian Exposition (1893: Chicago, Ill.). Joint Committee on Ceremonies. *Dedicatory and opening ceremonies of the World’s Columbian exposition*. A. L. Stone, Chicago, 1893.

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.

- [10] Francis Davis Millet. The decoration of the exposition. In *Some artists at the fair*. C. Scribner, New York, 1893.

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.

- [11] Daniel Hudson Burnham and Francis Davis Millet. *World's Columbian Exposition: the Book of the Builders*. Columbian Memorial Publication Society, Chicago, IL, 1894.
- [12] Chicago Municipal Flag Commission. Rules adopted by the Chicago Municipal Flag Commission to govern the public competitive contest for a suitable design of a municipal flag for the City of Chicago. In the Municipal Reference Collection, a xerographic copy of a typewritten manuscript, December, 1916.
- Bears a stamped date of December 12, 1916. Enumerates eleven rules to govern the competition. The authorship of the rules is unattributed.
- [13] Wallace Rice. Suggestions submitted for the guidance and information of contestants in the public competitive contest for a suitable design of a municipal flag for the City of Chicago. In the Municipal Reference Collection, a xerographic copy of a typewritten manuscript, 1916.
- Eight "suggestions" for the competition.
- [14] Chicago (Ill.) City Council. Municipal flag, standard, etc.: Adoption of designs. In *Journal of the proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Council year 1917*, pages 4150–4153. City of Chicago, 1917.
- 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.
- [15] Offer design for city flag; what it means. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 13, March 29, 1917.
- A brief notice in the Tribune on the report of the Municipal Flag Commission. Consists primarily of quotations from the report itself.
- [16] Chicago (Ill.) City Council. Municipal flag, standard, etc.: Adoption of designs. In *Journal of the proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Council year 1917*, pages 4295–4297. City of Chicago, 1917.
- 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.
- [17] What our city fathers accomplished yesterday during a four hour session. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 13, April 9, 1917.

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.

- [19] Beg your pardon! *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 15, March 4, 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.

- [20] Art and Architecture; How the Chicago Municipal Flag came to be chosen. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page G3, July 17, 1921.

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.

- [21] Look boys, our flag. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 8, October 7, 1921.

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

- [22] Charles Moore. *Daniel H. Burnham: Architect, Planner of Cities*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston and New York, 1921.

- [23] Wallace Rice. Letter to Samuel Ettelson. In Frederick Rex, editor, *Municipal Flag: Miscellaneous notes, correspondence, etc.* Chicago Municipal Reference Library, February 3, 1928.

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.

- [24] Designer of Chicago flag protests plan to change its stars. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 9, February 3, 1928.

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

- [25] Chicago (Ill.) City Council. Change in Specifications for the Municipal Flag. In *Journal of the proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Council year 1928-1929*, page 2155. City of Chicago, February 15, 1928.

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

- [26] Fair acquaints many folk with city's own flag. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 11, June 4, 1933.

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.

- [27] untitled article. *Official World's Fair Weekly*, 1(8):37, June 23, 1933.

A short article explaining the significance of the Chicago flag.

- [28] The day's doings of the press veterans of '93 : as guests of a century of progress, August 12, 1933. Chicago, 1933.

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

- [29] City gets new flag today with third star for 1933 fair. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 9, 1933.

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.

- [30] Chicago (Ill.) City Council. Adding of an additional star for the Chicago municipal flag in commemoration of A Century of Progress Exposition. In *Journal of the proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Council year 1932-1933*, pages 866–867. City of Chicago, October 21, 1933.

- [31] Photograph of state street. In *Topical photograph file*. Chicago Daily News?, 1933.

- [32] Photograph of state street. Chicago Daily News?, 1933.

- [33] Norwegian boy scouts visit Chicago; Receive city flag. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 5, July 22, 1936.

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

- [34] Display city flag, Kelly asks homes and business chiefs. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 6, September 13, 1934.

The illustration shows three 60-degree stars on the flag

- [35] City's forgotten flag destined for renaissance. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page N6, October 2, 1938.

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.

- [36] Wallace rice, lecturer and author, is dead. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 20, December 16, 1939.

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."

- [37] Chicago (Ill.) City Council. Addition of a star for the municipal flag to commemorate Fort Dearborn. In *Journal of the proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Council year 1939-1940*, pages 1400-1402. City of Chicago, December 21, 1939.

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.

- [39] Seek 5th star in city flag for Joliet and Marquette. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 18, February 27, 1941.

- [40] City flag. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 6, June 23, 1948.

- [41] Kennelly conducts crusade to teach city about its flag. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 2, August 29, 1948.

Full text: 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).

- [42] Chicago flag stays on mail of city clerk. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page C8, November 26, 1956.

- [43] Seal to oust flag on mail of city clerk. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 13, October 7, 1957.

- [44] Chicago flag waves in wind of questions. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 11, August 12, 1958.

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.

- [45] 4 stars in city flag tell 24 point story of Chicago. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 15, August 13, 1958.

- [46] A fifth star in our flag? *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 14, July 1, 1961.

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

- [47] 5th star in city flag idea intrigues Daley. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, page 18, July 6, 1961.

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

- [48] Yes, Melissa, here’s city flag. *Chicago Tribune*, page 13, March 25, 1963.

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.

- [49] Photographers get flag. *Chicago Tribune*, page 8, January 6, 1966.

Photo shows very large flag, with large pointy stars.

- [50] Yank thanks Daley for gift of sign, flag. *Chicago Tribune*, page 3, July 1, 1967.

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

- [51] Photo. *Chicago Tribune*, page W8, December 14, 1969.

- [52] Finds. *Chicago Tribune*, page B1, June 2, 1971.

- [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.

- [54] G. L. Dybwad and Joy V. Bliss. *Chicago Day at the World’s Columbian Exposition*. The Books Stop Here, Albuquerque, N.M., 1997.

This is version 48 of this document.

© 2005 T. E. Whalen

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.