

Don
Greame
Kelley

In memory of a remarkable man

EDITED BY D. L. EMBLEN

PRIVATELY PRINTED • VINEBURG, 1991

*The most displayed
but least-known artist*

THAT'S HOW DON KELLEY often referred to a unique commission: he designed the official specifications for the California State Flag which still floats over every school and state office building in California. In 1953, at the request of the state, he laid out the proportions of the star, stripe, and lettering; identified the "cable numbers" of the five colors (white, red, medium brown, dark brown, and green); and drew the central figure—the grizzly bear.

The year before, Fred W. Links, the state's Assistant Director of Finance, had asked two prominent zoologists (Tracy I. Storer and Lloyd P. Tevis, Jr.) for an accurate picture of the California grizzly (*Ursus arctos californicus*), by then extinct for at least 40 years. In turn, he commissioned Don Kelley to draw the bear's portrait for the flag.

The senior buyer of the state's Purchasing Division had long been frustrated by the variations in the California flag as produced by different manufacturers. The 1911 law which had adopted it failed to show any picture, so in practice the proportions, colors, and especially the bear varied widely.

One manufacturer (Emerson Flag Co.) had for many years modeled its bear on an 1855 illustration by one Charles C. Nahl—a sort of Gold Rush Don Kelley. Nahl was in the sixth generation of an artistic German family, a skilled

engraver and watercolorist who had come to California in 1850. His fine animal studies appeared in *Hutchings's Illustrated California Magazine*, and his *California Grizzly* was the hit of the 1858 state fair. Don Kelley and the zoologists chose the Nahl depiction as the definitive grizzly bear image; Don's final silhouette closely followed Nahl's.

But Don also studied a real (stuffed) grizzly bear when designing the flag. "Monarch," California's last grizzly, was in the collection of the California Academy of Sciences. The bear had been captured in the San Gabriel Mountains in Los Angeles County in 1899 by a reporter working for publisher William Randolph Hearst. Hearst's newspaper, *The San Francisco Examiner* ("Monarch of the Dailies"), presented Monarch to San Francisco's Golden Gate Park menagerie, where the bear reigned until its death in 1911. (Monarch has recently been refurbished and placed on display at the entrance to the Academy's "Wild California" exhibit. He stands on a clump of grass, underlined by the words *California Republic* and a red stripe, with a red star overhead. Observers see Monarch as the central figure in a three-dimensional California Flag.)



Until the end of the 19th century, state flags were not widely used in the U. S. (they were seen as a challenge to the Union)—in 1876 only 9 states even had flags. The others, including California, generally flew local regimental colors or the state seal on a blue field to represent the state in formal ceremonies. As the nation's 1926 sesquicentennial approached, however, patriotic groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution led campaigns to establish flags for all the states.

The Native Sons of the Golden West (a form of California D. A. R.), whose symbol was the California Grizzly bear, persuaded the State Legislature to adopt the historic 1846 Bear Flag as California's flag in 1911. The official description ran less than 100 words (far short of the 1,000 needed to make up for the lack of a picture!).

That Bear Flag had been the banner of the Americans in Sonoma who rebelled against Mexican rule in California in 1846. Their "Bear Flag Rebellion," as it became known, led quickly to U. S. control of California. The rebels, under "Commander" William D. Ide, designed a distinctive flag with a star for independence (like Texas), and a red stripe in honor of the United States. They included the grizzly bear for its strength and unyielding resistance—although on their crude handmade flag it looked more like a pig. The artist was William L. Todd, Mary Todd Lincoln's brother. At the time, the California grizzly was still an abundant and fearsome predator, although hunting and habitat destruction wiped it out in the wild by 1908.

The original Bear Flag was presented to the Society of California Pioneers in 1855, but it was lost in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. The 1911 redesign, along with Don Kelley's 1953 refinements, yielded a more balanced and attractive flag.

Marion Kelley remembers 1953 as a busy time for her and Don. But he took on the flag project in addition to all his other activities and with the same enthusiasm. His colored

reference standard for the flag accompanied Senate Bill 1014 of the 1953 session. It passed the Legislature, and Governor Earl Warren signed it into law as California Code Section 420 on Flag Day, 14 June, 1953.

The very next issue of *Pacific Discovery* (with Don Kelley as Editor and Art Director) featured an article by the zoologists Storer and Tevis on the California grizzly as the state emblem, with Don's rendering of the bear proudly displayed on the cover. The article described, in detail, Don's part in the flag's development.

Most state flags, designed by a committee or by the D. A. R., are dull and uninspiring (half merely place the state seal on a blue background). Today many states are considering redesigning their flags, often in connection with centennial, sesquicentennial, or bicentennial celebrations. But California's flag—with its colorful, striking design and vivid history—is in no such danger; Don Greame Kelley will live on as the least-known but most-displayed artist in California.

Ted Kaye

Don Greame Kelley
A limited letterpress edition
150 copies
112 pages 5.5" x 8.5"
Full cloth cover
\$31.50 Postpaid



ORDER FORM *

Send _____ copies of Don Greame Kelley
at \$31.50 per copy, postpaid

to _____

at _____

* Please make checks payable to The Don Greame
Kelley Project and mail to 160 California Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95405.

Don Greame Kelley