

# 49-Star Flag Flown First On Castle Hill

**Editor's note:** The following story about the raising of the 49-star flag for the first time in the State of Alaska was written by Sitkan Alice Harrigan, who helped prepare for the event.

Gov. William Egan had been associated with the Territorial Statehood Committee and it was he who proudly stated that on July 4, 1959, the Territory of Alaska would become the 49th state.

Because it was in Sitka that the cer-

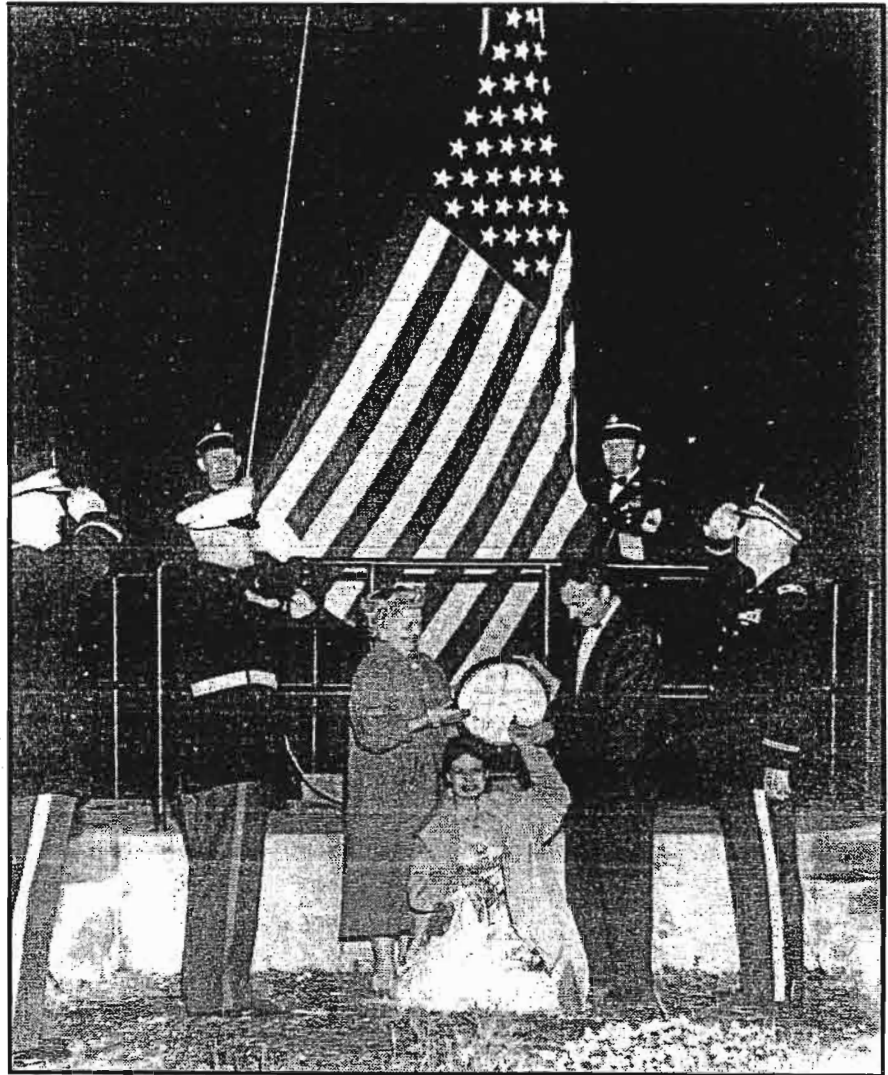
emony marking the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States had been held in Sitka, Gov. Egan determined that the first 49-star flag would be raised on Castle Hill.

Juneau residents were unhappy and insisted that the first flag should be raised in the capitol city. But the governor was adamant in his decision.

The members of the Alaska Day Committee were requested to plan the celebration. Since the celebration would be of a military nature, the committee asked Col. Willard Pearson for support and guidance. The Colonel assured the committee that he and his men would fly to Juneau aboard military planes, and the Sitka Coast Guard ship would meet them and bring them to Sitka. He added that the ship would arrive early in the morning of July 2 and the men would take charge of the military events.

By 7 p.m. July 3, Col. Pearson and his men had not arrived in Sitka and the members of the Alaska Day Committee were frantic. Two of the members were meeting with Gov. Egan and requesting guidance when Col. Pearson and Sgt. James Dye arrived. They reported that when they arrived in Juneau there had been a large delegation of Juneau folks waiting to greet them, but no Coast Guard ship. The men were informed that the

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A U.S. Army photograph documents the first raising of the 49-star flag in the State of Alaska, on July 4, 1959. Sitkans Alice Harrigan and George Beacom hold the clock while Pat Smith points to the hour — midnight. Saluting at right is Sgt. James Dye.

# Flag . . .

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ship had been called out on a search and rescue mission and would not get to Juneau until sometime the next day. For that reason, the Juneau residents had vehicles ready to take them into downtown Juneau. The men accepted the invitation and toured the city — were wined and dined by the Juneau residents and pressured to remain in Juneau and raise the first 49-star flag in the capitol city. When the men refused the invitation, they were told that Juneau would raise the first 49-star flag at 6 a.m. on July 4.

The men weren't certain whether that threat had been sincere or not, but en route to Sitka they had made a plan. They were going to raise the flag on Castle Hill at midnight and invited the governor to be present. Gov. Egan said that because all of the residents of Sitka would not be aware of the flag raising he could not participate.

Col. Pearson and Sgt. Dye swore to secrecy the two members of the Alaska Day Committee who were present during the conversation and asked for their help.

The women were to find a large clock, all of the spotlights that they could possibly locate, a Russian flag and a 49-star flag. Sgt. Dye and Col. Pearson in the meantime were going to locate the commanding officers of the other visiting military groups and invite them to participate in the midnight ceremony.

By 11:45 that night a large group of military guests had assembled on Castle Hill. There was no sound save for the waves breaking along the shore. The clock was stationed at the base of the flag pole and when the minute hand reached 12, Maj. Gen. Mudgett offered a prayer, Sgt. Dye lowered the Russian flag and raised the first 49-star American flag, as the Territory of Alaska became the 49th state in the United States.

As the men were leaving Castle Hill they discovered Gov. and Mrs. Egan standing back among the trees. Gov. Egan had tears in his eyes as he said, "It has truly come to pass — Alaska is truly the 49th state in the United States."

Because what had taken place that night was contrary to the Army regulations those present were requested not to make it known to the public. Until this time we have not. However, that was 33 years ago and this year both Mrs. Egan and Sgt. Dye will be in Sitka and they can confirm that all of the above is true.