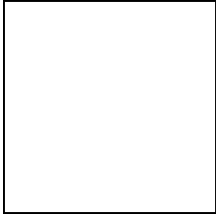


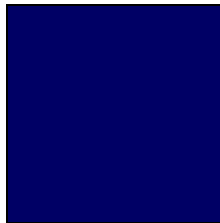
WHEN FLAGS COULD TALK *by Dave Martucci*

Formerly in the United States, particularly before radio and other electronic communications, there was in use a slightly complex system of flag signals indicating the weather forecast and the approach of certain types of storms. This system utilized five flags for forecasts and three flags for storm warnings. Although now discontinued, the hurricane and small craft warning flags are sometimes seen on television weather forecasts as added "color."

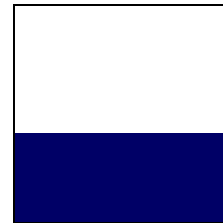
The weather forecast flags were:



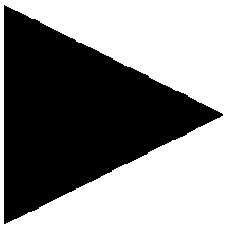
Clear or Fair Weather



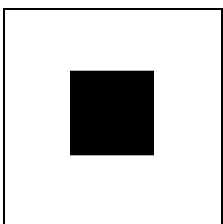
Rain or Snow



Local Rain or Snow: Indicated that local rains or showers would occur, and that the precipitation would not be general.



Temperature: When placed above any of the preceding three flags it indicated warmer weather. When placed below it indicated colder weather. When not displayed, the indications were that the temperature will remain stationary, or that the change will not vary more than four degrees Fahrenheit from the temperature of the same hour of the preceding day from March to October, inclusive, and not more than six degrees Fahrenheit for the remaining months of the year.



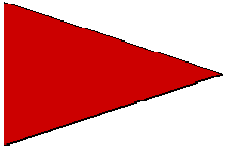
Cold Wave

Indicated the approach of a *sudden* and *decided* fall in temperature. When displayed, the preceding flag was omitted.

When displayed on poles, these flags were always arranged to read downward; when displayed from horizontal supports, a small streamer was attached to indicate the point from which the flags were to be read.

The September 1934 *National Geographic Magazine* said "These are the old weather-forecast flags, now practically out of use because of the rise of radio, though once they were familiar to everybody."

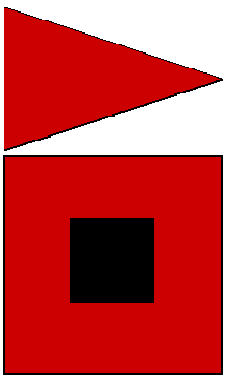
The Storm Warnings were:



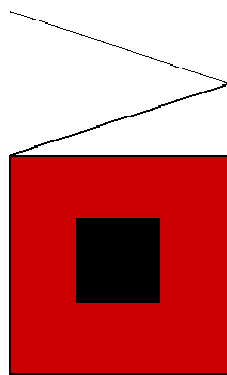
Small Craft Warning

Indicated that moderately strong winds were expected.

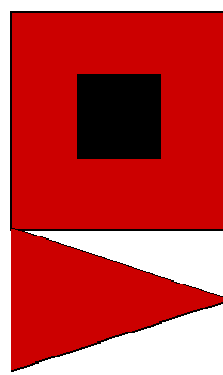
Storm warnings: a red flag with a black center indicated a storm of marked violence was expected. Pennants were displayed with the flag to indicate the direction of the winds: red indicating easterly, white indicating westerly. The pennant above the flag indicated that the wind was expected from the northerly quadrants and below indicated from the southerly quadrants. Two Storm flags indicated an impending tropical hurricane, or one of those extremely severe and dangerous storms which occasionally move across the Lakes and northern Atlantic coast. So:



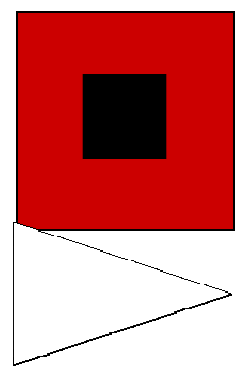
Northeasterly Winds



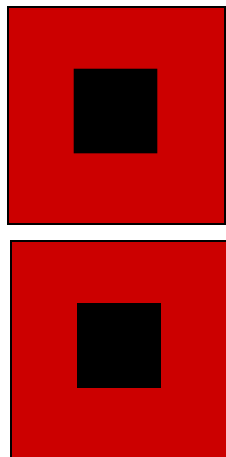
Northwesterly Winds



Southeasterly Winds



Southwesterly Winds



Hurricane Warning!

The October 1917 *National Geographic Magazine* stated "In the United States the system of weather signals is very complete, information of the approach of storms being received from various stations in the United States and even throughout the West Indies. These warnings are published at the various seaports by the display of flags by day and by lanterns at night; also by bulletins and reports furnished to newspapers. Every effort is made by the Weather Bureau of the United States Department of Agriculture to give these warnings as early as possible at all points where they may be of service to mariners and others. Storm warnings are displayed by the United States Weather Bureau at 142 stations on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and at 46 stations on the Pacific coast."

Although no longer displayed officially, occasionally these flags -- especially the Small Craft and Hurricane Warnings -- can be seen in the U.S. today. [http:// www.nava.org/Flag%20Information/articles/storm/storm.htm](http://www.nava.org/Flag%20Information/articles/storm/storm.htm)