

# *The Origin of the Wyoming State Flag*

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of a Wyoming State Flag. Mrs. Verna Keyes, of Casper, designer of the flag, has provided the following story of the origin of the flag. She wrote the account several years ago, in response to requests, for distribution to schools of the state.

The Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department knows of the location of only two of the original, taffeta hand-painted flags. One, which was presented to W. W. Daley, after his introduction of the bill for a state flag in the Wyoming Legislature, is in the Carbon County Museum at Rawlins. The taffeta flag presented to Mrs. Keyes in 1946 by Governor Hunt was given to the Johnson County Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum in Buffalo by Mrs. Keyes.

The Wyoming State Flag came into existence when I entered a flag design contest sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution of this state in 1916. Later the 14th Wyoming Legislature passed a bill adopting this design and it was approved by the late Governor Robert D. Carey as the official flag of this state.

It was in the early summer of 1916 that my Father, the late W. P. Keays, read in the Buffalo newspaper that the State Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution had announced an open competition for appropriate designs for a state flag for Wyoming.

The late Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard, Professor of Political Economy at the University of Wyoming, was state regent of the DAR. Dr. Hebard was an avid promoter of Wyoming and it was her suggestion to the members of this organization that a flag be designed for this young state, it being one of a few states at that time that did not have a flag.

The competition was advertised throughout the state and was open to all. A prize of twenty dollars was offered for the design selected as the most appropriate. Designs were to be judged at the State DAR conference which convened in Sheridan later that summer.

My father, after reading about the contest, suggested that I enter a design. I had just graduated from the Art Institute in Chicago, where I had studied Design and Decoration. But that summer a school friend was visiting me from Cleveland, Ohio, and she had made an excellent excuse for me to do everything but draw. As the closing date for the competition approached and my father's persuasion increased I knew it was time to heed him.

Silently I had been pondering over various possibilities for the design and was awakened from a sound sleep one night and there appeared to me a clear, complete and perfect design for the flag. I wakened my friend in great excitement, telling her I knew exactly

what I would draw. She was uninterested and sleepily mumbled something incoherent about not caring. The following morning I drew the design as it had been revealed to me that night; such inspiration reaffirms the true Source of all Creation.

An explanation of the symbols and colors used in the flag was then written. A log on the page of the original drawing was done by my late Mother in her beautiful handwriting. Here she wrote the description of the symbols as I had composed it. The design was carefully mounted, packed and mailed to Sheridan.

I would like to pause here to pay tribute to my parents. My Father, Wilbur Parke Keays, of Illinois, came to the frontier town of Buffalo with the Cross H Cattle outfit in 1884. In September of 1892 he married Miss Estella Ferguson of Cambridge, Ohio, in Omaha, Nebraska, at the home of her aunt. The couple then went to Buffalo, where as a bride she made their first home and lived for many years. My brother, Parke, and I were born in Buffalo. No parents could have been finer or more conscientious and inspiring than the two of them were.

Several days after I had submitted the design Dr. Hebard telephoned from Sheridan to announce the decision of the Judges. There had been thirty-seven designs entered in the contest and the one I had submitted had been given first place. I was then invited to be the guest of the conference to receive the first prize. It was an unexpected surprise and a great joy and satisfaction to my parents.

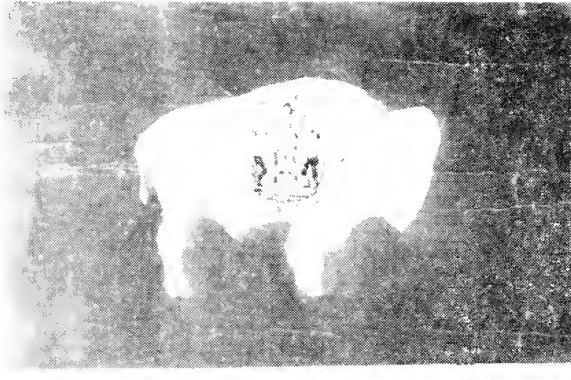
There followed many discussions and much correspondence with Dr. Hebard to perfect each detail of the design. A technical description of the flag was then written and this drafted into a bill for presentation to the Fourteenth State Legislature.

The bill was introduced in the Senate by the late honorable W. W. Daley of Rawlins, Wyoming. This august body of men had a great deal of amusement at the expense of the bison in the design. One esteemed Senator, being a Democrat, championed the cause of that party's emblem, as the donkey was the only animal appropriate for the Wyoming flag. The Republicans upheld the elephant and even the Bull Moose party suggested their emblem for the flag. However, the bison was left intact. The bill was passed and the Wyoming flag was officially adopted January 31, 1917.

There followed more conferences with Dr. Hebard relative to having the first flags manufactured. The George Lauterer Company of Chicago made the first six flags, which were of pure silk taffeta on which the bison and the great seal were hand-painted. At a joint meeting of the members of the House and the Senate in the House of Representatives with many guests in attendance, the flag was officially presented to Governor Robert D. Carey, February 16, 1919. The late Honorable Eugene J. Sullivan of Casper, Speaker of the House, presided upon this occasion.

It was then voted by the Legislature to have folders printed

showing a picture and description of the flag. In 1920 these were given to each school child in the state and generally distributed, that all could become familiar with the new flag.



*[Faint, illegible handwritten text, likely a description or notes related to the flag design.]*

The original design is now in the State Historical Society in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Many of the letters concerning the flag from Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard are in the Hebard collection in Laramie, Wyoming.

Some years later my good friend, Mrs. E. E. Hanway, of Casper, Wyoming, suggested to the Natrona County legislative delegation that it would be appropriate for the state to present me with one of the first flags made in recognition of my service to the state. In order to do this a bill was presented to the Twenty-eighth State Legislature making this gift possible. The bill was passed and signed by the late Governor Lester C. Hunt, February 20, 1945. The presentation was made by Governor Hunt at the State DAR conference in Laramie, Wyoming, on March 3, 1946. Just before the ceremony Governor Hunt asked me which I would prefer—one of the old flags on which the paint was quite cracked or one of the new improved ones with the complete design made of silk, with no painted surface. I assured him either would be most gratefully received. He then stated that he thought I should have both of them and forthwith presented me with the two beautiful flags.

Recently an inquiry came from the State Historical Society in Cheyenne regarding the direction in which the bison faces on the flag when mounted on a staff. In the original design as adopted by the Legislature the bison faced out from the staff. My reasoning on this was that the bison had once roamed freely over the plains of Wyoming and I thought it should so fly on the flag. Dr. Hebard did not agree with me and thought it would be better design and balance to have the bison facing the staff. Consequently, when the first flags were manufactured she had them done the latter way and so they have remained.

The symbolism of the flag is as follows:

The great seal of the State of Wyoming is the heart of the flag.

The seal on the bison represents the truly western custom of branding. The bison was once "Monarch of the Plains."

The red border represents the Red Men, who knew and loved our country long before any of us were here; also, the blood of the pioneers who gave their lives in reclaiming the soil.

White is an emblem of purity and uprightness over Wyoming.

Blue, which is found in the bluest blue of Wyoming skies and the distant mountains, has through the ages been symbolic of fidelity, justice and virility.

And finally the red, the white and the blue of the flag of the State of Wyoming are the colors of the greatest flag in all the world, the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America.

I am very grateful for this great honor and proud to have been of service to my State of Wyoming.

*15 February 1960*

VERNA KEAYS KEYES