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ABUSING VEXILLOLOGY

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The word *vexillology* belongs to all who are interested in the serious study of flags. Worldwide, that term—or its equivalent in other languages—has been used since the early 1960s to represent the organized and scholarly study of flags of all kinds. Cognates have developed as needed for those who study flags (*vexillologists*), for things pertaining to vexillology (*vexillological*), the designing of flags (*vexillography*), those who collect flags and their hobby (*vexillophiles*, *vexillophily*), short flag-related notes (*vexi-bits* or *vexilliana*), and so on.

This growing vocabulary is a healthy sign that the subject of flags is spreading and turning towards previously unexamined areas. Appearance of the word vexillology in many dictionaries—including the *Oxford English Dictionary*—and recognition of the Spanish equivalent *vexilología* by the Royal Spanish Academy may properly be viewed by all vexillologists with pride, especially considering the relative youth of this term.

There are as well some unfortunate developments, possibly inevitable for terminology based on actual usage rather than one carefully monitored or controlled. Too often, the adjective “vexillological” is used when the word “flag” would not only be adequate but more accurate. For example, a book of flags of the world—unless it is analytical of such topics as statistical aspects of flag usages and their changes, the relationship of flags to political and cultural developments, the systematic application to flags of recognized social science principles, etc.—is simply a flag book, not a vexillological book.

A person who collects and displays flags or creates designs for new flags does not thereby become a vexillologist, although the term is frequently used in this way.

This is not to demean those books, individuals, or activities. It is simply common sense to reserve specialized words for specialized conditions or objects. Vexillology and related terms were intended (and originally were used) to refer to an auxiliary historical discipline concerned with the study of flags, leaving other areas (flag manufacturing, for example) to be described by terms already long in use. However beautiful the plumage of certain birds or the flowers of certain plants maybe, it is both inaccurate and injudicious to refer to them as the “heraldry” of those birds and plants (except possibly in rare poetical usages). When individuals who take the study of flags seriously abuse the word vexillology, they are in effect abusing their own claim to be worthy of serious attention from those outside the field.

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Cover, *Houston Light Guard Historical and Pictorial Sketch*, 1889. Cumming & Sons Printers. DeGoyler Lib., S.M.U.

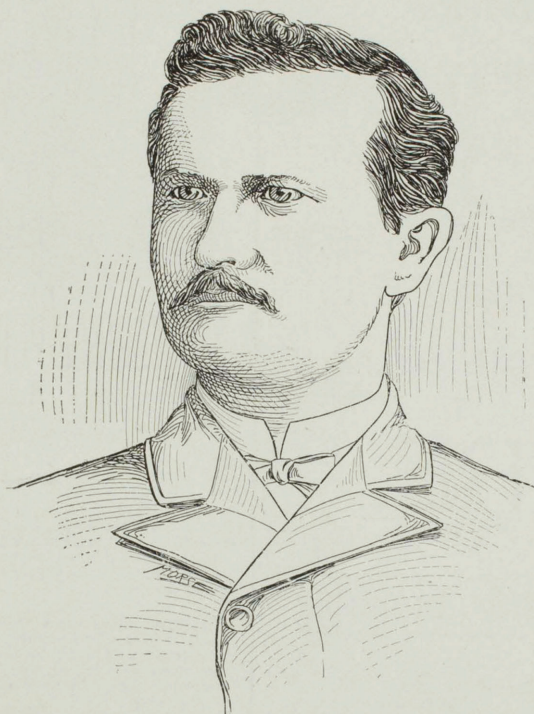
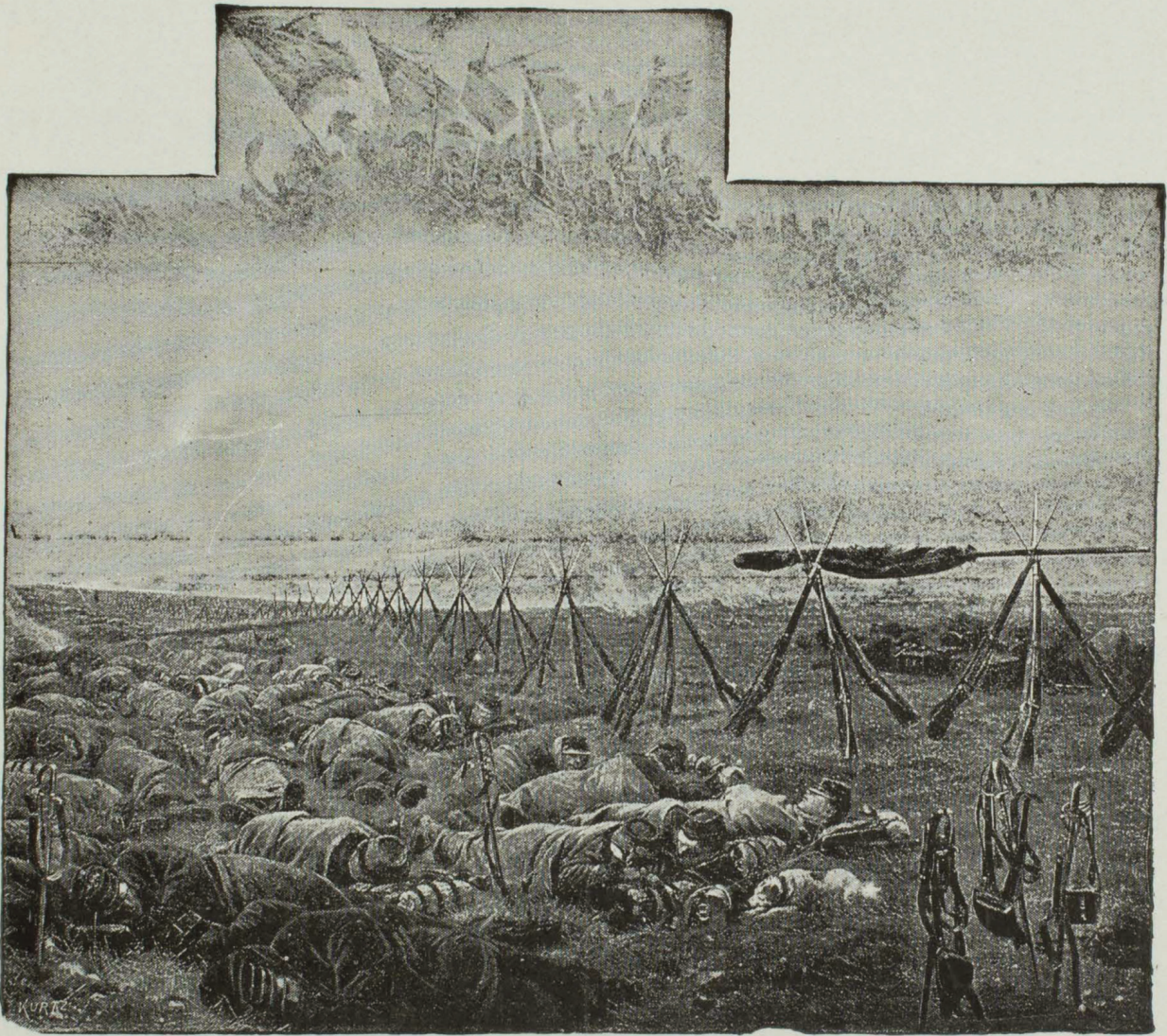
MATERIAL CULTURE: SOUVENIR SKETCHBOOK

The Houston Light Guards Historical and Pictorial Sketch, with its handsomely illustrated cover (depicted above) was printed in 1889, presumably as a souvenir for the members of the company and their friends. It contains a short history of the militia, line drawings of the company's officers, a photograph of the junior officers and enlisted men, and several etchings, including one of the men sleeping in an open field, presumably dreaming of martial glory amidst a sea of flags (see page 3). One of the featured officers is Capt. James A. Baker, Sr., the lawyer for William Marsh Rice and his estate, founder of the law firm Baker & Botts, and grandfather of Texas diplomat and public official James A. Baker, 3d.

First organized in 1873 in post-Reconstruction Houston by Confederate veterans newly active under the Redeemer Democrats in charge of the state, the Houston Light Guards were deployed multiple times by the time of the sketch's publication to restore or maintain civil order. The militia would see action during the Spanish-American War in 1898 and further deployment during the Galveston hurricane in 1900. "The unit's brilliant reputation in military drill competition dated almost from its organization," notes the Handbook of Texas, the history included in this sketchbook details its successes in that arena. *Sources: Handbook of Texas; Houston Post Archives.*

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CAPT. JAS. A. BAKER, JR.

Details from *Houston Light Guard Historical and Pictorial Sketch*, 1889. Cumming & Sons Printers. DeGoyler Lib., S.M.U.

TOP: Untitled etching, p. 23.

LEFT: Line drawing, Capt. James A. Baker, Sr., p. 15.



“MAKER OF THE
TEXAS FLAG”:
Postcard depicting
Joanna Troutman.
1914. Curt Teich & Co.,
Chicago.
DeGoyler Lib., S.M.U.
Troutman, to the best
of anyone’s knowledge,
did not design the
current state flag

MATERIAL CULTURE: FUNDRAISING POSTCARD

The reverse of the postcard explains its purpose and patriotic appeal better than any summer that might be offered:

“In 1835, when a Georgia battalion had been raised to take part in establishing the independence of Texas, Miss Joanna Troutman of Knoxville Georgia designed a white silk flag, with a blue star of five points in the center on either side, on which was inscribed “Liberty of Death” and presented the same to the Georgia battalion.

“Miss Troutman was born at Crawford, Georgia, February 19, 1819, and died at the home of her childhood in August 1880, at the age of sixty-one. At the time she designed and made the Lone Star Flag which was presented to the Georgia battalion, and which subsequently floated over the bloody field of Goliad, she was sixteen years of age. She was a girl of remarkable grace and beauty: by nature noble and refined, by birth she came of a wealthy and distinguished family.

“On the 8th day of January, 1836, the white silk flag with a single star was unfurled at Valasco, where it floated until the Georgia battalion took up its march to meet enemies of liberty and independence. It was this flag which floated from the flagstaff at Goliad when Mexican tyrants massacred Colonel Fannin and his men.

“Through the efforts of Governor O.B. Colquitt, the remains of Joanna Troutman were removed from Georgia to Texas in the early part of 1913, and re-interred in the State Cemetery. This post card is printed for sale for the purpose of raising a creditable monument in her honor.”