NEW HERALDIC CREATIONS AND MY FOURTEEN-POINT ETHICAL CODE

Walter Angst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sahs_newsletter

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sahs_newsletter/vol24/iss3/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swiss American Historical Society Newsletter by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
IV.

NEW HERALDIC CREATIONS AND MY FOURTEEN-POINT ETHICAL CODE

Walter Angst

Most of my contemporaries have many misconceptions about all things heraldic. Most people — if they even know what we are talking about — consider heraldic designs disdainfully as pretentious, superfluous, even silly, or at best arcane frills having to do with royalty. They are wrong. Armorial bearings are an expression of such things as sovereignty, of individuality, of beauty, of sagas, history, past glories and civic achievements. Just fancy our villages and resort places back-home: how poor would they be if they could not display their panoply of colorful community flags fluttering in the alpine breeze. Even here in the United States, we are surrounded by manifestations of heraldry: just look at the graphic arts used in advertising, or at illustrated instructions given to multilingual audiences. True, these designs are not centered in a shield and are not hereditary, as are coats-of-arms, but they nevertheless are heraldic in character. That they are not recognized as such by most of our contemporaries, is somewhat astonishing: just two, three generations ago, anyone with a college education was familiar with heraldry as part of his or her general knowledge.

Heraldry developed some 800 years ago at a time when people were illiterate. A warrior completely clad in armor was unrecognizable. Thus he painted an identifying symbol on his shield, his pennon, his saddle-cloth, and fastened an appropriate design on top of his helmet. The armorial shield is a kind of name plate for people who can't read. Today, as in times past, an individual's arms proclaim in blazing colors the identity of his or her family. In our world of cybernetics
and bureaucratic encroachments, this ought to be important for any self-respecting citizen.

In Switzerland, heraldry is venerated and used, frequently and freely, as almost nowhere else. Swiss heraldry is unique — unlike that of any other country — and it is, in my opinion, also very beautiful. Most shields of Swiss burghers and peasants have not been granted by any potentate, although some have been confirmed by crowned and tiaraed heads, mostly for military and diplomatic service. Usually, they are assumptions instead, or perhaps grants by guilds holding political power.

This has a simple reason. In the Swiss democracy, public functionaries are not appointed, but elected for specific terms. In other words, a magistrate needs the trust and consent of the electorate and thus, during the Middle Ages, a public office was considered to "annobli" the holder. A public functionary needed a seal to authenticate documents. The step from seal to coat-of-arms is small, and so, over the centuries, many descendants of former public officials came to use their family arms as a matter of course.

So-called Swiss "peasant" arms admittedly are not "noble" arms — yet they certainly are aren't non-noble either; they are not any less, but just as different from the noble arms of the true-blue blood. Most Swiss armorial bearings are founded on the ancient principle of original nobility: any free-born man owning land and being capable of providing military service to his sovereign was considered a member of the nobility and therefore "armigerous" (permitted to use coat armor). The Swiss Confederates were free, they owned land (either privately or communally), and they certainly were able to give military service to their sovereign communities. This has never been changed.

It would like to talk about some of the least understood aspects of the art, science and jurisprudence of heraldry, that of creating new arms. The creation of a new coat-of-arms has to do with sovereignty. In a monarchy, the king or queen as the sovereign is the
so-called "fountain of honor." The monarch bestows the high privilege of a grant of arms to a deserving subject. In a republic, however, each citizen is a part of the sovereign, because he helps to govern his country; therefore he has the self-evident right to assume arms. He or she is his or her own king or queen. In the Swiss republic, citizens are more directly involved in governing and thus shaping their destiny than are the citizens of any other land. It would be absurd to demand that a Swiss apply for a grant of arms from a foreign government. No Swiss in his or her right mind would even consider it. Just as one cannot be partially pregnant, one cannot be partially sovereign; either one is, or one is not. There are heraldists who seriously demand that Americans should apply to a foreign heraldic authority for their coats-of-arms. This is foolishness! As a citizen of an independent republic, one is - at least as far as heraldry is concerned - sovereign and thus may assume any armorial bearing to one's liking - provided one does not infringe on anyone else's rights.

Some twenty-five years ago, I formulated thirteen additional conditions to this, namely:

1. Any new creation of arms shall be heraldically correct, that is, shall conform to all major rules of good heraldry.

2. It shall not infringe on anyone else's arms.

3. It shall unmistakably identify the armiger.

4. It shall be unique.

5. It shall be heraldically stylized in its emblazonment or depiction in varying media.

6. It shall be as simple as possible.

7. It shall be recognizable at a glance at a reasonable distance.

8. It shall be symbolically meaningful.

9. It shall be artistically satisfying.

10. It shall present a unit in style and also reflect national origin.
11. It shall be adapted to the medium used to depict them.

12. It shall be described by a correct blazon, that is, by the universally recognized ancient technical idiom of heraldry - given in the appropriate language - which is as precise as a chemical formula and which has not essentially changed since the 16th century.

13. It shall be documented.

14. A heraldic artist who has invented a new position or attitude for an animal, or who has created a new kind of common charge, has the duty properly to name and define his creation. In this, he must follow the time-honored tradition and abide by the classic grammar of blazon, its syntax, morphology, semantics and etymology.

All this provides only a glimpse at heraldry; there is much more to it. In principle, a complete and proven genealogy is needed for a normal grant of arms. Many American families, however, cannot prove descent in the direct male line from an "armiger" (a person entitled to bear coat-armor). Any genealogical research project is time-consuming, costly, and does not guarantee to produce an appropriate blazon.

In such cases, in which genealogical research is not warranted, I usually recommend that either a new creation of arms be commissioned or that the most probable shield listed in published rolls be "differenced," i.e., adapted to uniquely fit the family in question. Differencing is a time-honored practice. If it is done correctly, with imagination, with unique "charges" (designs), and obeying all rules of good heraldry, it is no different from the work done by the ancient heralds. Thus, at a fraction of the costs needed for genealogical efforts, a family coat-of-arms can be created with which Americans can start a new tradition for their children and children's children. It should be self-evident, that a mail-order house, a "heraldic mill," cannot ever provide such a service.

Let me give an example of how a new creation of arms can be accomplished. It concerns the insignia for the USS Patterson, the
Destroyer Escort DE 1061, which was commissioned on March 14, 1970, at the Naval Base of Charleston, South Carolina. This vessel, which has a complement of 15 officers and 210 enlisted men, was a part of the Cruiser-Destroyer Force of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, but by now has been decommissioned. It measures 438 feet in length, has a displacement of 4100 tons, and a speed in excess of 27 knots. Its main mission was the protection of a destroyer, to hunt hostile submarines, and to carry out rescue, patrol, evacuation, blockage, search and visit operations.

My commission by the Captain of the Patterson to create a ship's symbol had five categories of conditions: the new badge had to be nautical, dignified, heraldic, representing the fighting spirit of a Naval vessel, portraying the dual mission of the ship as a destroyer of submarines and an escort for other ships of the Fleet; it had to symbolize the famous deeds of the name-giving hero, Commodore Daniel Todd Patterson, the defender of New Orleans in the War of 1812; it had to incorporate the family arms of Patterson; it also had to preserve the lineage of the two previous ships called Patterson and to recall their feats of valor; and it finally had to signify the readiness of the Patterson and its crew for all eventualities, besides containing a motto, the ship's name and hull number.

I am for simplicity in heraldic design, and having to cram that much into a shield is a rather tough assignment. Here is how I tried to solve it in an attempt to keep the brass-hats happy and still make it as simple as possible.

The Patterson family arms are not very well suited to depict a fighting spirit, because they contain three pelicans "in their piety." This piscivorous water-bird is "vulning" (wounding) herself on her breast to feed her young ones with her own blood and thus is a symbol of mother-love, piety, self-sacrifice, and Christian virtue. I decided to create a new type of pelican, the PELINICUS.

The Peliniclus is a new heraldic sea-monster of the griffin family. Of course, I know that English griffins, as well as heraldic pelicans
COMMISSIONING

U.S.S. Patterson DE-1061

Naval Base
Charleston, South Carolina

14 March 1970

Taratus sum-pax aut bellum
are female beasts. The Pelinicus, however, is decidedly male. I ought to know, because I "bred" him in six evenings, fins and all, from a fighting male pelican and a female opinicus. The opinicus is an obscure heraldic monster, closely related to the griffin; half-lion, half-eagle, with the neck and beak of a swan.

The Pelinicus is composed of a fighting pelican's head and bagged beak, a swan's neck, an eagle's body, legs, talons, and wings, a lion's hindquarters with finned legs, webbed feet, and a tail ending in a fish's tail fin. I depicted him "levé-en-pied," i.e., with a wide stance, the feet at the same level, the legs in a striding position, signifying a beast's deliberate, searching pace when he is on the prowl. I also provided him with a trident and a shield. His name is a contraction of pelican and opinicus.

The Pelinicus represents all the virtues of the four heraldic animals he combines: the lion is the symbol of the deathless courage of the most valiant soldier who is a foe to fear; the eagle signifies a lofty spirit, justice, magnanimity, and speedy apprehension in the service of fortitude; the swan is the ensign of the lovers of poetry and harmony; the pelican denotes self-sacrificing protection and devoted charity. Thus this combination amply symbolizes the dual mission of the USS Patterson as a submarine-hunter and protector of other vessels.

The fins and the webbed feet mark the Pelinicus as a nautical creature, as does the trident, symbol of maritime dominion, poised to spear the enemy lurking beneath the sea. The shield carried by our new heraldic monster not only symbolizes the protective part of the ship's mission, but its field "guttée-de-sang" (strewn with drops of blood) is a reminder of her lineage: the blood that was spilled by all the brave men who gave their lives serving on the previous ships named Patterson. It is also a remembrance of the blood the pelicans of the Patterson family arms are drawing for their brood. The fleur-de-lis recalls the city of New Orleans (which bears three fleur-de-lis on her shield), where USS Patterson was built, as well as
the valiant exploits of Commodore Patterson in that city's defense. Finally, the chief charged with the mullets denotes the fact that the second USS Patterson earned 13 battle stars during the Second World War, besides recalling the starred chief of the Patterson family arms.

In classical heraldry, the color combination of the blue field (the sea) and the silver Pelinicus (the ship) symbolizes "vigilance in service," while silver and blue (the chief) stands for "courtesy and discretion." The colors of the shield silver and red mean "honest boldness," and the red of the fins on the blue field signify "aptitude to reprove villany."

The charges of the ship's arms are placed on a "targe," a type of shield which was used by the nobility for their tournaments only. Since the USS Patterson had a specialized mission, it was appropriate to place the Pelinicus on a special shield. The targe was invented in Italy during the 14th century and spread all over Europe. Its hook-like cut-out (the lance rest) was used by the knight to improve his aim by guiding the lance with it.

The Pelinicus is copyrighted. He was cast in bronze on a round plaque and affixed to the ship, the legend circling the shield. This plaque is now in the maritime museum at the National Historical Park of the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston.

As motto of the USS Patterson serves: PARATUS SUM - PAX AUT BELLUM (I am prepared for peace and war). It was supplied by the ship's captain, Commander John Walden, who deserves high credit for his readiness to understand and tolerate things heraldic, as well as for his pioneer spirit in accepting an unconventional coat-of-arms for his destroyer escort.

The blazon for the arms of the USS Patterson is as follows:

"Azure, a Pelinicus levé-en-pied wings addorsed and inverted argent, armed langued finned and webbed gules, thrusting dexter a trident reversed Or, and carrying on his sinister member a shield of the second, gutté-de-sang, a fleur-de-lis gold, fimbriated sable; on a chief silver, thirteen mullets of five (3,4,6) of the field."