

**About “*The Flag Bulletin*”,** the original journal of flag scholarship (last revised 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024)

The proprietress of the websites [newzealand.flagoptions.com](http://newzealand.flagoptions.com) and [australian.flagalternatives.com](http://australian.flagalternatives.com) is a great admirer of the incomparable life and achievements of [Dr. Whitney Smith](#) (1940-2016), the founder and doyen of vexillology, which in its highest form is the scholarly and scientific study of all aspects of the history, symbolism, and significance of flags, and which in its lesser forms can be inclusive of all levels of flag enthusiasm, right down to that of the most casual of flag hobbyists and/or collectors, and perhaps even down to that of anyone who has ever paused to ponder and to appreciate the waving of a single flag. Amongst the greatest of Smith's feats was his co-founding and his fifty-year publication of the first periodical journal of vexillology, "*The Flag Bulletin*".

Possibly the very finest of Smith's accomplishments, however, was his co-founding and his fifty-year-plus operation of the Flag Research Centre. Until publication of *The Flag Bulletin* effectively ended in 2008, the negligible profits from its subscriptions provided one of the many cumulative revenue streams of the FRC, a purely vexillological business enterprise that Smith ran from his spacious but otherwise rather modest home to support himself, his family, and his employees for the best part of the last fifty-five years of his life. During that time Smith vigorously guarded all of his intellectual property, including a copyright for all but the six initial issues of *The Flag Bulletin*.

In Smith's declining years he saw the physical property of his FRC lorried off to an historical institution in Austin, Texas, [the Briscoe Centre](#), whilst he transferred its intellectual property to three trustees, who since 2013 have operated the FRC as a non-profit organisation. It is Smith's chosen trustees, in their capacity as the directors of what is now a mere shadow of the original FRC, who retain copyright authority for *The Flag Bulletin*, and who as of 2024, it might fairly be said, continue to tightly grip it as though the FRC or Smith's ghost would somehow be injured by any loosening of their fingers, notwithstanding that in his final years Smith himself wanted the full publication run of *The Flag Bulletin* to be digitised, and despite assurances from the directors themselves that they are "...committed to the goal of making Dr. Smith's work available". In 2022 they even claimed to have begun [a digitisation planning process](#), but to date nothing has come of it. The emptiness of the claim matches that of [the directors' 2016 announcement](#) that publication of *The Flag Bulletin* would resume. Actually the directors have not published anything under the FRC banner during their tenure, aside from [an 80-page paperback](#), and even that claim is tenuous, given that the work was not produced by the FRC but by an Austin publishing house, with its copyright curiously 'split' between its author and the FRC, nor have the directors yet managed to fulfil their duty to publish the proceedings of 2019's 28<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Vexillology, which incidentally was promised to be a *Flag Bulletin* number. Perhaps Smith did not chose well.

It is in this atmosphere that an anonymous party has independently digitised the full publication run of *The Flag Bulletin* and many of its supplements into a collection of text-searchable PDFs, voluntarily achieving over the course of a few months what the FRC directors have failed to accomplish since 2013. The directors are discomfited by this development, with the result that all attempts to freely donate the PDFs to them for distribution from the Flag Research Centre website have been vehemently rejected, an obvious loss to the entire vexillological community. In the absence of eventual consent from the current directors, who are Charles A. Spain, Scot M. Guenter, and Hugh L. Brady, or from future directors with less fragile egos, the full run of *The Flag Bulletin* may therefore not be in the public domain until 2116, 100 years after Whitney Smith's death.

[An overview of the publication run of \*The Flag Bulletin\*](#), [An initial announcement regarding \*The Flag Bulletin\*](#), [A follow-up announcement regarding \*The Flag Bulletin\*](#), [A final announcement regarding \*The Flag Bulletin\*](#), [An open letter to Charles A. Spain regarding \*The Flag Bulletin\*](#), [A corrected version of the NAVA overview of \*The Flag Bulletin\*](#), [Whitney Smith's now inactive but still informative Flag Research Centre website](#), [The current Flag Research Centre website](#), [The Briscoe Centre overview of the Dr. Whitney Smith Flag Research Centre collection](#)