



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PREVENTIVE MEDICINE
CORNELL UNIVERSITY MEDICAL COLLEGE
1300 YORK AVENUE
NEW YORK 21, N. Y.

September 15, 1952

Mr. Frank Whitney
Surry
Maine

Dear Frank:

Mr. Carter is of course correct in stating that the U.S. Navy has a tradition that no decoration shall be placed on top of a flagpole except a ball. This tradition has been carried over from the British Navy and is based originally on a sound reason. In the days of the pirates in the 17th Century, it was necessary for sailing ships to identify friend from enemy as soon as possible. The first thing that appeared over the horizon was the top of the mast with the flag on top. The pirates used a black flag which was of course immediately identifiable. Thus, the custom arose that nothing should be placed at the top of the mast that might be confused with the British flag. This is an old tradition and not a law.

There is no law nor regulation, so far as I can discover, that requires that a weather vane, or compass, or other simple decoration may not be placed on top of a school flagpole. In fact, I saw a school flagpole yesterday in Rye, New York, which had -- 1) a compass, 2) then a ball, 3) then an arrow as weather vane, 4) then a spread eagle.

I have written to the Maine State Department of Education explaining the situation and asking for a ruling on the Surry school matter. If the ruling is unfavorable, or if the sentiment of Surry Village is strongly opposed to the Clifford Coggins Memorial, then it would be possible to remove the weather vane from the flagpole and place it on a pole on top of the school building. This would be a poor compromise but the Coggins Memorial Committee of course do not want to go contrary to wishes of the people of the town.

I am enclosing a copy of my letter to the State Commissioner in Augusta.

Yours sincerely,

Wilson G. Smillie, M. D.

WGS:wj

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Wilson G. Smillie, M. D.

Contributed to Maine Memory Network by Surry Historical Society

Date: September 15, 1952

Description: Letter from Wilson G. Smillie to Frank Whitney regarding the placement of a weathervane atop the newly installed flagpole at the Surry Elementary School.

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