

FROM YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE

FUN WITH FLAGS: Legacy of a Medina Native

By: State Representative, STEVE HAMBLEY

HERE ARE SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE OFFICIAL FLAG FOR THE STATE OF OHIO:

- It has an official pledge very few people know about or ever recite
- It is the only non-rectangular state flag in the United States
- It is quite similar to the Cuban national flag which was adopted by that government the same month and year as the Ohio flag
- It was designed by a graduate of the University of Michigan
- It was our state symbol at a world event which is remembered primarily as the site for a national tragedy – the assassination of an Ohio-born President

Given these facts, should the State of Ohio flag be treated with the same respect as the flag of the United States? Just as there is an etiquette for the treatment and retirement of Old Glory, the State of Ohio flag is comparatively new and is relegated to a second place of honor in all official settings. 17 states across the nation possess official state flag pledges. In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Ohio's flag, the 124th General Assembly adopted Amended SB 240 which established a pledge. Accordingly, the pledge to the state flag is simply: "I salute the flag of the state of Ohio and pledge to the buckeye state respect and loyalty." Having attended many public meetings where the American flag is posted along with an Ohio flag, I have never heard this pledge, ever.

There is pending legislation in the 133rd General Assembly for a suggested ceremonial procedure in retiring an Ohio state flag. It is House Bill 32, sponsored by Representative Dick Stein (R- Norwalk). The retirement ceremony, spelled out in HB 32, adds to the pledge a statement reminding

everyone that it was born in the shadow of a national tragedy: "My first witness to our country as your state symbol was to the assassination of President William McKinley on September 14, 1901."

The State of Ohio has a flag unlike any other state. It is the only state flag designed in the shape of a burgee, or swallowtail pattern. Because of that shape, some say it was patterned from various Ohio regimental flags used during the U.S. Civil War, while others contend it also has a Cuban connection. After the United States seized Cuba from Spain during the Spanish-American War, the American Stars and Stripes flag flew from Jan. 1, 1899 until May 20, 1902. Thereupon they adopted a flag that closely resembles the elements of the Ohio flag.

The only Medina County native to be elected Governor of the State of Ohio, George K. Nash saw an opportunity for the Buckeye State to seize the spotlight at the Pan-American Exposition in 1901. It was a World's Fair held in Buffalo, New York from May 1 through November 2, 1901.

As the "Mother of American Presidents", many in Ohio wanted to showcase the state. He set up a commission to construct a big, fancy building at the Pan-American Exposition in honor of Ohio – and, out front, would wave Ohio's newly designed flag.

Both were designed by an engineer and architect from Cleveland, John Eisenmann. Born and raised in Michigan, he graduated in 1871 from the University of Michigan with a degree in Civil Engineering. He further studied architecture at the polytechnics of Munich and Stuttgart. The growing industrial centers along the shores of Lake Erie offered second chances to many immigrants and emigrants in the 1880's, even those from the state up north. He was commissioned as the architect of the Cleveland Arcade and authored Cleveland's first comprehensive building code. Eisenmann wanted to design a first-class building, but also wanted a first-class and unique flag for the State of Ohio to fly in front of it. The assassination of McKinley at the event would add even more importance in



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memorializing Ohio's prominence.

On May 9, 1902 under the sponsorship of HB 213 by WS McKinnon, Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives and member of the Ohio Pan-American Exposition Commission, the State officially adopted it. In memory of our slain President who had waged the Spanish-American War that had freed Cuba, many saw it as a fitting resemblance. In addition, as was noted soon after, "A United States Senator from Ohio introduced the resolution that made the people of Cuba free and independent. Ohio's son's rendered distinguished service on land and sea. An Ohio President conducted the Spanish-American war to a

triumphant conclusion." Ohio Magazine, Vol. 1 (July, 1906).

Although it may not have the gloried past of the US flag, the Ohio flag does have a connection to one of the most decisive wars in our history, a tragic presidential assassination, and designed to represent the hills, valleys, roads and waterways of the Buckeye state. The question remains, does it deserve similar prestige and respect afforded the American flag? Despite being designed by a graduate of the University of Michigan, perhaps the etiquette spelled out in HB 32 for the treatment and retirement of it will confirm that the only grudge we should hold is on the college football field. Perhaps not. **Go Bucks!**



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