

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **Town Flag Mystery**

Did you know that Longmeadow has a town flag? The flag is a colorful recreation of the shield that identifies some town documents, and the shield is displayed on a white field. There is only one problem with the flag. It cannot be found in Longmeadow. It can be found in only one place – the State House.

So I am asking your help to “capture the flag.” Here is the background of creation and the loss of the Longmeadow flag.

The story begins as part of a quest by state officials to acquire a flag from each municipality in Massachusetts.

The quest began about 15 years ago after the opening of the Great Hall, a magnificent marble-floored three-story atrium assembly hall in the State House. The extensively renovated hall opened with much fanfare, but guests and speakers in the hall quickly discovered that the acoustics were terrible. You could not hear what was going on no matter how good the sound system and no matter how close you were to the speaker. And since the hall can seat hundreds of people, most listeners were not that close.

What could be done? The answer came back: drape the walls. How could that be done? Drape them with flags from each of the 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts. The call went out to the municipalities to send their flags to the State House. A few cities already owned flags, but most were like Longmeadow and had to create their signature banners.

Longmeadow used the town seal that was designed as part of the nation’s 1976 bicentennial celebration as the basis for the flag. The shield has three illustrations: a beaver, signifying the importance of trapping as an early economic activity; the First Church weathervane; and an early colonial home, probably the Colton home that was the model for town hall. The date of 1644 marks the date the town was first settled, and 1783 notes the year Longmeadow was granted town status. Longmeadow had two flags made, one for the state and one to keep at home.

The flags trickled in to Boston and now, in 2003, 289 flags are hanging in the great hall. Each community has an assigned position on one of the walls. You can see an actual town flag by traveling to the State House and searching out position 3 on the top row of flags on the west wall. You can find a photograph on the state website, [www.state.ma.us/bsb/greathall.htm](http://www.state.ma.us/bsb/greathall.htm). The same website also shows a photograph of the flag-festooned Great Hall. But you cannot see one in town.

The flags have created civic pride throughout the commonwealth as townspeople designed, debated and sewed their flags. And they are fulfilling their stated purpose of reducing echoes in the Great Hall. In our town, however, the question of “what flag?” remains.

If you want to see the town flag in Longmeadow, you will have to join the search to find it. It might be in somebody’s basement or garage; it might be in a forgotten storage closet of a town building; or it might be hiding in plain sight. If you know where it is, please call town hall, call the Longmeadow News or call me.