

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Jumping Frog Almost Made It As State Flag Emblem

Pecor, the painter of the history of the many flags which have flown over California - now on the walls of Folsom Prison for the civilian employees to study and enjoy while eating in mess hall there, does the official Bear Flag (1911) full justice:

"The first Bear Flag - raised In Sonoma, took a loud ribbing from the pioneers, but when the play came up for an official state dinner, everybody filled in for a new Bear Flag. The present version was made the business on Feb. 3, 1911."

The grizzly bear made himself so feared by Californians and the latter - come Californians of American origin that no wonder, he is depicted on the great Seal of California and the official flag of the state, in the opinion of S. J. Coates of Carmel, who wrote "Flags, Frogs and Bears", the history of the various flags which have flown in California.

Today this flag flies - along with the Stars and Stripes, at every location of a state installation and over every public school building. The bear became extinct in California because of his inroads on domestic livestock, he was killed in great numbers. The only reminder of his great past is on the state flag as it is unfurled to the breezes. But not without a fight. So there he is officially on the official state flag since 1911 and on the Great Seal of the State of California ever since California joined the Union.

"But all this time he had no status as the official state flag animal, until Senate Bill 1014 was signed into the law June 14, 1953. It was on this date that Gov. Earl Warren signed this bill," wrote Mr. Coates.

Everyone probably knows the story of the "Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" made famous by Mark Twain, one of the best-known writers Of the Far West - California and Nevada in particular. But very few know the story of how and why the frog very nearly replaced the grizzly bear on the California state flag. After writing in detail the history, manners, fierceness, and extinction of the grizzly bear, Mr. Coates tells us the qualities of the frog which entitled it to a place in California history .

"But the frog," he was man's friend! He did not destroy life, human or animal. He was in great supply and has survived many years of being hunted for his flesh. He

still can be found and because of his existence he has prolonged and saved the lives of many hunters and lost wayfarers in the wilderness. He affords good clean entertainment which could be enjoyed by the most fastidious.

Support for his likeness to be placed officially on the state flag grew.

But sinister elements in the legislature and among those who placed these legislators in their jobs, rallied to the assistance of the opponents who insisted that the grizzly bear should forever remain as the heraldic emblem on the state flag, and this powerful and well financed group, after a tough fight on the floor, caused the bill to be assigned to a committee on social welfare and later transferee it to a committee on marshes and swamps and it was never reported back to the legislature and the frog lost out on becoming the 13th flag to fly over California.

The arguments, pro and con, that flowed upon the Senate floor were greatly amplified from the text of the resolution. Mr. Coates presents a verbatim copy of the bill and the action taken.

1948 Senate resolution by Sen. Jesse M. Mayo asking that the insignia on the state flag be changed from a bear to a frog.

Date of Resolution - March 25, 1948.

Resolution No. 44 Relative to the emblem on the California state flag, offered by Sen. Mayo:

Whereas, for almost a quarter of a century the emblem of the California state flag has been a lone star with the image of a bear occupying a prominent place thereon; and

Whereas, the likeness of a bear on the state flag is indicative of the State of California, as the bear is a destructive animal whose chief employment is disturbing prospectors, sacking hen roosts, raiding garbage cans and frightening women and children; and

Whereas, the bear emblem has been and is sometimes used emblematic of a foreign power, those tenets of government are distasteful to all Californians; and

Whereas, California's bear population is being rapidly depleted, while the frog census shows steady growth; and

Whereas, the frog described by Mark Twain in his celebrated "Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" has

enriched the world's literature as well as advertised the State of California throughout the world; and

Whereas, the California frog brought great honors to the State of California, and for the past century the high esteem of the people everywhere; now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California that the emblem of the bear be removed from the California state flag, and that there be substituted therefore the emblem of the jumping frog of California.

Resolution read, and referred to the Committee on Social Welfare.

Resolution died in committee—March 27. '

But the frog flag was designed and manufactured and does fly over the headquarters of the Calaveras County District Fair Assn. in Angels Camp. Maybe someday enough support will glow to make it officially No. 13 in the historical parade of flags in the stirring events in the life of the Golden State.

"So you see" writes Mr. Coates, "there is a connection between Flags, Frogs and Bears."