

HERITAGE

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THE
HISTORIC
FLAGS
OF
TEXAS



HERITAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

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<p>Who Designed the Lone Star Flag? 16 BY CHARLES A. SPAIN JR. The Lone Star flag of Texas is recognized around the world as unique among state banners, but there is still great speculation, controversy, and scholarly debate about just who designed this unique icon.</p> <p>A Grassroots Effort To Preserve the Past 22 BY CYNTHIA HARRIMAN Faced with the loss of their collection of Texas artifacts, which lay in storage, the United Daughters of the Confederacy Texas Division rallied to save its historic flags and find a new home for the banners and other priceless relics.</p> <p>A Flag's Story 26 BY FONDA GHIARDI THOMSEN Flags are more than fabric. They tell the story of sacrifice and the struggles of the men who carried them. Fonda Thomsen, considered to be one of this country's premiere textile conservators, says that these banners deserve to be treated with respect and great care in order that the stories within their folds are not lost forever.</p>	<p>Saving the Colors: Flag Preservation in Texas 7 BY ROBERT MABERRY JR., PH.D. Relegated for years to boxes, many of the historic flags of Texas are now being conserved and readied for public display at an exhibit scheduled for Houston in 2001.</p> <div data-bbox="574 772 1010 1354" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>ON THE COVER Historic flags of Texas. Photos by Dan Hatzenbuehler; Sagamore Hill Historical Site; Texas State Library and Archives; and Texas Military Forces Museum, Camp Mabry. Design by Blake Trabulsi.</p>	<p>President's Message 4</p> <p>Sponsors and Contributors 5</p> <p>The Historic Flags of Texas Project: An Introduction 6</p> <p>Texas Archives: The Tilted Lone Star By Robert Maberry Jr., Ph.D. 30</p> <p>Book Reviews 33 <i>Great Birds of Texas</i> <i>John P. O'Neill</i></p> <p>Grant Update 34</p> <p>Foundation Membership Honor Roll 35</p> <p>Texas Historical Museums Listings 36</p> <p>Texas State Parks and Historical Sites 37</p> <p>Classified Ads 37</p> <p>Sensing Place 39</p>

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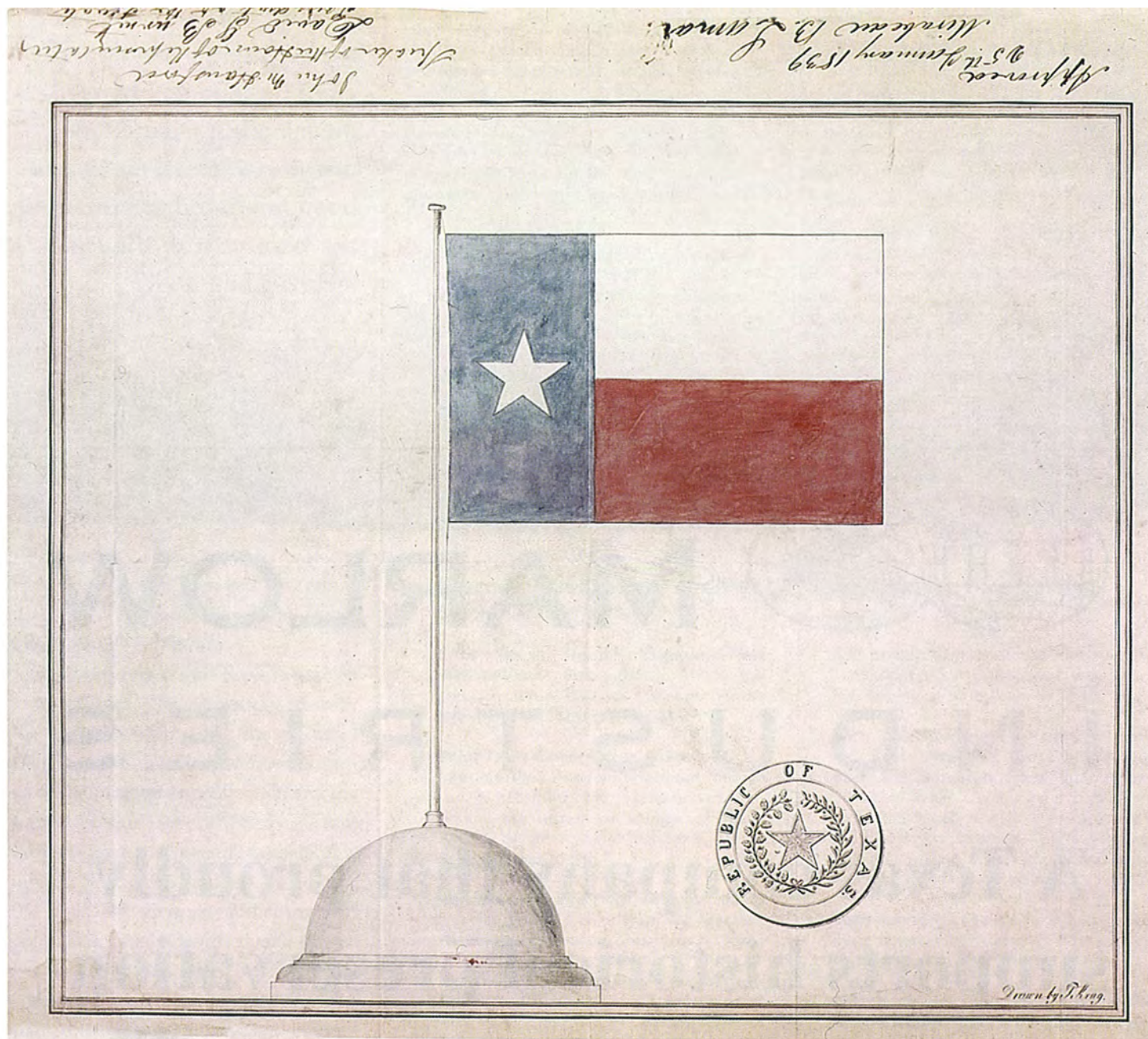
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Who Designed the Lone Star Flag?



Even though the Texas state flag is recognized around the world, there is still great controversy and scholarly debate surrounding just who designed this famous icon.

BY CHARLES A. SPAIN JR. • IMAGE ABOVE COURTESY OF THE TEXAS STATE LIBRARY & ARCHIVES COMMISSION

The Lone Star Flag, adopted by the Republic of Texas in 1839, is the state's most revered symbol. Perhaps unique among United States state flags, it is recognized around the world. It is natural, then, to wonder who designed this great flag.

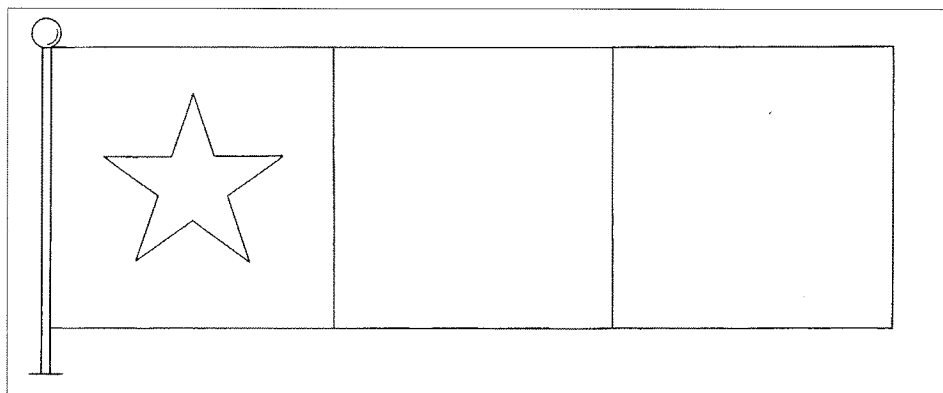
For the flag's 150th anniversary in 1989, the Legislature, by concurrent resolution of both the Senate and House of Representatives, said, "This beautiful symbol of our state was designed by Dr. Charles B. Stewart, the second signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence; the design was first approved by a committee of prominent Texans including Lorenzo de Zavala, William B. Scates, Thomas Barnett, Sterling C. Robertson, Thomas J. Gazley, and Richard Ellis; and . . . the Lone Star Flag was officially adopted by the Third Congress of the Republic of Texas in Houston on January 25, 1839." However, in 1992 the Legislature changed its mind and declared in another concurrent resolution that because "subsequent historical research has revealed that the actual designer of the Lone Star Flag is unknown," they would instead "recognize Senator William H. Wharton and Senator Oliver Jones for their efforts in adopting this abiding symbol of our state's unity." Finally, in 1997, the House of Representatives passed a simple resolution recognizing Dr. Stewart as the flag's designer and declaring Montgomery County as "the birthplace of the Lone Star Flag."

While there are certainly many unanswered questions about the flag's origins, there is a great deal of information that is known.

The Dodson Flag

The first—and one of the best researched—histories of Texas flags was written by Adele Looscan and published in the 1898 book "A Comprehensive History of Texas 1685 to 1897." In the section *The History and Evolution of the Texas Flag*, Looscan describes a flag made by Sarah Dodson at Harrisburg in September 1835.

Texas Flag and Seal Design by Peter Krag. Original color design sketch by Peter Krag of flag and seal for the Republic of Texas, approved January 25, 1839; signed by Lamar, Hansford, and Burnet. From the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

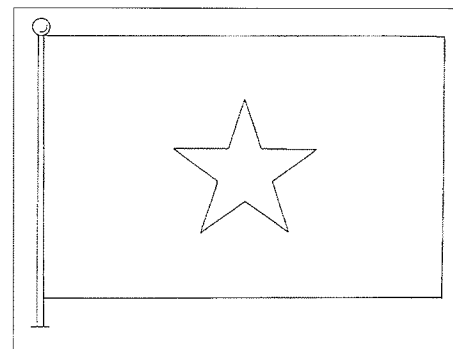


The flag consisted of three horizontal "squares" of the colors blue, white, and red, with a white lone star centered in the blue square (see top image). The flag's shape was similar to the Mexican green-white-red tricolor, and the white star allegedly symbolized that Texas was the only Mexican state in which the star of liberty was rising. Looscan believed that the stripes were truly square, although this certainly made for an oddly shaped flag. In any event, the Dodson flag and the Lone Star Flag are obviously very similar, with only the rearrangement of the white and red squares or stripes into a white stripe over a red stripe.

The March 1836 Flag from the General Convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos

The first discussion of a national flag for Texas occurred at the March 1836 general convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos. The convention's journals, which are admittedly incomplete, show that a flag committee was appointed on March 3, 1836, to "devise & report to this Convention a suitable flag for the Republic of Texas". The committee members were Lorenzo de Zavala, William B. Scates, Thomas Barnett, Sterling C. Robertson, Thomas J. Gazley, and Richard Ellis. But here is where the story starts to get complicated. The March 12, 1836, convention journal states, "On motion of Mr. Scates, the Rainbow and star of five points above the western horizon; and the star of six points sinking below, was added to the flag of Mr. Zavala accepted on Friday last". But what was Zavala's design? The answer is simply not known. The journals for Friday, March 4 and 11 are silent, and the convention hastily adjourned on March 17 after learning of the approaching Mexican army.

So there is an unknown flag design, to which was added a rainbow and two stars. Making matters worse, Charles Taylor in-



Top image: The Dodson Flag. Blue, white, and red squares; white star on blue square. Made by Sarah (Bradley) Dodson in September 1835 for use by her husband Archelaus Bynum Dodson's company of soldiers. Bottom: 1836 National Standard/"David G. Burnet's Flag". Gold star on azure field; national flag December 10, 1836, to January 25, 1839. © 1975 Whitney Smith. Used by permission.

roduced another resolution on March 12, 1836: "Resolved that the word 'Texas' be placed, one letter between each point of the star on the national flag." The journals do not say whether Taylor's resolution passed, and it is not even clear that the convention ever adopted a final flag design. Although it is known that the convention discussed the idea of a national flag, it is possible that the arrival of news of the March 6 fall of the Alamo foreclosed further debate on the flag issue.

The National Standard of Texas

The first official national flag was the "National Standard of Texas" or "David G. Burnet's flag." President ad interim Burnet proposed this design in an October 11, 1836, letter to Congress, and Senator William H. Wharton sponsored the bill to adopt it. The flag consisted of an azure (blue) ground with a large gold star in the center (see bottom image above); it served

PROFILE: JOHN NAU

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Since his appointment as chairman of the Texas Historical Commission in January 1995, John L. Nau III, of Houston, has represented the state agency dedicated to the preservation, restoration, and revitalization of our Texas heritage. He has taken special interest, however, in an effort that he feels especially proud of: the Historic Flags of Texas project.

According to Nau, "The idea for this undertaking was born out of boxes discovered lying within the files of the Texas State Library and Archives containing 23 historic flags. After careful examination and consideration, the Commission quickly realized that these flags, clearly telling the chronicles of Texas, should be displayed and made available for all Texans to see."

The nine flags recently unveiled in June 1999, were part of Phase I of the Preservation and Restoration Project (see sidebar of conserved flags on page 11). In the next phase of the project, the Commission will oversee the restoration of three more flags with significant value to Texas history. These flags include the Fifth Texas Hood's Brigade, a hybrid of the Texas Lone Star and Confederate flag present at Second Manassas, serving the regiment during the Maryland invasion and carried during the carnage of the Antietam holocaust; the Toluca Battalion Battle Flag, one of the hardest fighting commands in Santa Anna's army present during the final assault on the Alamo and later captured at San Jacinto; and the handmade Fifth Texas Infantry, present at the legendary "General Lee to the rear" episode at the Battle of the Wilderness in May 1864. Handsewn by Maude J. Young of Houston and presented to the regiment in the winter of 1862-63 with defeat on the horizon, officers of the Fifth Texas returned the battle flag to Young for safekeeping.

As an avid historian, Nau is pleased to be a part of the effort being made to preserve essential reminders of the Texas past for the generations that are yet to come. "The challenge to raise

more than \$300,000 necessary to preserve and restore these nine flags in Phase I was a great challenge," he said. "Several companies, foundations, and individuals stepped up to the plate and offered financial assistance by adopting individual flags as a means of supporting this worthy endeavor. While the generosity of these patriotic groups and individuals has afforded us the opportunity to step back in time and relive milestones that reflect the history of our great state, additional funds are still needed" (see sidebar of unconserved flags on page 14).

Nau has not seen fit, though, to let others shoulder the great financial challenges of this flag conservation project. As president and chief executive officer of Silver Eagle Distributors, L.P., he, his wife Bobbie, and Silver Eagle Distributors have become the sponsors of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Texas Cavalry Consolidated, Granbury's Texas Brigade flag. During the Atlanta Campaign Granbury's Brigade, including the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Texas, participated in some of the hardest fighting of the war. After a brief hand-to-hand struggle at the Battle of Atlanta on July 24, 1864, the battle flag was taken by a soldier of the Fifteenth Michigan Infantry and turned over to Union General William T. Clark. After the war, veterans of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Texas made considerable efforts to locate the flag. After a long search, the flag was found and returned to Texas in 1914.

"This flag, not unlike the others, represents a significant part in the history of Texas as we know it today," said Nau. "It is the finest Hardee battle flag in existence, and it was important that we keep it preserved for future generations."

JOHN NAU HAS NOT SEEN FIT, THOUGH, TO LET OTHERS SHOULDER THE GREAT FINANCIAL CHALLENGES OF THIS (HISTORIC FLAGS OF TEXAS) PROJECT.

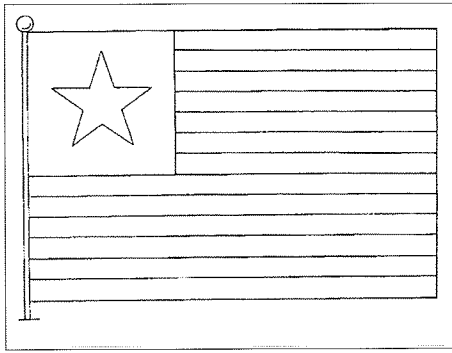
as the national flag from December 10, 1836, to the adoption of the Lone Star Flag on January 25, 1839. The Texas naval ensign was also adopted as a part of the same bill. The ensign was the same design as the United States flag, except it had only one star in the blue union (see image on page 20).

The Lone Star Flag

The Lone Star Flag was adopted by the Texas Congress in 1839, replacing both the David G. Burnett flag and the naval ensign: "[T]he national flag of Texas shall consist of a blue perpendicular stripe of the width of one third of the whole length of the flag, with a white star of five points in the centre thereof, and two horizontal stripes of equal breadth, the upper stripe white, the lower red, of the length of two thirds of the whole length of the flag" (see image on page 16). Senator Wharton introduced a bill on December 28, 1838, containing the flag's design, and the bill was referred to a committee consisting of Senator Oliver Jones and two unnamed senators. This committee reported a substitute bill containing the same flag design introduced by Wharton. Congress passed the substitute bill on January 21, 1839, and President Mirabeau B. Lamar approved it on January 25, 1839. The bill also modified the Texas seal into its present form, a lone star encircled by olive and live oak branches. Official art for the Lone Star Flag and seal was drawn by Peter Krag, and this art was approved and signed (upside down) on January 25, 1839, by President Lamar; John M. Hansford, speaker of the House of Representatives; and David G. Burnett, president of the Senate. It is noteworthy that Krag's flag and seal art were approved and signed with the same legislative formality as the text of the bill.

The Stewart Claim

So how does this relate to the claim that Charles B. Stewart designed the Lone Star Flag? Stewart came to Texas in 1830 and was actively involved in Texas politics. Among other things, he was a delegate to the 1836 convention, signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, practiced medicine in the town of Montgomery, and served three terms as a member of the House of Representatives after statehood. Stewart clearly was an influential man with friends in high office, but none of this links him to the Lone Star Flag.



1836 National Flag for the Naval Service. White star on blue union, alternating red and white stripes. April 9, 1836, to December 10, 1836 (adopted by president); December 10, 1836, to January 25, 1839 (adopted by Congress). © 1975 Whitney Smith. Used by permission.

In her 1898 article, Looscan is clearly skeptical that the 1836 convention adopted a flag, and she does not mention Stewart at all in connection with the Lone Star Flag. The Stewart claim appears to have originated in the 1920s, when one of Stewart's sons, Edmund B. Stewart, began publically displaying what he claimed was his father's original drawing of the 1839 Lone Star Flag and the seal.

In a letter of July 7, 1922, Stewart's son claims his father and Lorenzo de Zavala were appointed by President Lamar to a committee of three to design the Texas flag. Zavala, however, died in November 1836, two years before Lamar became president. Furthermore, the committee of three is doubtless the 1838-1839 Senate committee of which Senator Oliver Jones was the chair. Lamar, as president, would have had no role in appointing a Senate committee, and it would have been highly unusual for Stewart to serve on the committee since he was not a senator or even a congressman.

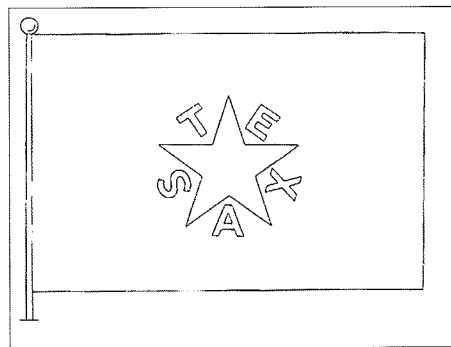
The chief source of the Stewart claim is in Mamie Wynne Cox's 1936 book, "The Romantic Flags of Texas." Cox, relying on information from Stewart's granddaughter, Elizabeth Stewart Fling, identifies the three members of the 1838-1839 Senate committee as Senator William H. Wharton, Senator Oliver Jones, and Stewart. Cox states that Stewart personally designed the flag and drew the original art for both the flag and seal on linen, which was signed by President Lamar on January 25, 1839, the day Lamar approved the flag bill.

Although Stewart's papers were available, Cox does not cite to any of Stewart's

letters or journals to support the claim that he designed the flag. The Stewart art for the 1839 flag and seal is reproduced as the frontispiece to Cox's book. This art shows the flag and seal in almost identical form to the Krag art. The approval of President Lamar is also almost identical to the Krag art, including the fact that Lamar's writing is upside down. One significant difference is that the signatures of Representative Hansford and Senator Burnett are absent from the Stewart art. In their place is the legend, "Original Flag—Republic of Texas."

In addition to promoting the Stewart claim, Cox also began the legend that the 1836 convention actually adopted a specific flag design. Cox illustrates this "Zavala flag" as a blue field with a five-pointed white star containing the letters "T-E-X-A-S" between each star point (see image below). This "Zavala flag" runs contrary to the convention journals, but instead appears to come from elements of a flag carried by Captain George H. Burroughs' company of cavalry that arrived from Ohio in September 1836.

The Stewart claim next appears in Charles E. Gilbert Jr.'s 1964 book, "A Concise History of Early Texas 1519 to 1861." Gilbert relies largely on Cox for his research but adds the claim that Stewart's design for the Lone Star Flag was approved by a committee consisting of Lorenzo de Zavala, William B. Scates, Thomas Barnett, Sterling C. Robertson, Thomas J. Gazley, and Richard Ellis. This committee, of course, was the 1836 flag committee present at Washington-on-the-Brazos. Although Stewart was a member of the 1836 convention, Gilbert does not suggest that Stewart was an active participant in the flag debates. Gilbert's book was the



"Zavala Flag." White star and white letters on blue field; design first appeared in 1930s; neither design or claim that it was adopted as first national flag is supported by historical record. © Whitney Smith. Used by permission.

source of the historically inaccurate information contained in the Legislature's 1989 concurrent resolution. This book was republished in 1989 under the title "Flags of Texas," and it remains in print.

Due to the influence of Cox's and Gilbert's books, several other works have mentioned the Stewart claim. A recent reference to the claim is made in Stewart's bibliographic entry in the 1996 "New Handbook of Texas," written by Virginia Stewart Lindley Ford. Stewart's original entry in the 1952 "Handbook of Texas" did not refer to his designing the Lone Star Flag.

Conclusion

Did Charles Stewart design the Lone Star Flag? Though it cannot be said that he did not, the evidence presented so far to support this claim is certainly not persuasive. It is hard to believe that the Texas Senate would appoint a nonmember to serve on a Senate committee. It is also hard to believe that the art pictured in Cox's book was actually signed by President Lamar on January 25, 1839. First, why was Peter Krag paid to draw art for the 1839 flag and seal if Stewart actually designed and drew the flag? Second, why would Lamar approve and sign two similar documents on the same day (and, curiously, both upside down)? Third, why would Lamar sign a document bearing the legend, "Original Flag—Republic of Texas," when that was obviously incorrect? The 1839 flag bill was expressly intended to amend the 1836 flag bill by replacing the original national flags of Texas—the Burnet flag and naval ensign—with the Lone Star Flag.

What is lacking in support of the Stewart claim is documentary evidence from Stewart himself or other sources. His personal papers are stored in the Montgomery County Heritage Museum in Conroe, but to date no one has found any reference in those papers to the Lone Star Flag. The same is also true for other key figures in the story of the flag: Zavala, Burnet, Wharton, and Jones. Until the historical research is done through the papers of these men and others, no one can provide a definitive answer. It is possible that the identity of the flag designer may remain a mystery -- assuming it was just one person. But the Legislature had the right idea in 1992 by recognizing Senator Wharton and Senator Jones, two men we know were influential in getting the flag adopted.

We can still safely speculate about the

PROFILE: SHELL OIL COMPANY FOUNDATION PIVOTAL PLAYERS

Texans have a lot for which to thank Shell Oil Company Foundation. For years, this Houston-based corporate foundation has been a quiet but important player in historic preservation and education projects. Time after time, the Foundation has given its support to significant projects, often at early stages. In doing so, they have provided necessary funds as well as the spark of endorsement often needed to make a project a reality.

Shell Oil Company Foundation once again played a pivotal role, signing on as one of the earliest supporters of the Historic Flags of Texas Project. According to former U.S. Representative Mike Andrews, a founding father of the project, Shell Oil Company Foundation was among the first organizations approached.

"When the idea was born to save these historic flags, the need was clear, but the resources were initially nonexistent. Shell Foundation was one of the first we approached, and it has since become one of the biggest contributors," Andrews said.

Shell Oil Company Foundation's substantial financial investment not only ignited major funder interest in the project. It also helped finance the project's early stages—the initial research and documentation that launched the preservation effort. In addition, Shell Oil Company Foundation became an official flag adopter by providing the funds necessary to conserve an important Texas banner that will appear in the Historic Flags of Texas exhibit in Houston: the flag of the Sixth Texas Infantry and Fifteenth Texas Cavalry Consolidated—the famous Granbury's Brigade.

According to Frances Rabbe, grants officer for the Foundation's charitable activities, "Because of Shell's strong connection to Texas, we have always felt that it is a great honor to be a part of any project that preserved the state's history. We are delighted to have had the opportunity not only to fund the conservation of two very historic banners, but also to have been a part of the research that has unearthed so much new information for this state's historical records." —*Oliver Franklin/Gene Krane*

Charles A. Spain Jr. is a Houston attorney whose hobby is vexillology, the study of flags. He is secretary-general of the International Federation of Vexillological Associations and past president of the North American Vexillological Association.

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inspiration for the Lone Star Flag. It was probably based on Dodson's flag, which itself was based on the Mexican flag, a banner in turn based on the French revolutionary tricolor of blue, white, and red. The Dodson flag was created at a time when many people in Texas still wanted Texas to remain part of Mexico, but only as part of a federal state loyal to the 1824 Mexican constitution. Certainly by the fall of the Alamo on March 6, 1836, the possibility of Texas remaining part of Mexico was gone. The Lone Star Flag was nevertheless able to use the basic Dodson elements by rearranging them into a variant of the U.S. flag in its most basic form: one red stripe, one white stripe, and one white star on a blue field. The Lone Star Flag is not only beautiful in its simplicity but elegant in the way that it bridges the Mexican and American heritage of Texas.

The question of who designed the Lone Star Flag apparently was not a concern in the 19th century. It now seems like a simple question that must have a simple answer.


Hopefully this desire for certainty will constructively channel itself into further research about the history of Texas flags. With so many old newspapers and collections of personal papers unread by flag historians, the definitive story of Texas and her flags is far from complete.

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