

Virgil Benoit on the Minnesota Flag and Seal February 7, 2023

I wrote and have spoken on the image on the flag and seal several times. In short, I have long said the image on the seal imposes a sense of victory by the people of the plow. It was created in a time when people thought more of themselves than they did of others they met. It is self-centered, and there is more to theories of thought than the last thought to be given out. The image on the seal represents the thought of the newcomer at the time. I prefer other thoughts on this issue than the one on the current seal.

Now for the motto “L’etoile du nord”. I feel more than I might know on this one, yet I feel that those who thought to use “L’etoile du nord” thought of the north star as the bright light which guided the French explorers to what is now Minnesota. For many then and since then these first explorers marked the coming of civilization. But keep in mind that the word civilization refers to a particular social order including land to be subdued—taking us back to the plow, of course. Those who supported “The bright star culture” felt that the piano, nice dishes, tea and so on were symbols of progress, good behavior, schooling. These were all symbols of social class they wanted to reflect. Today is no time if there ever was a time to forget other words and other objects of time, values and places which were hushed out as symbolized by the Indian rider and pony.

Please let us include in our thinking that the word civilization, in one of its meanings, has a word base which comes from Latin, and it means social organization with the “city” (civis) as informer of order and extender of laws over the land and people. It is the extension of the City with the land as the first to be taken as property. Other words, I can assume, were used over the land by Native Americans to describe the social order and how life was organized in Indian country. I can say for sure, by being acquainted with the language of the people called mixed bloods in the US or also Metis in Canada that traditional social orders were not dominated by the influence or map of civilization. The key word to describe what informed life was the word “country” or in French the Metis used “Le pays”. We can say the “country order” if I can call it such. The Metis who had come into being in Indian land had “uncivilized” life in many ways as reflected in their use of French. The language spoken by the old Michifs, as we used to say for the word which now is written “Metis”, was not considered civilized and it was shunned. People who lived outside of the “civilized” world, the Metis, used to say in French that they were living “a la facon du pays”, according to the ways of the country. History often reveals prejudices that we have inconsiderate of other spaces and other places reflecting values of other ways of living. Please be aware of how we portray, perpetuate, and refuse to put away.

Let’s see kinship on this and not portray someone riding off to accommodate. How do we reconcile and show tolerance, empathy, and a deep meaning of the “North star”. Let’s bring the symbolic pony back while there still might be riders of old, who recall perhaps other ways of viewing kinship with this land.

Virgil 2/7/2023