


Heraldry, in common with most other human concerns, is changing. To illustrate the mutation, it may be mentioned that "G. T. C.," writing in the Encyclopedia Britannica, Ninth Edition, in 1880, said: "Heraldry, though etymologically denoting all the business of the herald, has long in practice been restricted to one part of it only, and may be defined as the art of blazoning or describing in proper terms armorial bearings. It treats also of their history, of the rules observed in their employment and transmission, of the manner in which by their means families and certain dignities are represented and of their connection with genealogies and titular rank."

But this paragraph is revised by "O. B." for the Fourteenth Edition of the Britannica in 1929 to read simply: "Although the word heraldry properly belongs to all the business of the herald (q. v.), it
has long attached itself to that which in earlier times was known as armory, the science of armorial bearings.”

Both standard versions of the Encyclopedia, however, agree in effect that:

Particular symbols have in all ages been assumed by the various families of mankind, civilized and uncivilized. Such were the lion of the tribe of Judah, the SPQR upon the standard of ancient Rome and the eagle surmounting them, the tattoo marks of the savages of America and the Pacific, the Danish raven and the white horse of Saxony, which still remains carved upon the chalky downs of western England.

The more recent Britannica stresses the fact that “in all quarters of the world distinguished symbols have been adopted by tribes and nations, by families or by chieftains.”

What is happening now is reflected and, indeed, promoted by genealogists and other historians who have realized the significance of symbols, for example, in industrial advertising continuing the somewhat mystic, certainly richly imaginative imagery of military sign language.

Activity of any sort almost inevitably is reflected pictorially in the ratio of use. The designs tell their factual sources. It is not too much to say that they “talk in silence” and are understood in practice by thousands if not millions of people. Thus, the Atomic Energy Commission of the United States proclaims itself in a composition purporting to show four atoms in interlacing circular motion. Hubert Allcock in his Heraldic Design declares:

There is today a new and often justifiable pride in the consciousness of personal endeavor and individual accomplishment. So today, although the possessor of time-honored armorial bearings can and often does display them with pride, many feel that it is perfectly sensible to create an entirely new emblem symbolic of a man's real personal accomplishment (honestly and simply using bona fide heraldic methods) rather than unimaginatively to copy, adapt, or appropriate somebody else’s arms simply because they have been in existence longer. The new design becomes a valid personal symbol; in so establishing new arms the bearer is establishing an heirloom instead of continuing one . . . . Newly established family arms can be designed in the long tradition of punning on the family name or they can be indicative of a profession.

If the traditions of design are desired to be verified, recourse conveniently may be had to William H. Whitmore's The Elements of Heraldry, recently republished after 102 years of valued use. It explains the principles of the science of heraldic exposition as customarily practiced in England and still accepted in the United States nearly two centuries after the Revolution of 1776. The essential doctrine of historic integrity in the adoption of an historic design by proven merit exclusively is set forth by the author in this affirmation:
Within a few years, coats-of-arms have indeed been profusely assumed, but with such a total disregard of all authority as to prove the ignorance even of that part of the community which ought to have been better instructed . . . Competent writers have already disabused the public mind of the idea that identity of name argues identity of origin. No one now supposes that all Browns or Joneses or Smiths or Robinsons trace their descent from one man, the original assumer of the name . . . . The sole value or interest of our American coats-of-arms consists in the remembrance of an honorable ancestry. We cannot afford to insult our real progenitors by a false claim to others.

New arms, it is evident, can be devised by ethical use of symbols of historical validity, but it also is obvious that careful, deliberately cautious study is required in attempting any defensible composition. L. G. Pine, in his The Story of Heraldry, contends:

Genealogy and heraldry are quite incomprehensible without reference to national histories . . . . There are of course Americans who find themselves descended from people who had a right to arms in this country (Great Britain) and then they have the same right to those arms as the English descendants have . . . . The Washingtons . . . come from an old English stock going back to 1184. This family was of knightly status and bore the arms: argent two bars gules, in chief three mullets of the second. The crest of this family is an eagle and this completes the resemblance between these arms and the flag of the United States of America, for the two bars and the three mullets (stars) remind one of the Stars and Stripes, which was apparently influenced by the ancestral arms of the greatest Washington, that English gentleman, General George Washington, first President of the United States.

Heraldry, let it be remembered, is everywhere and, at least in the sense that it has civic connotations in portions of the earth as distant from each other as Jamaica and Jerusalem, belongs to everybody. The “law of life” involved is demonstrated in Jiri Louda’s European Civic Coats of Arms, which proves incidentally how truly beautiful heraldic art can be and commonly is. We quote:

Heraldry did not do very well on the territory of the United States once British rule came to an end; this is borne out by the vast majority of the seals of the individual States of the Union, which certainly do not link up with the fine tradition of British heraldry . . . . But there are signs that the present revival of interest in family heraldry in America will in time lead to an equal attention to civic arms.

Speaking of hopeful signs, perhaps the most encouraging development of current times is the republishing of James Fairbairn’s Crests of the Families of Great Britain and Ireland Revised — a classic in its field. The text starts with Aaron and ends with Zymon. It runs to 522 pages (1044 columns) of necessarily small type plus 144 plates of engraved crest representations, fifteen to the page. To illustrate: “Washington of Kent, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire, out of a ducal coronet, or, an eagle, wings addorsed, sa. Plate 19, crest 9.” There are 14 citations of Pitt, 4 Denny, 2 McClintock, 8 Christie, 13 Evans, 8 Humphrey, 6 Noble, 7 Henderson, 2 Elkins,
6 Child, 21 Watson, 5 Heron, 6 Salisbury, 4 Wilkins, 27 Wilson, 5 Chadwick, 32 Ross, 6 Orr, 28 Jackson, 78 Johnson, and of course many, many more.

The *minutiae* of every page is fascinating as such. Among the hundreds of family mottoes are such gracious gems as: “Throw not away the broken sword,” “The better prepared the more secure,” “Hope is the anchor of life” and “The noblest motive is the public good.”

All of the books here mentioned, naturally, are meant for one shelf — with Bardsley’s *English Surnames* as a parent volume.

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