100th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
ILLINOIS STATE FLAG

The 100th anniversary of Illinois' state flag is July 6, 2015.

Illinois did not adopt an official design until nearly 100 years after the state was admitted to the union. Like many other states, the Illinois flag was the result of a contest sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

During a 1911 visit to Washington, D.C., Ella Park Lawrence, then State Regent of DAR, noted that no emblem or flag of Illinois was on display in the Continental Memorial Hall. Eager to create a flag, Mrs. Lawrence wrote hundreds of letters to members of the General Assembly encouraging them to support a bill creating a state flag; at the same time she offered a $25 prize to the Illinois DAR chapter submitting the best design for the flag. This was a considerable sum for 1911, equivalent to approximately $600 today.

The winner, Lucy Derwent of the Rockford DAR chapter, had placed the Great Seal on a plain white background. State Sen. Raymond Meeker introduced legislation to adopt the design. The Flag Act of 1915 passed and automatically became law on July 6 when then-Gov. Edward Dunne failed to sign the bill.

Although the law stated that the flag should contain a reproduction of the official State Seal, few if any companies manufactured it correctly. Oftentimes the sun, water and prairie were omitted from the design. The adding of arrows, grasped in one claw, and an olive branch signifying a time of war and peace illustrated that of the U.S. Seal. Strangely, the background color often changed to cater to a particular event such as dinners, weddings or funerals.

More than 50 years would pass before any suggestions to change the flag were proposed. In 1968, Chief Petty Officer Bruce McDaniel of Waverly, serving in Vietnam at the time, wrote to state Rep. Jack Walker expressing his concerns that unlike other state flags in his mess hall, the Illinois state flag could not be identified because it did not carry the state's name. Responding to CPO McDaniel's request, Rep. Walker sponsored a bill to amend the Flag Act of 1915.

Walker's legislation adding "ILLINOIS" beneath the Great Seal was approved and signed into law on Sept. 16, 1969. However, this law, like the Flag Act of 1915, did not address specific flag design specifications. To ensure that the flag's elements, proportions and colors would be used consistently, then-Gov. Richard B. Ogilvie appointed a flag committee. The committee made the following recommendations:

- The flag of the state of Illinois shall be made up of the emblem portion of the seal of the state rendered in color on a white field with the word "Illinois" in blue below the emblem.
- The emblem portion and the word "Illinois" shall constitute approximately 80 percent of the vertical length of the flag.
- The word "Illinois" shall be in height approximately one-twelfth the diameter of the emblem.
- The word "Illinois" shall be horizontal, in a straight line and in serif lettering comparable to Craw Clarendon Modern typeface.
- The flag shall be composed of eight colors, identified in the Standard Color Card of America as: Old Glory Red, No. 70180; Old Glory Blue, No. 70075; Midnight Black, No. 70090; Nickel Grey, No. 70152; Hunter Green No. 70069; Spanish Yellow, No. 70068; Orange, No. 70069; and Brown, No. 70119.

These recommendations, along with a colored painting of the flag, were submitted to then-Gov. Ogilvie by the committee. On July 1, 1970, a new flag design created by Florence Hutchison of Greenville, "a white field carrying the word 'ILLINOIS' and the emblem portion of the state seal," was approved and began flying atop the State Capitol in Springfield.

In 1897, the Illinois General Assembly mandated that the U.S. Flag be flown daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., but made no mention of a state flag because Illinois did not have one at the time. Surprisingly, it was not until 1965 that the state flag was regularly flown over the State Capitol Building on a daily basis. While there is no statute or executive order supporting this practice, it's assumed that the state flag is flown by protocol or custom.