

The First Flag of the American Colonies

The British Red Ensign Flag and Why It's Displayed at Ft. Halifax Park



The display of the British Red Ensign flag at Ft. Halifax Park is in recognition of its relationship to the Fort and of the flag's significance to the history of our County. Although the Red Ensign ultimately became the banner of the King's troops in the American Revolution, it was the flag of the both British and American Colonial Provincial forces during the French and Indian War.

The Red Ensign, also called the "Colonial Red Ensign" or "Queen Anne's Flag," was initially adopted by England's Queen Anne in 1707 as a new flag for England and her colonies. The flag was flown from the stern of ships and it is surmised that the term "ensign" (or "end sign") derives from that fact.

After its adoption, it was determined that the new design was useful in distinguishing the King's vessels from those of the 13 Provincial Colonies, and the Red Ensign became the flag flown by ships of the Colonies before the Revolution.

It was originally intended that the Red Ensign be flown on ships, and the extent to which it was used on land in America is difficult to determine. However, the traditional British Union Jack flag was a semi-royal flag that was probably flown only on the very most important British military buildings, and thus it is probable that the Red Ensign was used on land by default. In any event, the Red Ensign effectively became the first national flag of the American Colonies, and it is portrayed on various period maps depicting Fort Halifax.