

Eight Stars of Gold

The Story of Alaska's Flag



By India M. Spartz

Alaska State Museums • Traveling Exhibitions Program

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Cover: Benny Benson's artwork detail.
Alaska State Museum III-O-410

Inside Covers: *Alaska's Flag* sheet music.
Alaska State Museum TD 96-6

Words and music to Alaska's
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Introduction

The story of Alaska's flag is a unique and important part of 20th century Americana. What began in 1927 as a flag design contest resulted in the remarkable story of 13-year old Benny Benson and how his winning entry provided a flag for Alaska and a symbol of independence during the statehood campaign. Benny's design was simple yet elegant: eight stars of gold in the shape of the Ursa Major constellation (the Big Dipper) set against a deep blue backdrop representing Alaska's sky and forget-me-not flower. Benny's creation helped designate the forget-me-not as the Alaska state flower. This inspired Marie Drake to write a poem and, later, Elinor Dusenbury to set it to music and create Alaska's official song: *Alaska's Flag*.

The exhibition, "Eight Stars of Gold: The Story of Alaska's Flag" commemorates the 75th Anniversary of Alaska's flag, Benny Benson, the 1927 Territorial Flag Contest, Marie Drake's poem, and their influence on Alaska's statehood efforts. The exhibition also shows actual entries by other contestants. As part of the original 142 entries in the collection at the Alaska State Library in Juneau, these designs illustrate the ideas and creativity embodied by Alaska's youth at that time.

I would like to acknowledge the staff members at the Alaska Division of State Libraries, Archives and Museums, the Friends of the Alaska State Museum, the Kodiak Historical Society, the Alaska and Polar Regions Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, and the Anchorage Daily News, all of whom contributed to the creation of this exhibition. I would also like to thank R.N. DeArmond, Lisa VanDoorne of Alaska Children's Services, Lou Dill, ExxonMobil Corporation, Charlotte Irvin and John Gibbons of Anchorage, Alaska for their insights and assistance.

India Spartz, Guest Curator



Courtesy of ExxonMobil, Houston, Texas

The Alaska Purchase and the steps toward statehood

On October 18, 1867, the Alaska Purchase was finalized during a flag-raising ceremony in Sitka, Alaska between Russia and the United States. When the United States purchased Alaska, it was designated a military district. The Army, the Treasury, and finally the Navy administered its governmental activities, while Congress enacted legislation pertaining to Alaska. However, discussion of Alaska statehood began almost immediately when, in 1869, William H. Seward, former Secretary of State and architect of the Alaska Purchase, visited Sitka and proclaimed that Alaska would soon become a territory and eventually a state. Little did he know that statehood for Alaska would take another 89 years to achieve.

From 1867 to 1884, Congress passed a number of poorly defined laws pertaining to Alaska. This made it difficult for local authorities to enforce laws or conduct routine business transactions. For example, Alaskans could not legally marry, have valid wills, buy property or secure mining claims. These limitations prevented local residents from governing or investing in Alaska because Congress and absentee business interests controlled the economy and government. These conditions crippled Alaska's development and reinforced its colonial status.

In 1884, after protests by Alaskans over the lack of self-government, Congress passed the First Organic Act, which provided a "first-stage" of local representation by establishing a crude civil government and court system. It also gave the President power to appoint a district governor to oversee Alaska.



Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library PCA 20-23

*William H. Seward
Secretary of State, 1861-69, and
architect of the Alaska Purchase.*

LEFT: The Alaska Purchase was finalized during a flag-raising ceremony in Sitka, Alaska on October 18, 1867. Today, Alaskans observe October 18th as Alaska Day.

Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library PCA 01-2286



John Kinkead
Alaska's first District Governor, 1884-85. A former Governor of Nevada, he was appointed by President Arthur and designed a District Seal for Alaska.

The first district governor was John H. Kinkead, who administered government activities locally and designed a district seal that served as the official symbol for Alaska. The seal showed the northern lights, icebergs and Alaska Natives. Governor Walter Clark redesigned it in 1910 to reflect the importance of mining, agriculture, fisheries, fur seals and a railroad.



Courtesy: Alaska State Archives

During the early 20th century, Congress enacted legislation providing Alaskans with an improved form of self-government. In 1906, it passed a measure allowing one non-voting congressional delegate to represent Alaska. Additionally, Congress passed the Second Organic Act of 1912, changing Alaska's status from a district to a territory. This marked a turning point in Alaska's self-governance by providing for the creation of an

Courtesy: Alaska State Archives

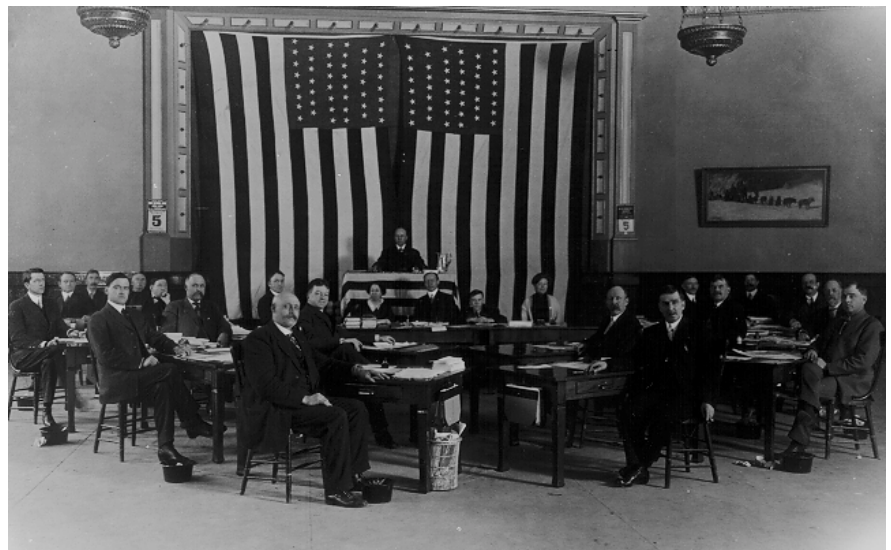


Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library PCA 01-2178

The first Territorial Legislature met in March 1913 at the Elk's Hall in Juneau, Alaska. A total of 24 members comprised the legislature: 16 members in the House of Representatives (shown here) and 8 members in the Senate.

elected legislature. The powers of the Territorial Legislature were limited, however, and it could not pass laws pertaining to divorce, the mentally ill, the disposal of land, or fish and game management. Furthermore, Congress retained the right to override any legislation it passed. Limitations aside, the designation of territorial status for Alaska provided the first step toward statehood.

The 'Twilit Twenties' and the birth of Alaska's flag

While the transition from district to territorial status enabled some local control in Alaska, many residents agreed that the only solution for independence and self-government was through statehood. This was particularly true during the 1920s, when Alaska's economy almost collapsed because of a neglectful Congress which refused to finance essential government services. As a result, Alaska's economy and population declined dramatically, sparking a depression in the territory. With the exception of laws relating to the conservation of fisheries, Congress virtually ignored any legislation pertaining to Alaska during the 1920s.

In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge appointed George A. Parks as Territorial Governor. This marked another important turning point in Alaska politics because, unlike previous appointees, Parks was a long-time resident of Alaska. A mining engineer, he was the first governor to use an airplane to travel around the territory and witnessed Alaska's economic decline firsthand. A two-term governor, he worked tirelessly to ease congressional mandates that limited the ability of local businesses and individuals to invest in the economy.

Despite politics, the nation recognized the importance of the Territory of Alaska. This was evident in 1926, when Governor Parks visited the Post Office building in Washington, DC. Standing amongst the flags of each state and territory displayed in the rotunda, the Postmaster General reminded Parks that the Territory

"Alaska is only a red-headed stepchild and the other children want its estate."

James Wickersham, Delegate to Congress, describing Alaska's plight during the 1920s.



Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library PCA 01-2291

George A. Parks
Territorial Governor 1925–1933. Born in Colorado in 1883, Parks lived in Alaska most of his life. A bachelor, he died at the age of 100 at St. Ann's Nursing Home in Juneau, Alaska.

of Alaska was not represented because it lacked a flag. Upon returning home, Parks immediately arranged for the Alaska Department of the American Legion to conduct a flag design contest for all territorial schoolchildren in grades 7–12.

In January 1927, the rules of the flag design contest were circulated throughout the territory. They directed each town to set up a local board of judges consisting of one member of the American Legion, a school superintendent, a principal or teacher, and one citizen of the town. The panel chose the ten best designs and sent them to Juneau for submission to the Final Awards Committee. If a town did not have an American Legion Post, the superintendent or schoolteacher chaired the committee and selected two local citizens to serve as judges.

The rules stated that the designs were to be submitted on cardboard, plain paper, or drawing paper, with dimensions measuring 8 1/2 x 11 inches. The designs could be presented in ink or color. If contestants used the Territorial Seal, it could be indicated as a circle and labeled accordingly. Contestants were also required to write their name, age, and address on the reverse of their design. The deadline for the entries to reach Juneau was March 1, 1927.

The first prize was a gold watch with the winning design engraved on the back, second prize was \$15, and third, \$10. Upon the official acceptance of the design by the 1927 Territorial Legislature, the American Legion would send the winner to Washington, DC to present the new flag to the President of the United States.

The First Prize Watch

The gold watch, a Howard movement, was awarded to Benny Benson in July 1927 at a flag raising ceremony. The Nugget Shop in Juneau engraved the winning design on the back. During the 1950s, the watch was placed on display at a local store in Kodiak, but was taken during a robbery. After the local paper ran a story, the watch was returned to Benny in the mail. Today, the watch is part of the Alaska State Museum collection.



Alaska State Museums III-O-354

Benny Benson's winning design

Benny Benson first learned of the flag design contest at the Jesse Lee Mission Home in Seward, Alaska. Founded in 1890 by the Woman's Home Missionary Society, the first Jesse Lee Home was located at Unalaska and provided schooling and shelter to children from the Aleutians and Bristol Bay area. In 1925, the Mission and its residents relocated to Seward.

Benny Benson was born in Chignik, Alaska to an Aleut-Russian woman and a Swedish fisherman. Upon the death of his mother in 1916, the father placed Benny and his younger brother Carl at the Jesse Lee Home.

As a seventh grader, Benny believed he had little chance of winning the design contest since he was competing with older children. However, the children were encouraged to submit entries with accompanying narratives that explained their design and what Alaska meant to them. Benny completed and submitted his design to the local panel of judges. Of the total entries submitted in Seward, the panel sent his and three others to Juneau for the final contest. Benny worried that his entry would be disqualified because he misspelled the word "strength." However, this was not the case, and his entry was submitted despite the fact that local judges placed it third in a field of seven semi-finalists.

A total of 142 entries arrived in Juneau. The contestants used a variety of designs ranging from the territorial seal to a polar bear perched on an iceberg. However, Benny Benson's outstanding design was unanimously voted the winner. It showed the constellation Ursa Major, or the Big Dipper, set against a field of blue. Benny wrote:

"The blue field is for the Alaska sky and the forget-me-not, an Alaskan flower. The North Star is for the future state of Alaska, the most northerly in the union. The Dipper is for the Great Bear – symbolizing strength (sic)."

Word of Benny's winning design arrived in the form of a telegram to the Jesse Lee Mission Home. Benny recalls that his teacher, Mrs. Hatten, was overwhelmed and could not read the telegram aloud, thus her husband made the official announcement to the students.

Benny's original entry is in the Alaska State Museum collection.



Benny Benson

Benny Benson is one of the most respected and revered people in Alaska history. As the creator of Alaska's flag, he overcame tremendous personal tragedy, and transformed hardship into triumph.

Benny's life began in the Aleutians, where he was born John Ben "Benny" Benson, Jr. in Chignik on October 12, 1913, to Tatiana Schebolein, an Aleut-Russian woman, and John Ben Benson, a Swedish fisherman. When Benny was three years old, the family home burned to the ground and, shortly afterward, his mother died of pneumonia. These tragedies forced John Benson to place Benny and his younger brother, Carl, at the Jesse Lee Home in Unalaska, while an older sister, Elsie, was sent to Oregon. The motherless boys departed Chignik on a small mail boat, the *Dora*, and arrived at the Jesse Lee Home on September 29, 1916, where they were two of 65 children. Shortly afterward, Carl fell ill and nearly died.

In 1925, the Jesse Lee Home relocated to Seward, Alaska, and Benny left the Aleutians for the first time. Benny lived at the Jesse Lee Home a total of 17 years. He was a gifted athlete and learned to read, write, cook and sew at the Home.

Benny heard about the flag design contest while in the seventh grade. His teacher, Mrs. Hatten, explained the rules and the children discussed design ideas and put them on the chalk-board. Shortly afterward, Benny began drawing a grizzly bear. Later, he said: "I wasn't satisfied with it, and, looking up at the board, I saw that one of my [other] ideas hadn't yet been taken. So, I colored a piece of paper blue and drew on it the dipper pointing to the North Star." Benny drew the Big Dipper with a narrative that explained what Alaska and the flag meant to him.

The Final Awards Committee met in Juneau and voted Benny's design the unanimous winner. In March 1927, Benny was notified, and the Territorial Legislature adopted his design as Alaska's official flag. On July 9, 1927, a ceremony was held in Seward where Benny

received his gold watch and formally raised the new flag. Benny's outstanding achievement was quickly recognized throughout the Territory. William L. Paul, Alaska Native lawyer and legislator, wrote to Benny shortly after he won:

"I had the honor of writing the bill—now a law—which made your winning design the official flag of Alaska...Altogether, this should encourage the native races in Alaska to enter competition with all others, to do so without fear, and to stick to it until we win something."

Benny left the Jesse Lee Home after graduating from Seward High School in 1932. He then went to the Aleutians, where he worked with his

A native-born Alaskan, Benny used his notoriety to serve as a 'goodwill ambassador' for Alaska.



Photo courtesy: Anchorage Museum of History and Art, #25662, Steve McCutcheon

Benny Benson is presented to the delegates of the Constitutional Convention in 1956. Left is Convention President William Egan, right is M.R. 'Muktuk' Marston.

father on a fox farm at Ugaiushak Island. Benny trapped fox and sold pelts for the international fur trade, but declining fur prices forced him to abandon furs and he moved to Seattle in 1936. In Seattle, Benny used his \$1,000 scholarship to enroll in diesel engine repair school.



Photo Courtesy: Anchorage Daily News.



Photo courtesy: Anchorage Daily News.

Benny Benson presents a signed flag to Miss Alaska, Ginny Walker, of Kotzebue while Elk's Club Exalted Ruler, Dale Robinson watches.

In 1938, Benny met and married Elizabeth 'Betty' Van Hise of Seattle. Together they had two daughters: Anna May and Charlotte. After a divorce in 1950, Benny moved with his daughters to Kodiak, Alaska where he worked as an airplane mechanic for Kodiak Airways. The skills he had

learned at the Jesse Lee Home were helpful when he became a single parent. Benny later remarked about child raising: "It was comical. I sewed for them, and did everything. No, not dresses; I ordered stuff for them, ordered it too big, and took up the hems." Benny also used his sewing skills to make autographed Alaska flags for each newly crowned Miss Alaska, legislative members, and visiting dignitaries.

Benny's father died in the late 1930s. In 1950, Benny was reunited with his sister, Elsie Benson Allen, after 30 years of separation. However, she died

shortly after their meeting. Carl Benson died in June, 1965.

Benny's health worsened and, after several years of infections and poor circulation due to an old frostbite mishap, his right leg was amputated in 1969. Despite these problems, Benny continued public appearances, and in 1972 he married a former Jesse Lee resident, Anna Sophie Jenks.

Benny was the first Alaska Native to be officially admitted to the Elk's Club in Alaska. John Gibbons of Kodiak sponsored him and recalled that Benny broke racial barriers as Elk's Lodges in the southern United States argued against his initiation because of race. Despite these protests, Benny was admitted to the Kodiak Elk's Lodge #1772 in the early 1960s, paving the way for other Alaska Natives to join the fraternal organization.

Benny Benson often said that the greatest thrill of his life was receiving a standing ovation as he was presented to the delegates of the

Alaska Constitutional Convention. In 1972, he died of a heart attack at the age of 58. Alaskans mourned his death with editorials and memorial services throughout the state. Today, Benny Benson is honored in Alaska as streets, schools, and monuments commemorate his remarkable contribution to our state.

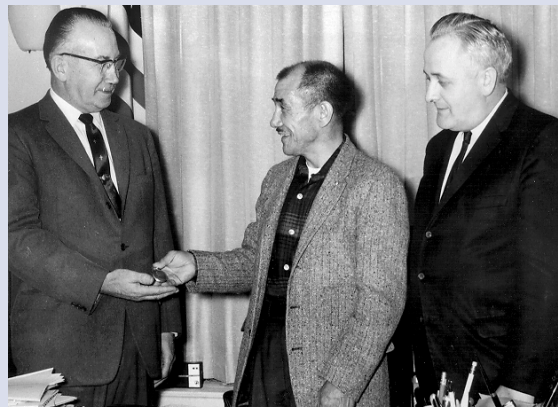
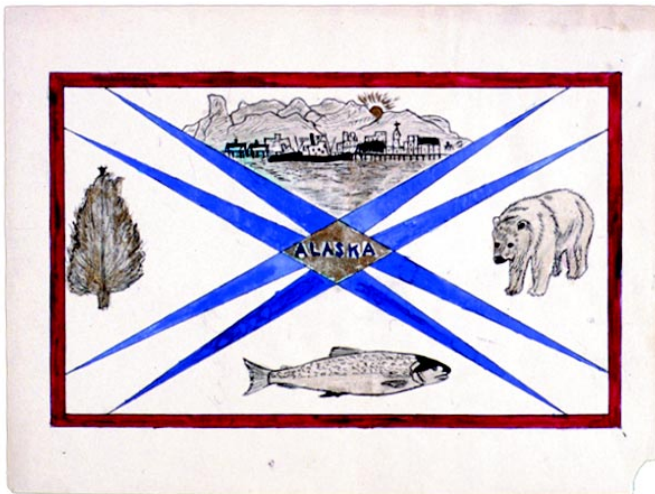
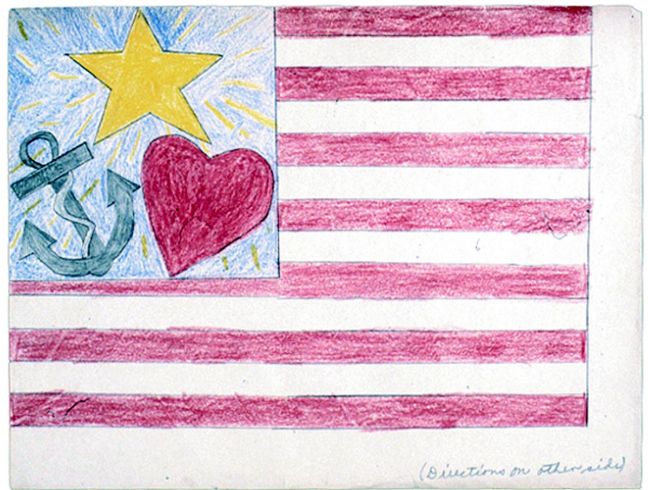


Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library, PCA 01-3250

In 1963, Benny Benson donated his first-prize watch to the Alaska State Museum. Accepting the watch is Edward Keithahn, Curator at the Alaska State Museum, while Governor William Egan looks on.

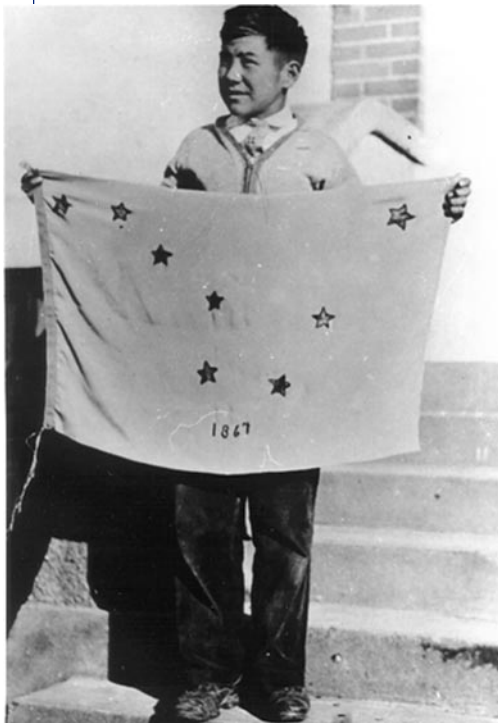


Alaska State Library MS 14-1-5-126



Alaska State Library MS 14-1-6-142

Original design entries by Raymond Wheeler, Wrangell and Mary Walsh, Nome.



Flag, Alaska State Museum III-O-3081

Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library PCA 01-1921

13-year old Benny Benson holds a handmade flag shortly after winning the flag design contest. The flag is in the Alaska State Museum collection.

According to news stories, Benny turned pale and speechless from hearing the news. Years later, Benny was interviewed and said: "I guess I was pale; I couldn't move in my seat. They closed the school that day and afterward I got a lot of publicity and mail." The attention made Benny Benson nervous, and he later said that he would hide in the woods when people came to see him at the mission. This notoriety followed him the rest of his life.

Upon the recommendation of the American Legion, the Territorial Legislature unanimously adopted Benny Benson's entry and passed an act proclaiming his design the official flag of Alaska. The act stated:

"The design of the official flag is eight gold stars in a field of blue, so selected for its simplicity, its originality and its symbolism..."

"The stars, seven of which form the constellation Ursa Major, the Great Bear, the most conspicuous constellation the Northern sky, contains the stars which form the 'Dipper,' including 'pointers' which point toward the eighth star in the flag, Polaris, the North Star, the ever constant star for the mariner, the explorer, hunter, trapper, prospector, woodsman, and the surveyor. For Alaska the Northernmost star in the galaxy of stars and which at some future time will take its place as the Forty-ninth star on our National Emblem."

Jesse Lee Mission Home



Photo courtesy: Alaska Children's Services

One of the new buildings at the Jesse Lee Home at the new location in Seward, Alaska, 1927.

The original Jesse Lee Mission Home was located in Unalaska, a small fishing village that was first occupied by the Russians in 1760. The Mission began in 1890, under the auspices of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Church. Bostonians Dr. A.W. and Elizabeth Newhall, along with several teachers, ran the mission and provided shelter and schooling to approximately 63 children from the Aleutians and Bristol Bay area.

In 1925 the students and staff of the Jesse Lee Mission Home relocated from the Aleutian Islands to a new facility in Seward, Alaska. By this time, approximately 40 percent of the children in the home had lost one or both parents to death or long-term hospitalization due to a tuberculosis epidemic in rural Alaska. The relocation to Seward took seven days by steamship. The landscape and modern facilities in Seward offered the children new experiences. For the first time, they

saw trees, which don't grow in the Aleutians, trains, automobiles, horses and even modern airplanes. The Reverend Charles and Mrs. Myrtle Hatten ran the Mission Home after its relocation to Seward.

During World War II, the Jesse Lee buildings were camouflaged with paint that showed foliage and a blend of trees by the mountains. After the Japanese invasion of Dutch Harbor and the Aleutians, the children went to a facility at Eklutna located near Anchorage for the duration of the war.

In 1964, the Good Friday Earthquake severely damaged the Jesse Lee Home, making it unsafe for habitation. Donations from public and private sources made it possible to repair some of the damage for a brief time. However, the damage eventually forced the closure of the facility. The Jesse Lee Mission Home relocated to Anchorage in the winter of 1965-66, and continues to operate today as Alaska Children's Services.



Photo courtesy: Kodiak Historical Society

Proud classmates and Benny, holding the flag, pose for this picture in 1930.



The Alaska flag was raised during a ceremony held in July 1927 at the Jesse Lee Mission Home in Seward, Alaska. "Benny Benson, a 13-year old student at the Jesse Lee Home, designer of the flag, attached it to the halyards just below the national emblem and stood at attention while the multicolored folds of Old Glory and deep violet blue of Alaska's official emblem, studded with the golden stars of the Big Dipper pointing to the North star, fluttered about him."

*Seward Gateway (Newspaper)
July 11, 1927*

With the declaration of an official flag for Alaska, arrangements were made for the Hirsch-Weiss Company of Portland, Oregon, and the National Flag Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, to manufacture replicas. The flag was dedicated on July 9, 1927, at the Jesse Lee Mission Home in Seward, where Benny also received his first prize gold watch. The legislature arranged for Benny to receive \$1,000 toward travel expenses to Washington, DC in order to deliver the flag to President Coolidge. However, the trip never transpired due to prior commitments on the part of the President. Instead of travel, the legislature decided to apply the money toward Benny's education, which he later used to pay for training in diesel mechanics.

In September 1927, Governor Parks loaned the first Alaska flag to H.J. Thompson of the Alaska Department of the American Legion. The Legionnaires took the flag, which was the only manufactured replica at that time, with them to Paris, France where it was displayed at the International American Legion Convention. The delegation left Juneau via the steamship *Yukon* and upon their arrival in Seattle, proudly displayed the flag at the Olympic Hotel. The well publicized trip included a train ride from Seattle to Chicago and then on to Washington, DC. Since President Coolidge was not available, the delegates were unable to present the flag to the nation as protocol would dictate. However, an official presentation to the President took place later with Governor Parks and Alaska's Congressional Delegate Dan Sutherland in attendance.

Alaska's flag came at a time when the Territory needed a morale boost. It is not surprising that immediately following the contest, Governor Parks received numerous flag requests from throughout the nation, thus increasing Alaska's profile to the rest of the nation. The flag also inspired Marie Drake, secretary to the Commissioner of Education, to write a poem, *Alaska's Flag*, based on Benny's narrative. The flag and poem became important symbols of independence and pride for Alaska during the mid-20th century. As the nation watched the "Roaring Twenties" abruptly end in October of 1929, Alaska began to emerge from a dark chapter in its history. The 1930s and the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt strengthened Alaska's economy. Federally-funded "New Deal" projects poured into Alaska, creating a much needed infrastructure in the Territory, and providing a foundation for the Alaska statehood campaign.

In 1938, Elinor Dusenbury composed music for Marie Drake's poem and created the song, *Alaska's Flag*. This song provided another morale boost for statehood campaigners. After years of struggle, the statehood campaign peaked in 1955, when the



Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library PCA 01-402

Marie Drake

As Secretary to the first Commissioner of Education, Marie Drake worked for the Department for 28 years. She died in Juneau on March 5, 1963.



Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library PCA 01-3831

Marie Drake and Elinor Dusenbury with Franklin Butte (at piano). In 1955, the song *Alaska's Flag* was declared Alaska's official song. Elinor Dusenbury came to Alaska with her husband, Colonel Ralph Dusenbury, where they were stationed at the Chilkoot Barracks from 1934-38.



Alaska State Museum TD 96-6

55 delegates met in Fairbanks to write Alaska's constitution. Here, the Alaska Statehood Committee gathers. Holding Alaska's flag are Senator E.L. "Bob" Bartlett (left) and Robert B. Atwood (right) and Andrew Nerland (far right). Seated from left are William L. Baker, Mildred Hermann, Frank Peratrovich, Percy Ipalook (first Inupiaq to serve in the legislature), Warren A. Taylor and Victor C. Rivers.

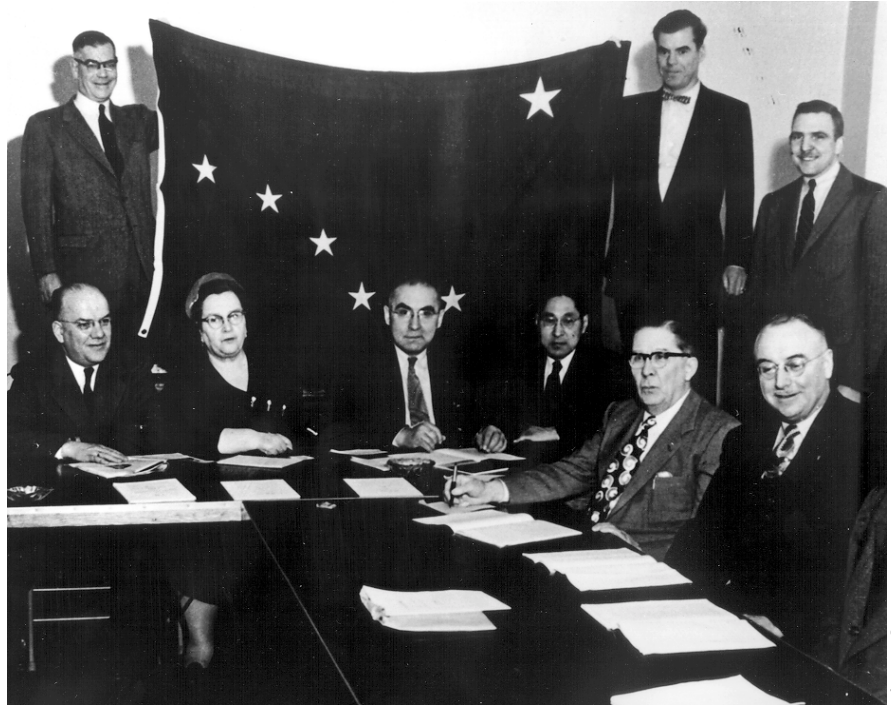


Photo courtesy: Bob Bartlett Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks, VJ Addendum Alaska, and Polar Regions Dept.

“When they sing
Alaska's Flag
 people always
 stand, and older
 ones cry when
 they come to the
 words, ‘Alaska’s
 Flag to Alaskans
 dear, the simple
 flag of the last
 frontier.’”

Elinor Dusenbury

Territorial Legislature passed a groundbreaking bill that authorized a constitutional convention with an accompanying call for the election of 55 delegates from throughout Alaska. That November, the convention was held in Fairbanks. Aside from the Governor, Benny Benson was the only other invited guest of honor at the convention. Upon his introduction at the convention, Benny stood up and was greeted by a “roaring” standing ovation. Benny later explained that, “the noise was so loud I couldn’t hear a thing; people whistled and hollered and stamped.” The convention concluded with a highly emotional crowd weeping as the Ladd Choral Group sang *Alaska's Flag*. By April 1956, the voters of Alaska approved a constitution that would take effect upon the approval of Alaska statehood by Congress. Furthermore, the forget-me-not was helpful during the statehood campaign when a group of Alaskans sent each member of Congress an artificial flower with a note that read: “We, the people of Alaska say, *Forget-Us-Not.*” Several years later, on June 30, 1958, Congress passed a statehood bill, and on January 3, 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower proclaimed Alaska to be the 49th state of

the United States. Finally, Alaska became a state of the union, transforming its great North Star into the 49th star on the national flag.

The story of Alaska's flag highlights a young boy's remarkable achievement and how he created a meaningful and enduring symbol for Alaskans during the battle for statehood. Additionally, Benny's flag inspired a poem and song that created a song of independence for Alaska: *Alaska's Flag*. These events, combined with Benny's achievement, left an indelible mark on Alaska's history and remain fundamental pieces of our heritage and culture.

*Newspapers proclaim Statehood:
This Anchorage Daily Times,
(January 2, 1959) headline
enthusiastically welcomed
statehood.*

Celebrating Statehood:

A group of statehood campaigners gather at the White House after President Eisenhower signed the statehood proclamation. Holding the flag is Robert Atwood. From the left are, Congressman-elect Ralph Rivers, Interior Secretary Fred Seaton, Senators-elect Ernest Gruening and Bob Bartlett, and former Territorial Governors Mike Stepovich and Waino Hendrickson.



Photo courtesy: University of Alaska Fairbanks, VF Addendum Alaska, and Polar Regions Dept.

*Photo courtesy: Alaska State Library
PCA 20-22*

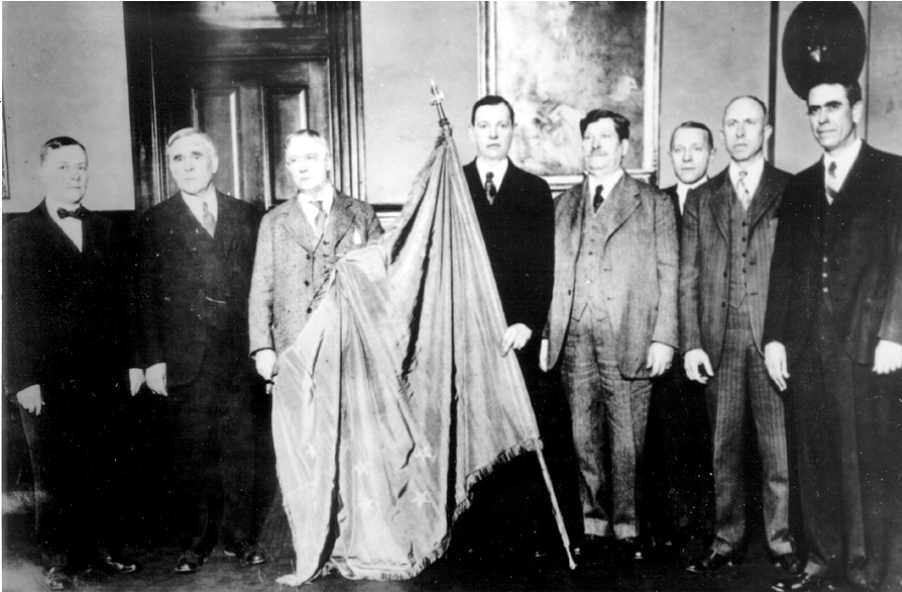
Timeline

"Alaska Purchase"
oil copy of original
"Signing the Alaska Treaty" by E. Leutze,
1867, 66" x 43"

- 1867** The Alaska Purchase
- 1869** William H. Seward visits Alaska.
- 1884** Congress passes the First Organic Act, establishing a rudimentary civil government and court system for Alaska.
- 1884-85** President Arthur appoints John Kinkead as first District Governor of Alaska. Kinkead creates the District Seal of Alaska.
- 1906** Congress passes a measure allowing one non-voting delegate to represent Alaska in Congress.
- 1910** Governor Walter Clark redesigns the Seal of Alaska to favor agriculture, transportation, mining and fisheries.
- 1912** Congress passes the Second Organic Act, changing Alaska from a District to a Territory. The act also establishes the first Territorial Legislature.
- 1913** Benny Benson is born in Chignik, Alaska to John Benson and Tatiana Sheboline.
- 1916** Benny Benson is placed at the Jesse Lee Home in Unalaska.
- 1925** President Coolidge appoints George A. Parks as Territorial Governor. The Jesse Lee Mission Home moves to Seward, Alaska.
- 1926** Governor Parks visits Washington, DC.
- 1927** The flag design contest is held. The Final Awards Committee includes seven judges: two senators and two representatives from the Territorial Legislature, and three judges chosen by the American Legion.
- May 1927** Benny Benson's winning design is adopted by the Territorial Legislature.
- July 1927** The first Alaska flag is dedicated at the Jesse Lee Mission Home in Seward, Alaska. Benny Benson receives his first-prize gold watch.



Alaska State Museum V-A-142



Gov. George A. Parks
with the Alaska flag in
Washington, D.C., 1927.

A delegation of Alaskans from the American Legion departs Juneau, taking the Alaska flag to Washington, DC and Paris, France where it is displayed at the International American Legion Convention.

Sept. 1927

Marie Drake writes a poem: *Alaska's Flag*, based on Benny Benson's narrative.

Fall 1927

Benny Benson graduates from Seward High School and leaves the Jesse Lee Home.

1932

Elinor Dusenbury writes music to Marie Drake's poem and creates the song: *Alaska's Flag*.

1938

Benny Benson and his two daughters move to Kodiak from Seattle, Washington.

1950

Alaska's Flag is adopted as Alaska's official song. By November, a Constitutional Convention is held in Fairbanks.

1956

Alaska voters approve a constitution for Alaska.

1958

Congress passes a statehood bill for Alaska on June 30.

1958

President Eisenhower signs the proclamation admitting Alaska to the Union as the forty-ninth state on January 3.

1959

Benny Benson donates his first-prize gold watch to the Alaska State Museum in Juneau.

1963

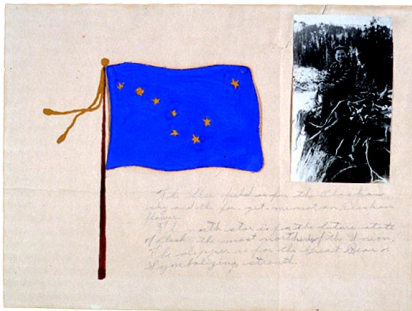
Benny Benson dies of a heart attack in Kodiak, Alaska on July 2.

1972

List of Entries

1927 Flag Design Competition

The original flag designs are preserved by the Alaska Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums in Juneau, Alaska. Featured in the exhibition are 36 original design entries from contestants from throughout Alaska. Also, featured are two additional designs submitted by Benny Benson from the Mission Territorial School (also known as the Jesse Lee Home).

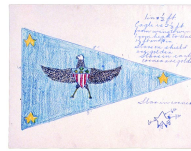


The winning design*

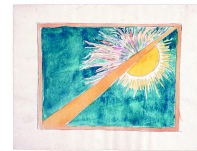
Benny Benson
Mission Territorial School
Seward, Alaska

ASM III-O-410

*The photo of Benny was added at a later date.



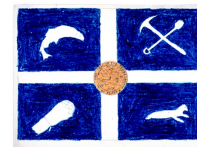
Oscar Sandvick
Petersburg, Alaska
MS 14-1-1-3



Natalia Kashevaroff
Juneau, Alaska
MS 14-1-3-42



J.W. Hatten
Mission Territorial School
Seward, Alaska
Age: 12 years
Grade: 8
MS 14-1-12



Regina Lindholm
Haines, Alaska
Age: 15 years
MS 14-1-3-50



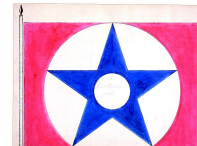
Charles Lange
Mission Territorial School
Seward, Alaska
Age: 12 years
Grade: 7
MS 14-1-2-17



Elizabeth Anne Sheldon
Haines, Alaska
MS 14-1-3-56



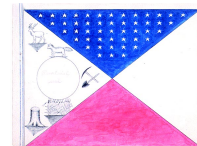
Eva Oloowsine
Mission Territorial School
Seward, Alaska
MS 14-1-2-18



Walter A. Savikko
Douglas, Alaska
MS 14-1-3-61



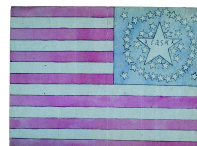
Benny Benson
Mission Territorial School
Seward, Alaska
MS 14-1-2-19



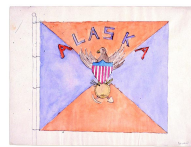
Unknown
MS 14-1-4-62



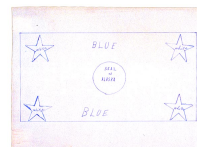
Benny Benson
Mission Territorial School
Seward, Alaska
MS 14-1-2-20



Florence Peterson
Sitka, Alaska
Age: 13 years
MS 14-1-4-66



Otto Sandbek
Seward, Alaska
MS 14-1-3-26



Robert Neil DeArmond
Sitka, Alaska
Age: 15 years
MS 14-1-4-67



Unknown
MS 14-1-3-32



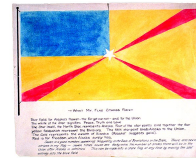
Frances Meals
Valdez, Alaska
MS 14-1-4-72



Louise Meals
Valdez, Alaska
Age: 12 years, April 1926
MS 14-1-4-74



Jim Cavanaugh
Anchorage High School
Anchorage, Alaska
Feb. 18, 1927
MS 14-1-6-102



Madeline Calkins
MS 14-1-6-133



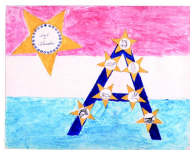
Beauford Clifton
"age next birthday
12 yrs. old."
Grade: 8
MS 14-1-4-76



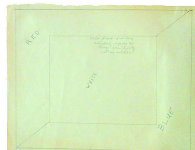
Ingeborg Puckard
Anchorage, Alaska
Age: 15 years
Grade: 8
MS 14-1-5-103



Frances Ross
Nome, Alaska
Age: 16 years
MS 14-1-6-135



Minnie M. Stensland
Ketchikan, Alaska
Age: 15 years
MS 14-1-4-82



Steve McCutcheon
Anchorage, Alaska
MS 14-1-6-106



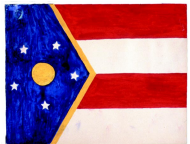
Mary Walsh
Nome, Alaska
Age: 13 years
MS 14-1-6-142



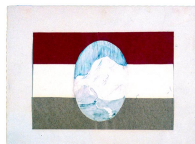
Massako Nagashima
Ketchikan, Alaska
Age: 15 years
MS 14-1-4-86



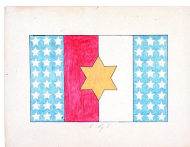
Philip J. O'Neill
Cordova Public School
Cordova, Alaska
Grade: Sophomore
MS 14-1-5-117



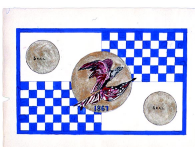
Helen Nelson,
Age: 18 years
MS 14-1-4-87



Adah Osborne
Matanuska, Alaska
Age: 11 years
Grade: 7
MS 14-1-6-122



Myrtle Wacker
Wacker, Alaska
(Ward Cove)
MS 14-1-4-89



Raymond Wheeler
Wrangell, Alaska
Age 15 years
MS 14-1-6-124



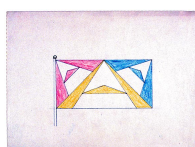
Yvonne Arkens
Ketchikan, Alaska
Age: 13 years
MS 14-1-4-90



Raymond Wheeler
Wrangell, Alaska
Age: 15 years
MS 14-1-5-126



Paul Solka, Jr.
Fairbanks, Alaska
Jan. 2, 1927
MS 14-1-5-101



Wilfred S. Gert
Wrangell, Alaska
Age: 17 years
MS 14-1-6-131

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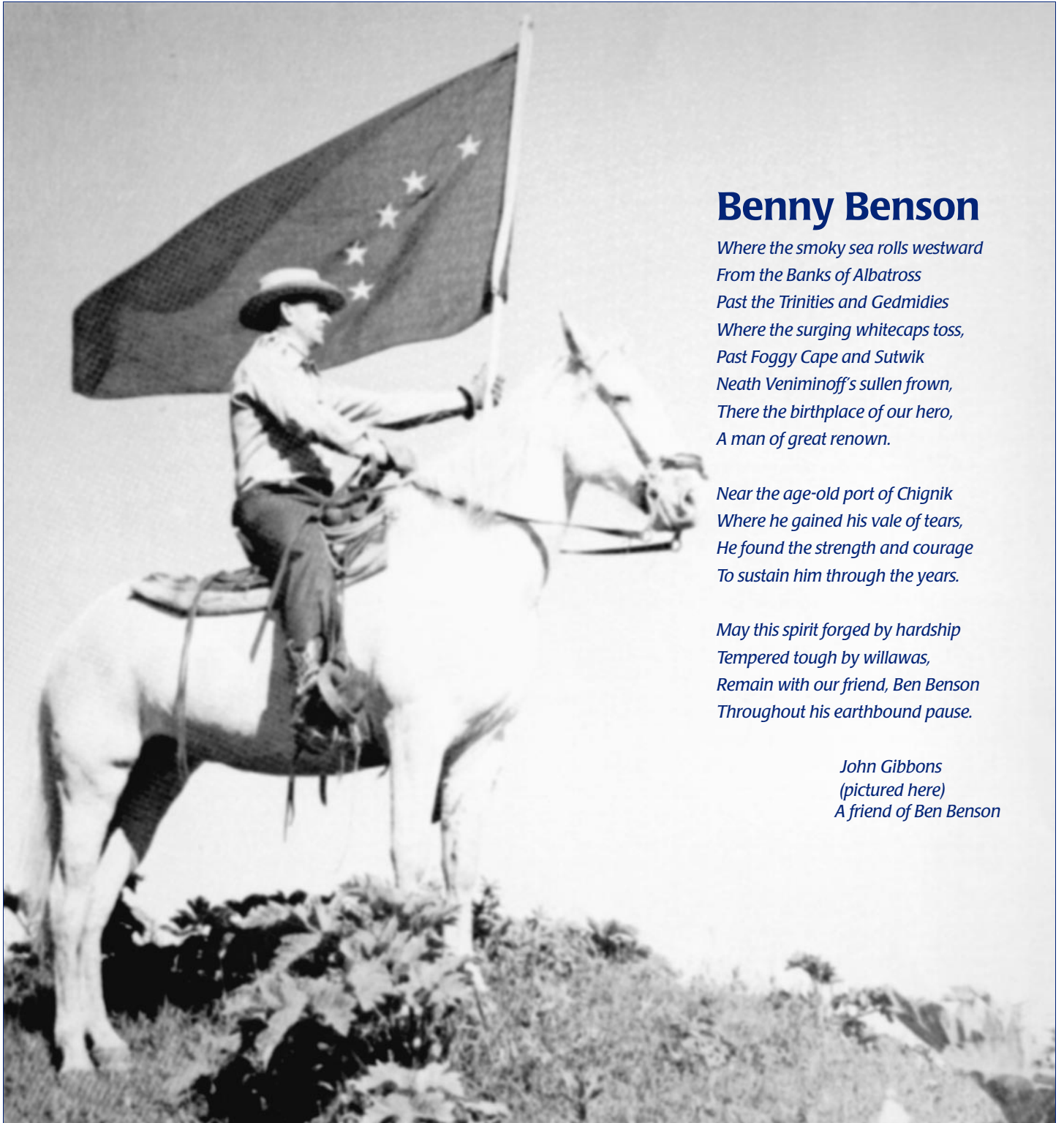
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Benny Benson

*Where the smoky sea rolls westward
From the Banks of Albatross
Past the Trinities and Gedmidies
Where the surging whitecaps toss,
Past Foggy Cape and Sutwik
Neath Veniminoff's sullen frown,
There the birthplace of our hero,
A man of great renown.*

*Near the age-old port of Chignik
Where he gained his vale of tears,
He found the strength and courage
To sustain him through the years.*

*May this spirit forged by hardship
Tempered tough by willawas,
Remain with our friend, Ben Benson
Throughout his earthbound pause.*

*John Gibbons
(pictured here)
A friend of Ben Benson*

Alaska's Flag

Words by Marie Drake and music by Elinor Dusenbury

Eight stars of gold on a field of blue—
Alaska's flag. May it mean to you
The blue of the sea, the evening sky,
The mountain lakes, and the flow'rs nearby;
The gold of the early sourdough's dreams,
The precious gold of the hills and streams;
The brilliant stars in the northern sky,
The "Bear" —the "Dipper"— and, shining high,
The great North Star with its steady light,
O'er land and sea a beacon bright.
Alaska's flag—to Alaskans dear,
The simple flag of a last frontier.