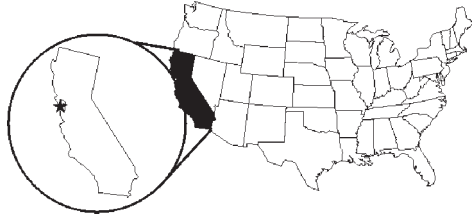


SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA



Population Rank: U.S. # 13
California # 4

Proportions: 3:5 (usage)



Adopted: 14 April 1900 (official); revised 30 December 1940

DESIGN: According to the 1940 ordinance:

The City and County of San Francisco shall have an official flag to be known as 'The Flag of San Francisco'. The flag shall be as hereinafter described, to-wit: 'A Phoenix rising from the flames, below which shall appear the motto Oro en Paz—Fierro en Guerra', both in a golden yellow hue on a field of white, with the Flag itself bordered with gold.

*The words **San Francisco** shall appear horizontally along the lower portion of the Flag, below the Phoenix and the Motto, in letters of appropriate size, rich blue in coloring.*

The wings of the phoenix are outspread and pictured above a ring of red flames, resembling an open crown, with eight points outlined in

golden yellow. The scroll is segmented into three sections and is bordered in black to separate it from the white field. The Spanish motto means “Gold in Peace, Iron in War”. The width of the gold border is one-eighth the height of the flag.

SYMBOLISM: In the words of Mayor Phelan in 1900, *It is singularly appropriate by reason of the fact that California is the Golden State and San Francisco has become the point of debarkation for our troops* [in the Spanish-American War] ... *Gold is emblematic of the abundance of nature, and iron of the fortitude and courage of men; but when the war ceases let us hope that the productive industries ... may permit us to read the inscription, ‘Gold and Iron in Peace.’*

This motto, however, predates the Spanish-American War, appearing on a seal dating from 1859 (perhaps anticipating the Civil War). Others attribute the origin to Don Quixote and his instructions to Sancho Panza. The phoenix first appeared on a seal in 1852 as a crest to symbolize the city’s resurgence from an earlier fire (Kenneth M. Johnson, *California Governmental Seals*, Castle Press, 1963: No. 8). The phoenix is a symbol of human aspiration and achievement, a mythological bird that lives for 500 years, then is consumed by flames and rises again from its ashes. In an alternate interpretation, the phoenix represents the city’s emergence under the 1856 Municipal Consolidation Act as a city and county separate from San Mateo County. In any case, the symbol was unintentionally prophetic, as the flag was adopted six years before the great earthquake and fire of 1906.

HOW SELECTED: Chosen in a competition initiated by the mayor, James D. Phelan. He appointed as judges the commissioner of public works, the parks commissioner, and three members of the board of supervisors. The winning design was selected from among over 100 entries.

DESIGNER: Policeman John M. Gamble won the prize of \$50 for his design.

MORE ABOUT THE FLAG: The words **SAN FRANCISCO** were not on the original flag. They were added by a resolution, first passed on 29 August 1938, that later resulted in the 1940 ordinance. The language of the resolution explains the addition with these words:

Whereas, many have marveled at the beauty of the Official Flag of the City and County of San Francisco and have inquired 'What flag is it?' because there is no wording to show; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That there be added to the Official Flag ... of San Francisco the words San Francisco so that it will be identifiable to all who view it; and be it

*Further Resolved, That the words **San Francisco** be placed horizontally along the lower portion of the Flag, below the Phoenix and the Motto, in letters of appropriate size ... so that the Flag will be blue and gold on a field of white, symbolic of the blue skies of San Francisco, the gold of her commerce and industry and the white of her pure purpose to be a city of happy homes and contented, prosperous people.*



The original city flag had a plain white field, and was entrusted to the chief of police in May 1900 for use in parades and ceremonies. According to tradition, it was rescued in a paddy wagon from the flame-engulfed city hall in April 1906. That

flag was replaced by a duplicate in 1926. In 1940, when pre-war patriotic fervor led the board of supervisors to authorize making more than one flag, the drafter of the specifications described the gold fringe of the 1926 ceremonial flag with the phrase *bordered with golden yellow*. This misinterpretation added the golden border to the flag's otherwise white field.