

Alaska



On 03 Jan 1959, Alaska was admitted to the union as the 49th state.

More than 30 years before Alaska was to become a state, the Alaska Department of the American Legion sponsored a territorial contest for Alaska children in grades seven through twelve. A flag was needed to represent the future state of Alaska and somebody thought it would be a good idea to tap into the creativity of these kids.

Contest rules were circulated throughout the Alaska Territory in January, 1927. The rules stipulated that the first stage of the competition would take place at a local level. Each town would set up a panel of judges that would determine the ten best local designs and forward these to Juneau where the final competition would take place. A total of 142 designs were forwarded to Juneau.

Several interesting concepts were represented, and eventually rejected, in the submissions reviewed by the Juneau Flag Committee. All of these concepts were rejected as too specific to one or another certain aspect of the vast Alaska Territory. A couple of designs centered around Polar Bears. One design displayed a Polar Bear on an iceberg. Another had a Polar Bear balancing at the top of the globe. Others depicted imagery representing the fishing and mining industries of Alaska. About 1/3 of the entries centered around the territorial seal.

The winner of the contest was a seventh grade Aleut student, thirteen year old John Bell (Benny) Benson from Chignik. He was living in an orphanage in Seward, the Jesse Lee Mission Home, at the time of the contest.

He designed the present Alaska State Flag with a blue background to represent the sky and the Forget-me-not flower. On that background were placed eight gold stars to represent the Big Dipper and the North Star. The Big Dipper forms part of the constellation Ursa Major or Great Bear; symbolizing strength.* The North Star represents the future state of Alaska, the most northerly in the Union. Benny's simple, elegant design was adopted by the Alaska Territorial Legislature in May, 1927.

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For his efforts, Benny received first prize, a gold watch that was engraved with his flag design. In addition, the Alaska Legislature awarded Benny \$1,000 toward a trip to Washington, D.C. to present the Alaska Flag to President Calvin Coolidge. Unfortunately, the trip to Washington never took place due to prior commitments of the President. Though Benny never made it to Washington, his territorial flag became the Official "State" Flag when Alaska joined the Union in 1959. The Alaska Legislature decided to apply Benny's award of \$1,000 to his education. Benny chose to study diesel mechanics.

In 1967, the state of Alaska adopted "North to the Future" as its Official State Motto linking its geographic position with the bright future prospects of the northernmost state.

In January 17, 2002, at the opening of the [Alaska State Museums exhibit](#) commemorating the 75th anniversary of the flag's adoption, Alaska Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmar paid tribute to Benny Benson.

"Benny Benson made a tremendous impact on Alaska history when he submitted his entry that featured the Big Dipper and the North Star. His story is a wonderful example of how one young person can really make a difference. The flag story continues to remind us of the importance of listening to the ideas and opinions of young people."

Benny's contribution has been honored by the city of Anchorage, where you could find yourself walking down Benson Boulevard and Kodiak, where you could find yourself walking down Benny Benson Drive. The [Benny Benson Secondary School](#), in Anchorage, is a S.A.V.E. II school (Specialized Academic and Vocational Education), specializing in a Work-Study Educational Program for High School Students.

Source: http://www.netstate.com/states/symb/flags/ak_flag.htm