

“I Pledge Allegiance...”



NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

Schoolchildren recite the Pledge of Allegiance in Albany, New York, 1942.

Before 1942, state and local laws and customs determined the proper method of saluting the flag during the Pledge of Allegiance. The most common civilian salute from 1892 to the 1930s was the “Roman salute,” which was also used by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. To distinguish the American salute from these, the “Bellamy salute” was created, which held the palm upwards.

The Bellamy salute (shown here) for the Pledge of Allegiance was adopted by a wartime Congress with the first federal Flag Law on June 22, 1942. It called for placing the right hand over the heart, then “extending the right hand,

palm upward, toward the flag at the words ‘to the flag’ and holding this position until the end, when the hand drops to the side.” Congress, however, thought this style was still too reminiscent of the Roman salute used by our European enemies. Just six months later, Congress amended the Flag Law on December 22, 1942, calling for the civilian salute that is used today, with the right hand remaining over the heart throughout the pledge. ■

EDWARD H. KNOBLAUCH