

The Strange Case of the City of Toronto Flag

When most people think of the City of Toronto flag they imagine the current version, a stylized outline of Toronto's "new" City Hall on a blue background with a Red maple leaf in the centre. Starting in 1958 the Toronto Optimists carried a much different City of Toronto Flag. This story talks about the 1958 version of the flag.

In 1958 the Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps was presented with the City of Toronto flag by Toronto's mayor, Nathan Phillips. Glenn Copp, who once played cymbals with the Toronto Optimists, decided to search for the flag. Glenn never located the flag but, in the process of searching for the flag, he learned a lot of background information.

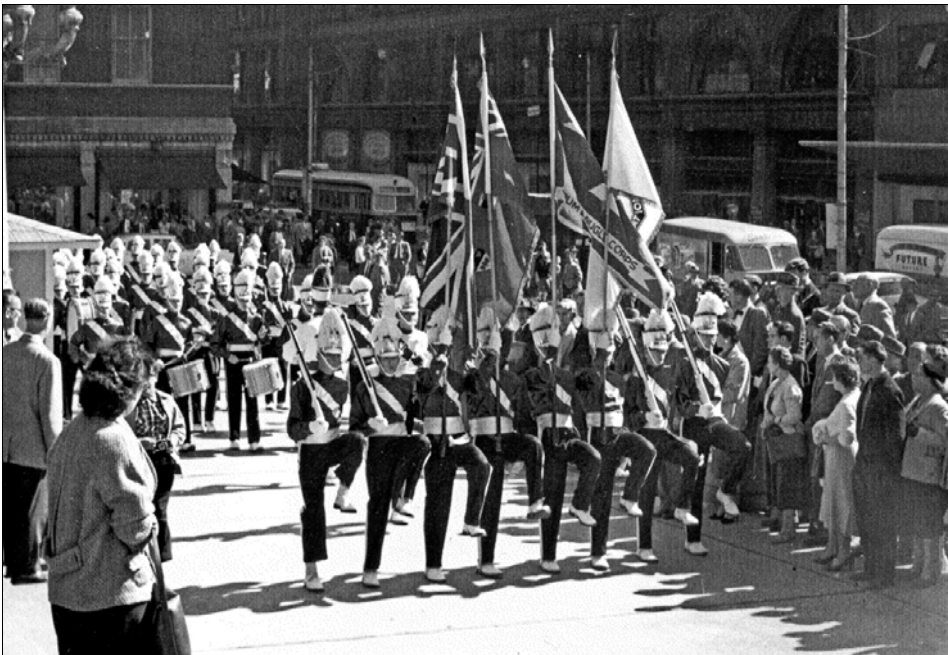


What follows is a delightful tale from 1958 and the early days of the Toronto Optimists. This story includes an eye witness account by Phil Hennings, the Drum Major of the Toronto Optimists, to whom the flag was presented.

After Phil's article you find the best photo of the flag that we have, so far, been able to uncover as well as a graphic showing the complete crest. There is also some additional information which Glenn discovered in his search for the flag.

In the Fall of 1958, after winning the Canadian National Trumpet Band Championships, the Toronto Optimists were invited to march up Bay Street to the Old City Hall. There they met the Mayor of Toronto, Nathan Phillips, for whom the new City Hall square is named.

Marching up Bay Street in a parade is an honour that was usually limited to Stanley Cup Hockey Team winners and Football Champions. As a result, it was a great privilege to be honoured in this way.



The Toronto Optimists marching up to Toronto's City Hall.

The Toronto Optimists Executive and the Mayor gave congratulatory speeches after which the mayor presented the corps with The Toronto Flag. To our knowledge the City of Toronto Flag was never given to any other corps.

Phil Hennings Remembers

The City of Toronto flag was carried by the colour guard of the Toronto Optimists to represent Toronto. The flag was the same on both sides. It was black with a gold fringe and in the centre was an embroidered version of the Toronto's Coat of Arms.



As Drum Major, I greeted the Mayor and he presented the Toronto flag to me in a canvas bag. Reporters were asking the Mayor and myself to show them the flag but (very quietly) Mayor Phillips leaned over to me and whispered in my ear, "Don't open the bag, son." Of course, I asked, "Why?" And the mayor said, "There is no flag in the bag! It's still being made!!"

The reporters were very puzzled because all of them wanted to take pictures of the presentation of the flag. I wonder whether they ever learned the reason.

Even though we paraded up Bay Street many times after that 1958 appearance, this is one of my proud moments with the Corps.



This photo shows Phil Hennings, Toronto Optimists' Drum Major, with Nathan Phillips, the Mayor of Toronto. The corps can be seen in the background. The Mayor is holding a brown bag that "contains" the flag.

More on the History of the Corp's City of Toronto Flag (by Glenn Copp)

We had been looking at the possibility of replacing or reproducing some of the Corp's original flags. While doing this we came to meet and speak with Mr Ken Spink of what used to be Dominion Regalia. They manufactured most of the original flags.

Ken told us that the idea of the Corp's being presented with and carrying this flag was entirely the product of Al Baggs, our founding director's rather fertile mind. It seems that when Baggs first approached the Mayor and the City, they were agreeable; however, the City had a problem since it did not have an official flag. Mr. Baggs, the City and Dominion Regalia then undertook the task of designing the first and original flag.

When the Corps and Phil Hennings attended the official presentation, Phil was told by the Mayor not to open the canvas sleeve because the flag had not even yet been made. In fact, the flag had probably not even been designed at that time. The Press were disappointed because they had brought their photographers. As you can see, Toronto Optimists corps director, Mr Baggs, had been instrumental in the creation of the official flag for the City.

Only three such flags were originally made: one for us, one for the City and one which was retained by Dominion. When the City moved into the new City Hall, the City's one and only flag disappeared. Dominion then made a fourth. This was the last to be made. The one that Dominion had has also disappeared in the intervening years. The City presumably still has theirs. So where is our flag?

Below are two close-ups of the city of Toronto Flag.



The version Toronto's old Coat of Arms that was embroidered on the flag. (from City of Toronto Archives)



A second version Toronto's old Coat of Arms



Below are two photos showing the Toronto Optimists Colour Guard carrying the City of Toronto Flag.



The Toronto Optimists Colour Guard carrying the old City of Toronto Flag (centre, front)



The Toronto Optimists Colour Guard carrying the old City of Toronto Flag (left, front)

