

This Day in History... January 3, 1959

Alaska Becomes America's 49th State

On January 3, 1959, Alaska joined the United States.

Most scientists believe the first people to live in America walked across a land bridge that connected Asia to Alaska more than 20,000 years ago. When Russian explorers first reached the area, they found several groups of indigenous people living there. The Inupiat lived mainly in the far north and west. They hunted whales, seals, and polar bears. To the south of them lived the Yupik. The Aleuts lived in the Aleutian Islands and the Alaska Peninsula. And along the coast to the southeast were the Tlingit and Haida.



Stamp pictures Denali (formerly Mount McKinley), the highest peak in North America.



Pictures the shape of Alaska with the Big Dipper constellation, as taken from the state flag.

Semen I. Dezhnev led a group of Russians across the narrow body of water that separates Asia from Alaska, in 1648. In 1725, Russian Tsar Peter the Great commissioned Vitus Bering of Denmark to explore the North Pacific. Bering's expedition traveled more than 6,000 miles across Russia and Asia. In 1728, they built a ship and sailed through the strait which Dezhnev had navigated. Because of fog, Bering was unable to spot North America. He gave his name to this body of water, known today as the Bering Strait.

In 1741, Bering and the Russian explorer Aleksei Chirikov led a second expedition to the Bering Strait. Bering spotted Mount St. Elias in southeastern Alaska. The expedition landed on what is now known as Kayak Island. Bering returned to Russia with sea otter furs. Within the next few years, explorers from England, France, and Spain came to the region in search of a water passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.



The state flag includes the Big Dipper to symbolize strength and the North Star for Alaska's role as the northernmost US state.



Stamp pictures the Alaska state bird and flower – the Willow Ptarmigan and Forget-Me-Not.

Fur brought Russian hunters and traders to Alaska. On the Aleutian Islands and later on the mainland, a lucrative fur trade was developed. Fur traders enslaved the Aleuts, forcing them to supply more furs. As a result, the populations of fur-bearing animals were decimated. The first white settlement in Alaska was established on Kodiak Island, in 1784. It was founded by Gregory Shelikof, who called it Russian America. Russia chartered the Russian-American Company to conduct trade in 1799. The firm's manager, Alexander Baranof, captured a town from the Tlingit and named it Novo Arkhangelsk (New Archangel), today's Sitka. This became the largest town in Russian America.

Russia signed treaties with the United States (1824) and Great Britain (1825), recognizing proper boundaries in America. The treaties gave these countries trading rights along Alaska's extensive coastline.

Russia attempted to build several industries in Alaska, including coal mining, ship building, and whaling. However, once the fur trade became less profitable, interest in the area declined. After Russia's economy was damaged by the costly Crimean War (1853-56), Russia decided to sell Alaska in 1867.

US Secretary of State William H. Seward agreed to buy Alaska for \$7,200,000 – a cost of about 2¢ per acre. Today, with the perspective of



William Seward arranged for the purchase of Alaska in 1867.

This Day in History... January 3, 1959 continued

history, Seward's purchase is seen as beneficial. However, many Americans opposed the purchase at the time. In fact, some called it "Seward's Folly", and referred to Alaska as "Seward's Icebox" and "Icebergia." However, not all Americans opposed the purchase, and Congress approved the treaty. On October 18, 1867, US troops raised the American flag at Sitka.

Alaska had no independent government for the next 17 years. The territory was administered by the War Department, then the Treasury Department, and finally the Navy Department. No attention was given to local matters. Salmon first attracted US companies to Alaska. The first cannery was built in 1878. Congress passed the first Organic Act in 1884, establishing Alaska as a distinct "civil and judicial district." Alaska was provided with a governor, a code of laws, and a federal court. However, Congress remained in control of lawmaking for Alaska.

Joseph Juneau and Richard T. Harris discovered gold in southeastern Alaska in 1880. The city of Juneau was founded in the subsequent gold rush. Gold was later discovered in the Klondike area of Canada's Yukon region. Discoveries followed in Nome in 1898 and Fairbanks in 1902. Thousands flocked to Alaska to prospect and mine for gold. Between 1890 and 1900, Alaska's population almost doubled, reaching 63,592 people.

Gold brought government attention to Alaska. A Board of Road Commissioners was created to build roads, trails, bridges, and ferries throughout the populated areas of the territory. In 1906, Alaskans were allowed to elect a representative to Congress. This representative could speak before the Congress, but could not vote. In 1912, the second Organic Act provided Alaska with a territorial legislature, with limited power.

In 1942, the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands and occupied the islands of Kiska and Attu. These islands were the only parts of North America invaded during World War II. The actions brought greater recognition of Alaska's economic and strategic importance. Thousands of workers were sent to Alaska to build and maintain military bases and installations. The Alaska Highway was completed in 1942 – its main use was as a military supply road. By 1943, US forces had recovered Kiska and Attu, and over 150,000 US troops were stationed in Alaska.

World War II changed perceptions about Alaska, and movements for statehood were initiated. Several bills were introduced between the mid-1940s and the late 1950s. In 1958, Congress finally voted to admit Alaska into the Union. On January 3, 1958, Alaska achieved statehood. It was the first new US state since Arizona in 1912.

In 1968, a giant oil field was discovered in Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Coastal Plain. This field has North America's largest oil reserves. The discovery created a gigantic source of revenue for the state. A pipeline was constructed between Prudhoe Bay and the port of Valdez to facilitate shipping oil.

Alaska continues to improve its infrastructure, updating transportation and public services. A great deal of effort has been made to manage and preserve public lands.



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of the US purchase of Alaska from Russia.



Alaska statehood stamp pictures a caribou and the Alaska pipeline.



Stamp depicts a common Alaskan scene – a bear hunting salmon in a stream.



Issued for the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Highway.



This stamp was issued months after the stamp above for a rate increase.

This Day in History... January 3, 1959

Alaska Becomes America's 49th State

On January 3, 1959, Alaska joined the United States.

Most scientists believe the first people to live in America walked across a land bridge that connected Asia to Alaska more than 20,000 years ago. When Russian explorers first reached the area, they found several groups of indigenous people living there. The Inupiat lived mainly in the far north and west. They hunted whales, seals, and polar bears. To the south of them lived the Yupik. The Aleuts lived in the Aleutian Islands and the Alaska Peninsula. And along the coast to the southeast were the Tlingit and Haida.



Stamp pictures Denali (formerly Mount McKinley), the highest peak in North America.



Pictures the shape of Alaska with the Big Dipper constellation, as taken from the state flag.

Semen I. Dezhnev led a group of Russians across the narrow body of water that separates Asia from Alaska, in 1648. In 1725, Russian Tsar Peter the Great commissioned Vitus Bering of Denmark to explore the North Pacific. Bering's expedition traveled more than 6,000 miles across Russia and Asia. In 1728, they built a ship and sailed through the strait which Dezhnev had navigated. Because of fog, Bering was unable to spot North America. He gave his name to this body of water, known today as the Bering Strait.

In 1741, Bering and the Russian explorer Aleksei Chirikov led a second expedition to the Bering Strait. Bering spotted Mount St. Elias in southeastern Alaska. The expedition landed on what is now known as Kayak Island. Bering returned to Russia with sea otter furs. Within the next few years, explorers from England, France, and Spain came to the region in search of a water passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.



The state flag includes the Big Dipper to symbolize strength and the North Star for Alaska's role as the northernmost US state.



Stamp pictures the Alaska state bird and flower – the Willow Ptarmigan & Forget-Me-Not.

Fur brought Russian hunters and traders to Alaska. On the Aleutian Islands and later on the mainland, a lucrative fur trade was developed. Fur traders enslaved the Aleuts, forcing them to supply more furs. As a result, the populations of fur-bearing animals were decimated. The first white settlement in Alaska was established on Kodiak Island, in 1784. It was founded by Gregory Shelikof, who called it Russian America. Russia chartered the Russian-American Company to conduct trade in 1799. The firm's manager, Alexander Baranof, captured a town from the Tlingit and named it Novo Arkhangelsk (New Archangel), today's Sitka. This became the largest town in Russian America.

Russia signed treaties with the United States (1824) and Great Britain (1825), recognizing proper boundaries in America. The treaties gave these countries trading rights along Alaska's extensive coastline.

Russia attempted to build several industries in Alaska, including coal mining, ship building, and whaling. However, once the fur trade became less profitable, interest in the area declined. After Russia's economy was damaged by the costly Crimean War (1853-56), Russia decided to sell Alaska in 1867.

US Secretary of State William H. Seward agreed to buy Alaska for



William Seward arranged for the purchase of Alaska in 1867.

This Day in History... January 3, 1959 continued

\$7,200,000 – a cost of about 2¢ per acre. Today, with the perspective of history, Seward's purchase is seen as beneficial. However, many Americans opposed the purchase at the time. In fact, some called it "Seward's Folly", and referred to Alaska as "Seward's Icebox" and "Icebergia." However, not all Americans opposed the purchase, and Congress approved the treaty. On October 18, 1867, US troops raised the American flag at Sitka.

Alaska had no independent government for the next 17 years. The territory was administered by the War Department, then the Treasury Department, and finally the Navy Department. No attention was given to local matters. Salmon first attracted US companies to Alaska. The first cannery was built in 1878. Congress passed the first Organic Act in 1884, establishing Alaska as a distinct "civil and judicial district." Alaska was provided with a governor, a code of laws, and a federal court. However, Congress remained in control of lawmaking for Alaska.

Joseph Juneau and Richard T. Harris discovered gold in southeastern Alaska in 1880. The city of Juneau was founded in the subsequent gold rush. Gold was later discovered in the Klondike area of Canada's Yukon region. Discoveries followed in Nome in 1898 and Fairbanks in 1902. Thousands flocked to Alaska to prospect and mine for gold. Between 1890 and 1900, Alaska's population almost doubled, reaching 63,592 people.

Gold brought government attention to Alaska. A Board of Road Commissioners was created to build roads, trails, bridges, and ferries throughout the populated areas of the territory. In 1906, Alaskans were allowed to elect a representative to Congress. This representative could speak before the Congress, but could not vote. In 1912, the second Organic Act provided Alaska with a territorial legislature, with limited power.

In 1942, the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands and occupied the islands of Kiska and Attu. These islands were the only parts of North America invaded during World War II. The actions brought greater recognition of Alaska's economic and strategic importance. Thousands of workers were sent to Alaska to build and maintain military bases and installations. The Alaska Highway was completed in 1942 – its main use was as a military supply road. By 1943, US forces had recovered

Kiska and Attu, and over 150,000 US troops were stationed in Alaska.

World War II changed perceptions about Alaska, and movements for statehood were initiated. Several bills were introduced between the mid-1940s and the late 1950s. In 1958, Congress finally voted to admit Alaska into the Union. On January 3, 1958, Alaska achieved statehood. It was the first new US state since Arizona in 1912.

In 1968, a giant oil field was discovered in Prudhoe Bay on the Arctic Coastal Plain. This field has North America's largest oil reserves. The discovery created a gigantic source of revenue for the state. A pipeline was constructed between Prudhoe Bay and the port of Valdez to facilitate shipping oil.

Alaska continues to improve its infrastructure, updating transportation and public services. A great deal of effort has been made to manage and preserve public lands.

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of the US purchase of Alaska from Russia.



Alaska statehood stamp pictures a caribou and the Alaska pipeline.



Stamp depicts a common Alaskan scene – a bear hunting salmon in a stream.



Issued for the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Highway.



This stamp was issued months after the stamp above for a rate increase.