



# Journal of Vexillology

April

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## EARLY COLONIAL MILITARY FLAGS IN NEW ENGLAND

by Dave Martucci

*Note: this is the first of a series of articles that will review our knowledge of flags and flag usage in Colonial New England. The subject can be broken into several segments, such as flags on ships, forts and use by the militia. This installment focuses on the latter prior to 1700. A future article will continue this subject to the American Revolution.*

Flag usage in the seventeenth century was considerably different than at present. Different designs and styles were used for military purposes on ships, forts and bodies of fighting men. The New England colonies adopted the conventions of their mother country, England, right from the start, but because of different local conditions, some modifications were made. In addition, some differences in opinion regarding design and symbolism spawned a unique vexillological heritage.

The earliest mention of military flags for use by the infantry formations of the militia are found at the start of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, particularly during the so-called "Great Migration" that began in 1630. Although it is likely there were military flags used prior to that date, the records of the Puritan emigration list military supplies sent over to be used by the settlers. Among these supplies is listed "For every 100 male passengers over the age of sixteen, there were ... two ensigns ..." The records of the first wave of emigration seem to indicate there



*Painting of Major Thomas Savage attributed to Thomas Smith, dated 1679. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite, 106.68 x 93.98 cm (42 x 37 in.), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Bequest of Henry Lee Shattuck in memory of the late Morris Gray. Assession number 1983.35.*



*Record of the "Worke don for New England", the "Cornett" of the Three County Troop of, Massachusetts, 1659.*

were perhaps as many as 800 people who fit in this category (out of more than 1,500 who came over in 1630), so the possibility exists there were at least 16 "ensigns" shipped along with them that first year\*. The records of subsequent emigrations between 1631 and 1643 when the great numbers had dwindled are silent about flags, but by 1636 there were three complete regiments in the colony, one in each county\*\*.

The militia organized in New England followed closely the only model these folk knew, that of England. At that time, militia, or "train bands" as they were often known, were organized into companies of about 50 men, ten companies making up a regiment. Flags were assigned to each company, based on the seniority of each commander, so a complete regiment displayed ten flags†. At that time, each company was commanded by an officer starting with the Colonel who also headed the entire regiment and the first battalion. The second company was headed by the Lieutenant-Colonel who also headed the second battalion and the third company and third

*Continued on Page 2*

\* *The Massachusetts Bay Colony; Volume II* by Leo Bonfanti (Pride Publications, Wakefield MA, 1980) pg 16.

\*\* *Ibid*, pg 31. The counties were Suffolk, Essex, and Middlesex.

† For more complete information on the organization of "train bands" see *Ensigns of the English Civil Wars* by Stephen Ede-Borrett (Gosling Press, Pontefract UK; 1997).

battalion were commanded by the Major. Subsequent companies were headed by the First Captain, Second Captain, etc. It is thought this system was carried over to America.

Early on, prior to the English Civil War (1642-1651), colors for companies varied somewhat but a system evolved of having a plain flag for the Colonel, the addition of the St. George Cross for the Lt. Colonel, the same for the Major with the addition of one device and the addition of one more device for each subsequent Captain in order so that the First Captain's flag displayed two devices, the Second Captain's had three and so on. After about 1643, a different Major's flag featuring a wavy "pile" issuing from the canton began to be used and the Captains stepped up one getting flags with the same number of devices as their seniority.

These flags were made of silk and measured approximately six feet square.

The ground color of all of these flags varied from regiment to regiment and, in fact, the regiments may have been named for their color, as in England where one finds "train bands" named Red Regiment, White Regiment, Blue Regiment, Yellow Regiment, Green Regiment and Orange Regiment. All the flags in one regiment had the same color field.

After the Restoration in 1660, King Charles II made some changes in this system, but these changes do not appear to have been imple-

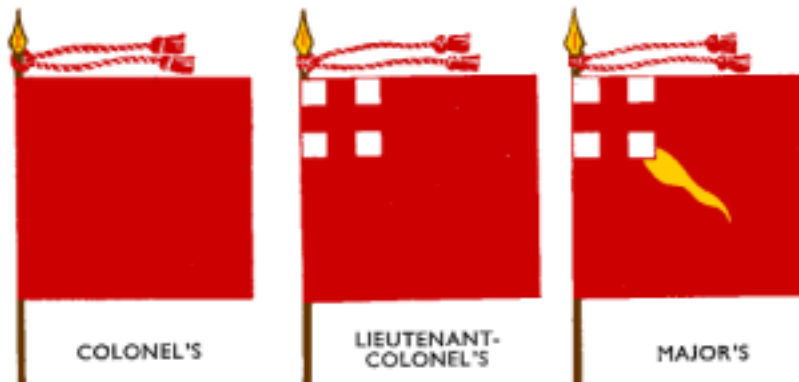
\* For a complete in-depth account of this event, see "The Early Use of Flags in New England" by Howard M. Chapin, *Old-Time New England* magazine, October, 1930, Vol. XXI, No. 2. Bonfanti, *op. cit.*, also discusses this event, giving details on its political significance within the colony.

\*\* <http://www.sedgwick.org/na/families/robert1613/sedgwick-gen-robert-article.html>

† Why only seven ensigns are said to be displayed is unknown; this is the number of two battalions, not the three that would be expected.



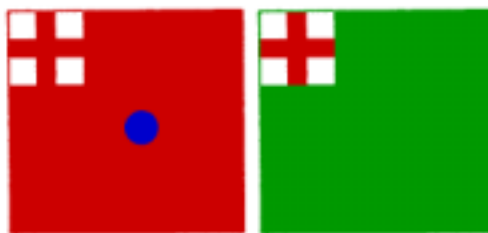
Close up of the three flags in the painting of Major Thomas Savage, 1679.



The three command flags shown in the painting of Major Thomas Savage, 1679.

mented in America.

I won't recount the whole story, but in 1636 John Endicott, former Governor of Massachusetts, after hearing a sermon by Roger Williams that referred to the cross in the flag as a relic of the Antichrist, ordered the cross removed from the military flag of Salem\*. However no further description of the flag or flags in



(Left) Saybrook, Connecticut flag of 1675.

(Right) Newbury, Massachusetts flag of 1684.

question is known, although all subsequent authors writing about this incident assert the flags were red, and they may have been, but that is not known for certain. In fact Salem is in Essex County, as is Newbury, and the latter is known to have used a green flag at a subsequent date, so it seems more likely the Regiment in Essex County was the Green Regiment and therefore the Salem col-

ors were more likely green, although by the time the Newbury colors were made, this regiment had split and Newbury and Salem were in different units. As we shall see, the Red Regiment was based in Suffolk County.

The following year, the cross was generally omitted in all of the militia flags of the colony.

In 1643, the colony was divided into four counties but still with three regiments. The original three counties consisted of eight towns each and the new, fourth county, Norfolk, which took in the newest settlements, had just six towns at this time. These settlements number thirty, exactly the number of companies to make three full regiments.

In a pamphlet entitled "Good News from New England,"\*\* the author says

*Prest to oppose haters of peace with guide  
Of officers, three regiments abide  
In Middlesex, seven ensigns are displayed,  
There disciplined by Major Sedgwick's aid.*

Major Sedgwick of the Middlesex Regiment was commissioned in 1644.†

Sometime later, exactly when is unknown but likely it came about one flag at a time, the cross was again included in the militia colors.

Samuel Crampton of Salem, Massachusetts made colors for the Saybrook, Connecticut militia in 1675. The flag was described as being "of double sarsnet [a type of silk], red with a white field to shew the red cross, ... with a blew ball in ye sd collures." The size is described as being five and a quarter feet by six feet.

A painting of Major Thomas Savage made in 1679 (see page 1) shows a tiny scene in the background of a regiment lined up in review with three flags posted in front. On the observer's left is a plain red flag; in the center is the same with a white canton bearing a red St. George's cross; on the right is the same flag

with the addition of a wavy pile or flame as it is often called, seemingly in yellow (although it may be white). These are the colors of the Colonel, Lieutenant-Colonel, and Major respectively, of the Red Regiment. Savage was in charge of a company from Boston, so this illustration is of the Suffolk County Regiment.

In 1670 and 1671, three new regiments were formed, Norfolk, York, and Hampshire. In 1680 there was a general reorganization and the original three regiments were all split into two and the Norfolk Regiment was disbanded (its soldiers were incorporated into the other regiments).

Captain Thomas Noyes of Newbury, Massachusetts was ordered by the council for the colonies in 1684 "to provide a flight of colors for your foot company, ye ground or flight whereof is to be green, with a red cross with a white field in ye angle, according to the ancient customs of our own English nation, and the English plantations in America, and our own practise in our ships and other vessels. The number of bullets to be put into your colors for distinction may be left out at present without damage in the making of them." The "number of bullets" of course refers to the distinguishing devices signifying the precedence of the Captain within the regiment. Likely the reorganization of 1680

was still being implemented and their status was not fully determined at the time the flag was needed.

Judge Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) kept a detailed diary in the years that saw the reintroduction of the cross into the flags used in New England. He illustrates a number of important attitudes and opinions surrounding this. One note listed in his diary for October 19, 1685 shows an interesting event. "Training of Six Companies. Exercise was Taking of the Fort and advancing White Colours with Red Cross, above the Red Colours: so it stood while we went to Dinner. Then Retaken."\*

In August of 1686, after the last meeting of the government of Massachusetts voted to turn over the keys of the fort to the representatives of the new government that was shortly to be organized under Governor Sir Edmund Andros as a Royal Colony, it was apparently understood that the cross was to be reinstated in all of the flags used in the colony. Sewall, being a devout Puritan, was quite disturbed about this. He could not understand how he could be involved in the restoration of the cross because he "had spoken so much against it in April 1681, and that Summer

and forward, upon occasion of Capt. Walley's putting the Cross in his Colours."

In August, 1686, Sewall had grave doubts as to whether he could conscientiously serve in the militia under a flag in which the cross has been restored; and three days later he answers his own question by resigning as captain of the South Company. His resignation was not accepted.

Massachusetts also fielded a number of cavalry troops: Suffolk Troop (organized prior to 1652), Essex Troop (1652), Norfolk Troop (1656), Three County Troop (1658), and the Middlesex Troop (prior to 1662). We have information on the flag of only the Three County Troop.

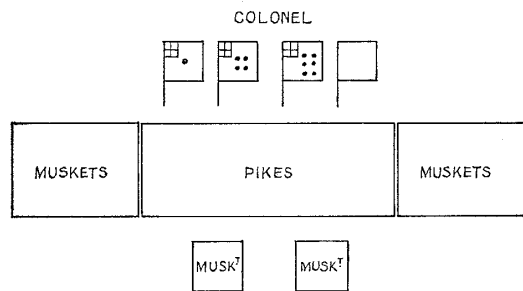
A record in England dated 1659 details the "Work don for New England" and illustrates a flag of red silk bearing an arm holding a sword and lightning bolts coming out of a cloud. The surrounding ribbon is inscribed "Thre County Trom". A copy of the record is illustrated on page one.

There is no information on any flags used by Artillery units in this period. Likely there weren't any because there were no separate Artillery units at the time.

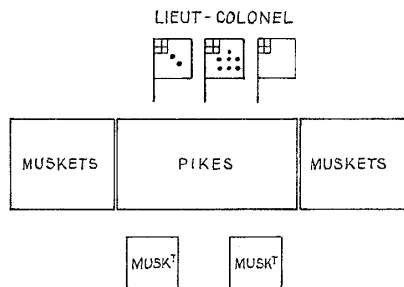
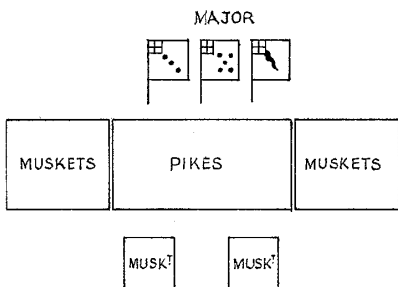
In addition to the militia units, there were a number of chartered "Military Companies" organized in this period. These were considered elite units and were privately financed and then chartered by the colony. The first was the Military Company of the Massachusetts, chartered in 1639, and still in existence today under the name of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company. Note the the use of the name "Artillery" is not a reference to cannon, but is used in the 17th century notion of musket projectiles.

In 1645, three other Military Companies were chartered.\*\* Unfortunately we do not know of any flags used by these units.

Organizational plan of a regiment showing the three battalions and placement of the company flags and officers prior to 1707.



British Infantry Colours by Dino Lemonofides (Almark Publications, London; 1971) pg 5.



\* This and further events are described in *The Diary of Samuel Sewall* edited and abridged by Harvey Wish (G.P. Putnam's Sons, NYC; 1967) pp 38, 45-46.

\*\* <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/Reference/mamil/Mamil.htm>



# MAIN STREET & LINCOLN STREET SCHOOL FLAG PROJECT



EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE – Parent, community, and school partnerships at both Main and Lincoln Street Schools have combined efforts to create flags that celebrate unity and connectedness while also respecting autonomy and individual differences. A flag, representative of each school community, was housed at each school site

in the fall of 2002 after being on public display that summer at the Exeter Town Library.

All members of the school community created their own piece of their flag which was connected to the whole and stitched together by a group of volunteers. This was a thoughtful, introspective project which combined the talents of art teachers, Sue

Hanson and Christine Hodsdon, many parent and community volunteers, teachers, and all students in kindergarten through grade five. Debbie Wheeler-Bean and Diane Platt, along with members of the School Spirit and Enrichment Council, coordinated the many facets of this work, which was captured on digital video by Elayne Flynn, and shared with the public at a school board meeting in April 2002 as well as at the unveiling ceremony. Here are just a few pictures of the project as it was being constructed and displayed.

Main Street School's flag was a series of handprints by students with a black border of multicultural figures. Students in kindergarten and first grade made hand prints while second graders made the figures.

Lincoln Street actually has two flags with identical construction. Students con-







structed squares that represented something in which they had pride and respect on a background of either red, white, or blue. Teachers constructed squares on backgrounds of black. The squares were then assembled with the blue in the upper left corner and the red and white bands with the black squares surrounding the flag.

The assembly was done by many volunteers and took many hours.

The unveiling of the flag ceremony was held on Flag Day, June 14, 2002. Each school had their own unveiling ceremony, attended by many family members, town officials, and dignitaries. The entire audience was awash with red, white, and blue. When the flags were unveiled, the

amazed audiences burst into cheers. Main Street students paraded over to Lincoln Street led by Mr. Ford and were welcomed by Ms. Katsos. Art Teachers Sue Hanson and Christine Hodsdon celebrated all the great work. Veterans came and assisted with unveil-

ing a flag that had flown over the Capitol Building in Washington, DC. Roger Reeser, the LSS head custodian and a veteran himself, led the Pledge of Allegiance. It was an incredible experience and one which we are sure the students and participants will not forget. 🇺🇸



<http://exeter.sau16.k12.nh.us/specialevents/flag/flag.htm>

# RED SOX NATION HOISTS THE PENNANT



The 2004 World Champions of Baseball, the Boston Red Sox, began the 2005 season on April 11 at Fenway Park in Boston by raising the World Series Championship Pennant (and then beating their rivals, the New York Yankees 8-1). A huge version of it was displayed on the “Green Monster”



the infamous left-field wall that looms over the park.

In researching the pennant, I have discovered there is no set design. Rather it is left to the winning team to make up the pennant for that year. The pennant traditionally has the colors of the winning team

and the year of the championship on it. In this example, it also bears the name of the team and the inscription “WORLD CHAMPIONS.” The lettering is sewn to both sides so as to

read correctly. You will note the extra-large version differs somewhat from the pennant that is flown on the pole.

In addition to the pennant, each winning club has the option of having a trophy made to commemorate the event. The Red Sox 2004 Championship



trophy consists of a ring of graduated size flag poles, each bearing a gold triangular pennant. This trophy has travelled around for the fans to see (and in some cases touch) to all of the New England States as well as other places. It has been in California and New York!





President Gurtman shows the NEVA Flag at the 38th Annual Meeting of NAVA in Indianapolis, Indiana in October 2004. The next NAVA Meeting will be held in Nashville, Tennessee in October 2005. See the NAVA web site <<http://www.nava.org/>> for more information.



## A NOTE ABOUT FORT WESTERN

The next NEVA Meeting will be held at Old Fort Western in Augusta, Maine (see notice on page 8).

Old Fort Western, built in 1754 and a National Historic Landmark, is America's oldest surviving wooden fort - a reminder of the great contest between cultures that dominated New England life 250 years ago.

The Fort was built by the Kennebec Proprietors, a Boston-based company seeking to settle the lands along the Kennebec River that had been granted to the Pilgrims more than a century earlier. The company and the Province of Massachusetts both were interested in expanding their influence in the area as part of an effort by Britain and her colonies to take final political control of North America and to sever what they saw as the ties between the Abenaki (Maine's Indians) and the French in Canada.



**The Maine State Museum** would like to announce that our newest exhibition *To the Highest Standard: Maine's Civil War Flags* is now open. The exhibit is located on the Museum's lower level.

This exhibition is the culmination of a decade-long effort to conserve and make accessible Maine's historic flag collection. Thousands of Maine people have participated in the *Save Maine's Colors* campaign, raising \$170,000; Maine government and the federal *Save America's Treasures* program together granted \$400,000 towards the conservation and exhibition of the flags. It is cause for great celebration.

### Flags On Exhibit

To protect them from long-term light damage, the flags shown in the exhibit will be changed every six months. The exhibit runs through mid-June 2007.

Under very controlled lighting conditions, and in its own special case, the Gettysburg flag of the 20th Maine will be on permanent exhibit.

On view mid-December 2004 to mid-June 2005:

- 4th Regiment Maine Infantry
- 10th Regiment Maine Infantry
- 31st Regiment Maine Infantry

Following the meeting on June 4th at Fort Western, NEVA members will car pool over to the Maine State Museum to see the exhibit. There is an entry fee of \$2 per person to get in.



Dear Vexillologists:

It is already 2005 and in a few months another international congress of vexillology will be held, continuing a biennial tradition uninterrupted since 1964. The event has become more international than the initiators of the first congress perhaps ever imagined, although they might have hoped for such a success.

The Organizing Committee for VEXILOBAIRES 2005 is now pleased to invite you to participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Vexillology.

To help us to formalize certain arrangements, please send a note to the Organizing Committee expressing your intention to participate in the congress and join fellow vexillologists from around the world to once again be part of history. For further details, visit our web page [www.funcidec.org.ar](http://www.funcidec.org.ar).

Saludos,

The Organizing Committee -  
VEXILOBAIRES 2005 - ICV XXI

For more information, contact Gus Tracchia: [gustracc@aol.com](mailto:gustracc@aol.com)



See beautiful flag awaiting for you at Buenos Aires with our host next to it, Anibal Gotelli. Picture taken at the Women's bridge, Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires. The flags are the member organizations of FIAV.

## MINUTES OF THE 11/7/04 MEETING FORT INDEPENDENCE

Attending: President Carl Gurtman, Sec./Treas. Dave Martucci, Tom Hale, Robert Lloyd Wheelock, Tom Landry, and Whitney Smith.

Meeting called to order at 1:25 pm.

On motion by Hale, second by Smith, the minutes of the 4/17/04 meeting as presented in the last *Journal* were adopted unanimously.

The Treasurer reports we have \$330.50 in the bank. Treasurer's report adopted unanimously.

Three members of NAVA sent in letters and greetings that were read, Richardson Libby, Al Kirsch, and Lynn Knights. Kirsch recommends listing available public transportation for attending the meetings.

Carl Gurtman initiated a discussion regarding meetings. He discussed getting info into local papers and member outreach. He plans to continue meetings at flag venues whenever possible. He made calls; no more participants but one renewal. Dave will work on getting a questionnaire out to the members. We did send 25 NEJV copies to New England members of NAVA with a member appli-

cation and got one response. Should get meeting info out to college history departments.

A discussion of NAVA ensued. Members are encouraged to join. Carl reviewed the meeting in Indianapolis (see pictures on page 7).

A discussion of who will carry the NEVA credentials to Buenos Aires was held. Lynn Knights volunteered to do so; Whitney Smith also expressed that he is going and available. A vote on this will be held at the next meeting.

On motion by Gurtman, second by Hale, it was voted unanimously to donate \$25 to GWAV to help support NAVA 38.

Round table: Whitney Smith described upcoming flag exhibits and his involvement as well as the next *Flag Bulletin* and the National Geographic book he contributed to.

Robert Lloyd Wheelock showed the new flag of St. Eustatius and dis-

cussed his *Flag Handbook* web site.

Tom Hale welcomed us to the Fort and showed recently acquired flags and his notebooks of material from FOTW. He is planning to go to Hungary.

Dave Martucci showed some of the books and flags he recently acquired.

Carl Gurtman showed some 4"x 6" flags he bought (including the spurious "Isle of Women") and photos of flags on ships.

Tom Landry went to the UN and got postcards of every members flag. At Old Sturbridge Village he saw a 24 star flag. He also showed some recently purchased books.

The next meeting will be on April 17 or when the President can organize it.

Meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Martucci, Secretary

## NEXT MEETING AT FORT WESTERN



The *New England Journal of Vexillology* is published irregularly by the New England Vexillological Association, Dave Martucci, Editor. Annual membership dues in NEVA is \$10 for a single class of membership and this fee includes a subscription to the *Journal*. In addition to the print version, there is an online edition of the *Journal* found at URL <http://www.midcoast.com/~martucci/neva/nejv.html>. The editor can be contacted by writing to:

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**Washington ME 04574-3440**

or by phone: **(207) 845-2857**

or by email to:

**vex@vexman.net.**

The views of individual authors are their own and do not reflect the views of NEVA.

The next meeting of NEVA will be held at **1:00 p.m.** on **SATURDAY, June 4th, 2005** at **Fort Western, 16 Cony Street, Augusta Maine.**

Old Fort Western is located on the East bank of the historic Kennebec River in Maine's capital, Augusta. Augusta is on I-95. Coming from either north or south, get off at the Augusta-Winthrop exit and follow signs towards Augusta. Continue straight down Western Avenue, following the signs to Downtown, River Front, City Center, and Old Fort Western. Drive over the bridge at the foot of Western Ave (on the opposite side of the traffic circle) and then go three-quarters of the way around the Cony Traffic Circle on the east side of the river and down Cony Street, down hill towards the river. The City Hall/Fort Western complex is on your left. Park in the city hall park-

ing lot just behind Old Fort Western. Enter through the main gate off Cony Street. We will meet in the South Parlor.

Dave Martucci will give a public presentation entitled "Symbol and Flag Usage in Early New England" at 1:00 pm (get there early!) following which we will have a short meeting, including the election for Secretary/Treasurer. After that we will car pool over to the Maine State Museum to see the flag exhibit. There is a \$2 per person charge for entry to the museum.

Call Dave at 845-2857 (or email [vex@vexman.net](mailto:vex@vexman.net)) if you need a ride. Continental Trailways offers bus service to Augusta and scheduled airlines also service this city. Call Dave to arrange pick up at the bus terminal/airport (they're at the same place).