Introduction

As the Honourable Ian A. Mackenzie remarked during the contentious 1945 parliamentary debates about Canada's flag, "In the life of every nation symbols are important, and perhaps the most important of these is the national flag." So, too, Canada's strong and vibrant tradition of civic flag use often provides meaningful symbolism to engage the allegiance of municipal citizenry. Their designs also often make clear connections to the nation, province, or territory, as well as to the shared history, geography, and values of the cities they represent.

Unlike cities in the United States, a large number of Canadian municipalities have coats of arms, most granted by heraldic authorities in Canada, England, or Scotland—except in Québec, where there is a prevalent tradition of "assumed" arms. Those arms find their way onto flags in three primary ways: 1) placing the entire coat of arms onto the flag, or using the shield from the arms as a device, 2) spreading the main elements of the shield across the entire field of the flag (called here a "banner of arms"), or 3) using elements of the arms in other ways in the flag's design. This heraldic tradition distinguishes Canadian municipal flags from those in the United States, where city seals are often used. Corporate-style logos, however, represent a growing trend on Canadian municipal flags, and seals do appear on some.

In addition, Canada's compelling national flag, adopted in 1965, introduced a new format—the "Canadian pale design", a 1:2 flag with a square panel (the "pale" itself) in its centre (usually white) and coloured bars at the sides. This

forms the pattern for many Canadian municipal flags, which place a device in the centre and often alter the colours of the bars. Further, most of those flags that do not follow the Canadian pale still have proportions of 1:2, which Canada inherited from British usage.

While municipalities' coats of arms, badges, crests, and seals may go back over a century, the adoption of civic flags appears to be a much more recent phenomenon. The oldest in this book, perhaps the oldest in Canada, is the flag of Montréal (1939), older than both Québec's Fleurdelisé (1948) and Canada's Maple Leaf (1965). Of those whose adoption dates we know, over four-fifths are after 1980. Sometimes external events spur flag design—such as Expo '86 in Vancouver, B.C. Sometimes a community anniversary or celebration will provide the spark. In any case, only a handful of the cities we identified for our list did not have flags. Their actual use, however, can vary from widespread in the community to nearly non-existent.

The story of Canadian municipalities differs over time and across the continent, with the flags of some of the older, eastern cities reflecting more religious symbolism and the newer, western cities using more secular images. In Québec in particular, many municipal flags incorporate elements from the former seigniorial families' coats of arms, many created by the Collège canadien des armoiries, a private Montréal-based heraldic design firm active in the late 1950s which designed coats of arms for French-dominant municipalities in Québec, Ontario, and New Brunswick.

As Canada's population became increasingly urban throughout the 20th century, many provincial governments chose to give their urban centres stronger administrative coherence to stimulate economic growth. In the late 1990s and early 2000s (and to a lesser extent in the 1970s) a wave of mergers and amalgamations swept the country's municipal institutions, especially in the larger metropolitan areas. A large number of new and successor municipal entities emerged, needing new or sometimes adapted symbols to represent and unify them. Many flags documented here date from that era.

Two areas of professionalisation characterize recent flag design, with varied success. First, the Canadian Heraldic Authority (CHA), able inheritor of the mantle of arms-granting in Canada since 1988, has taken an increasingly active role in developing civic symbolism. Second, the trend toward "branding" cities has led to the involvement of graphic design firms and "logo" flags.

Canada's current municipal system began in the mid-19th century. Some cities incorporated and adopted symbols even before the original four provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Québec united under the Canadian federation in 1867. Over time, English-dominant municipalities sometimes assumed arms of their own creation or were granted arms by authorities in London or Edinburgh. In 1988, the CHA granted its first coat of arms and flag to the city of Québec, Canada's oldest continuously-inhabited municipality. The CHA was mindful of the heritage of the Collège canadien des armoiries and often based its designs on those of its pioneering, though unofficial, predecessor.

In all, Canada's municipalities—large and small—have wholeheartedly embraced flag adoption and display, in an often successful effort to represent, differentiate, and inspire. From the hamlet of fewer than 500 inhabitants to the megacity of over 5 million, the municipal entities of Canada fly their colours proudly. This "civic flag parade" as Canadian Flag Association president Kevin Harrington so aptly calls it, shows that flags are more than static bits of cloth—they form a dynamic part of human public ritual.

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