St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador

Population Rank: Canada. . . . 20
Province. . . . 1

Proportions: 1:2
Adopted: Unknown (arms granted 1965)

DESIGN: The flag of the City of St. John’s has a white field with its colourfull coat of arms, nearly the full height of the flag, in the centre. The simple shield has a horizontal top and simply-curved sides forming a pointed “U” shape. It has a red field, with a white section on its top third bearing three wavy blue stripes with three undulations at its base. Atop the wavy stripes is an early ship sailing toward the hoist with a jib and square main sail in white and a golden yellow hull. A long pennant blows forward from its single mast, a smaller ensign from a staff in the stern, both in red. In the centre of the lower section is a lamb oriented toward the hoist, depicted in white with black details, a golden yellow halo, and holding with its right foreleg a staff (ending in a cross finial) from which streams a swallow-tailed white flag bearing a red cross. On either side of the lamb is an inverted scallop shell in white outlined in black. Above the shield is a knight’s helmet in grey, white, and black with an elaborate crest: a golden yellow crown in the form of a crenulated stone wall with five towers, surrounding a rocky hill. On it stands a lion in golden yellow, with right foreleg raised between two red and white Tudor roses with green leaves and stems. Its tongue and claws are red. The mantling is red with black and white details. On either side of the shield, standing on a slightly
arched wooden platform of brown and golden yellow, are two sailors—at the left, in 15th-century garb (a brown hat over a green, orange, and purple tunic and cowl) holding a scroll inscribed 14 97, at the right in late-16th-century garb (a green hat and a grey, collared jacket) holding a scroll inscribed 15 83. Both have orange leggings and brown footwear. The scrolls are white, the dates black, in old script. Below the shield curves a white ribbon inscribed AVANCEZ in blue serifed letters.

**SYMBOLISM:** According to English legend, the explorer John Cabot discovered St. John’s harbour on 24 June 1497, the feast day of St. John the Baptist for the Catholic Church, although scholars consider it unlikely that Cabot ever visited St. John’s. Basques, on the other hand, believe that the harbour was named for the town of San Juan in Basque Country. San Juan is on the Bay of Pasaia, of which early Basque fishermen in Newfoundland were reminded by the topography of St. John’s harbour. In either case, the “Lamb of God”, traditional in Christian iconography, refers to St. John, who gave Jesus this title (John 1:29, 36), as do the scallop shells (used in Catholic baptism). The sailing ship refers to the province’s early discoverers and explorers, with one sailor representing the discovery of Newfoundland by Cabot in 1497, and the other Sir Humphrey Gilbert’s proclamation in 1583 that Newfoundland belonged to England. In the crest, the lion and roses are symbols of England as well. The mural crown signifies St. John’s status as a municipality. The city’s motto is Avancez (“Advance” in French).

**HOW SELECTED:** Unknown.

**DESIGNER:** Unknown. The arms were created by the College of Arms in London, England, and granted 1 March 1965.

**FORMER FLAGS:** The city apparently had flags before it was granted a coat of arms in 1965. For example, the *Daily News* of 5 August 1907 noted *The City Flag was hoisted on the New Pole in Bannerman Park, for the first time yesterday.*

**OTHER FLAGS:** As Britain’s easternmost port in North America, St. John’s had a long and interesting history of signal flags. Upon sighting a vessel approaching, a signaller would hoist at Signal Hill a flag symbolizing its nationality and corporate owner. For more information, consult Mark Le Messurier, “The Signal and Commercial Flags of St. John’s, Newfoundland c. 1500–c. 1900” in *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology, Volume 7* (2000), pp. 19–36.

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