



Alaska State History

~ In a Nutshell ~

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Alaska State History In a Nutshell
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What is the "In a Nutshell" series?

This is a series of concise, easy to understand information on many popular topics. You will find that many of products in this series can also be found as part of larger publications and/or curriculum on the publisher's website. At the end of each book, you will find a list of questions that may be used to help you review the material.

Alaska State History Lapbook Journal Study Guide



The Great Seal of Alaska

America's last frontier!

The name "Alaska" was used by the Russians to refer only to the peninsula. This name was used by the United States to refer, first to the entire territory, and then, to the State after its purchase in 1867.

The name "Alaska" is taken from the Aleut word "aláxsaq" that refers to an object to which the sea is directed, in this case the Alaska Peninsula and mainland. This is sometimes loosely translated as "great land."

People who live in Alaska or who come from Alaska are called Alaskans.



Map of Alaska – Capital, Major Cities and Rivers

STATEHOOD

On March 30, 1867, United States Secretary of State William H. Seward signed the Treaty of Cession of Russian America to the United States. The United States paid Russia \$7,200,000, about 2 cents an acre, for the territory that was to become the state of Alaska. Some Americans opposed the purchase. Derogatory nicknames such as Seward's Folly, Seward's Icebox, Icebergia, Walrussia, and Polaria were heard across the country. Many Americans favored the idea however and Congress approved the purchase. On October 18, 1867, American soldiers raised the United States flag over Sitka.

For 17 years after that, Alaska was without any formal government. First the area was presided over by the War Department, then the U.S. Treasury, and then the Navy Department. Finally, in 1884, Congress passed the first Organic Act, which defined Alaska as a civil and judicial district and allowed for a governor, a code of laws, and a federal court.

Momentum was building. Interest in the area's salmon fisheries had caused the first canneries to be built in Alaska in 1878. The discovery of gold in 1880 and the gold rush of 1897-1898 attracted thousands of people hoping to strike it rich. Alaska's population nearly doubled, in ten years, to 63,592 by 1900.



Village of Klawak - 1927
West coast Prince of Wales Island
Home of Alaska's 1st Salmon Cannery

Over the years, some small allowances were made for Alaska and in 1912 Congress passed the second Organic Act, which allowed Alaska a territorial legislature with limited powers. The first Alaska statehood bill was introduced in Congress in 1916, but it never received a hearing.

With World War II, the United States recognized a strategic importance in Alaska. In fact, Kiska and Attu islands, two islands of the Aleutian Islands chain were occupied by the Japanese.

The United States built the Alaska (Alcan) Highway in 1942 as a military supply route. In 1943, about 143,000 military personnel were stationed in Alaska. The United States recovered Kiska and Attu islands later that year and the demands for Alaska statehood increased.

Additional bills were introduced throughout the mid-1940s, but it wasn't until 1958 that Congress voted to admit Alaska to the Union. Alaska was inducted into the Union in 1959. On January 3, 1959, President Eisenhower signed the official declaration, which made the territory of Alaska the 49th state. Alaska became the first new state admitted to the Union since 1912. The headline in the *Anchorage News* read "IKE SAYS: YOU'RE IN NOW!"



Alaska (Alcan) Highway between
Edmonton, Canada and Fairbanks, Alaska

STATE CONSTITUTION

A constitution sets out the rules by which we play the game of government. Like the rules for any other game, it limits the moves available to players. It describes how the various players interact with each other, and who has more power in various situations.

The Alaska Territory Constitutional Convention adopted the Alaska Constitution on February 5, 1956. The citizens of Alaska ratified it on April 24, 1956. It became effective when Alaska was formally inducted into the Union on January 3, 1959.

PREAMBLE: *WE THE PEOPLE OF ALASKA, grateful to God and to those who founded our nation and pioneered this great land, in order to secure and transmit to succeeding generations our heritage of political, civil, and religious liberty within the Union of States, do ordain and establish this constitution for the State of Alaska.*

STATE GOVERNMENT

The government of the State of Alaska is divided into three separate yet equal entities: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. The purpose of this division is to prevent the concentration of governmental power and to provide for checks and balances.

The Executive Branch of Alaska state government is headed by an elected governor and lieutenant governor. The Governor is the chief executive officer of the state and is responsible for the faithful execution of the laws and public programs enacted and funded by the legislative branch. There are 14 state departments created to carry out these duties. The Governor appoints Commissioners to head most departments. The exceptions are the Departments of Education and Early Development and Fish and Game whose commissioners are appointed by their respective boards and commissions and then approved by the Governor. Alaskans elect a governor and a lieutenant governor to four-year terms.

The Alaska Legislature, Legislative Branch, is composed of two bodies like the United States Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Alaska Legislature is responsible for making the laws in Alaska and for raising and distributing the money necessary to run the state government. The Alaska State Legislature includes a Senate and House of Representatives.

Representatives in Alaska each represent people in a specific area of the state. These areas are called house districts. There are currently 40 men and women representing 40 House districts in the Alaska House of Representatives. Each representative serves for a period of two years in the House of Representatives, after which he or she must run for re-election.

Senators in Alaska each represent people in a specific area of the state. These areas are called Senate districts. There are currently 20 men and women representing 20 Senate districts in the Alaska Senate. Each senator serves for a period of four years in the Senate, after which he or she must run for re-election.

Legislative Process: The legislative branch of government is responsible for making and maintaining laws within their jurisdiction. United States representatives and senators, federal

legislators, are responsible for laws at the national level and state legislators are responsible for laws at the state level. A law begins as an idea that is introduced to legislators as a bill by one or more legislators. The bill then goes through the legislative process to become a law. During this process the bill may be changed. Not all bills become law.

When the legislature is meeting, it is said to be "in session." Most years the Legislative session begins meeting (convenes) on the second Monday in January. But, in the year following a gubernatorial (governor election) election, the legislature convenes on the third Monday in January unless that happens to fall on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, in which case it convenes on the Tuesday after. Session ends (adjourns) after a period of 120 days. In other words, Alaska legislators meet in January for a period of 120 days each year.

The Judicial Branch of Alaska state government consists of three separate entities: the Alaska Court System, the Alaska Judicial Council and the Alaska Commission on Judicial Conduct. There are four levels of courts in the Alaska Court System, each with different powers, duties and responsibilities. Alaska has a unified, centrally administered, and totally state-funded judicial system. Municipal governments do not maintain separate court systems.

The four levels of courts in the Alaska Court System: the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, the Superior Court and the District Court. The Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals are Appellate courts, while the Superior and District Courts are Trial Courts. Jurisdiction and responsibilities of each level of court are set out in Title 22 of the Alaska Statutes.

The Supreme Court and the Superior court were established in the Alaska Constitution. In 1959, the legislature created a district court for each judicial district and granted power to the Supreme Court to increase or decrease the number of district court judges. In 1980, the legislature created a Court of Appeals.

The chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court is the administrative head of the Alaska Court System. An administrative director is appointed by the chief justice with concurrence of the Supreme Court. The director supervises the administration of all courts in the state.

In rural areas of the state where full-time Superior or District Court judges are not required, magistrates preside over District Court matters and may be the sole court officer in a village court location. Magistrates are appointed by the presiding judge in their judicial district and need not be lawyers. Many magistrates are Alaska Natives.

Alaska Tribal Courts operate at the village level. They have a shorter history and less formal structures than their counterparts in other parts of the U.S. Two primary areas of Alaska Tribal Court activity are Indian Child Welfare Act cases and customary adoptions. Tribal Courts or village councils may also hear cases about public drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and minor juvenile offenses, and may impose fines, community work service, alcohol treatment, or other conditions.

Local Government/Boroughs

The United States Constitution does not define local government. Instead, this function is left up to the states. All but two of the states are divided into counties. Alaska is divided into boroughs and census districts and Louisiana is divided into parishes.

Two basic forms of local government exist in Alaska: the city and the borough. Because it is extremely large and sparsely populated, Alaska is divided into a group of boroughs and geographical census areas. The borough is similar to the areas referred to as counties in most other states. Governing responsibilities for boroughs are similar to counties.

Alaska is divided into 16 boroughs and 11 geographical census areas.

U.S. CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

The legislative branch of the United States government makes laws for our nation and raises and distributes money to run the United States government. The most evident part of the legislative branch is the United States Congress. Congress is divided into two parts, called houses. The two parts are the Senate and the House of Representatives. Congress is referred to as a bicameral body because it is made up of two houses. The Latin roots of the word bicameral, "bi" and "cameral," mean two chambers or rooms. Members of the Senate are called Senators and members of the House of Representatives are called Representatives. Senators and representatives serving in these two bodies are sometimes referred to as congressmen, or women, and sometimes as legislators because their business is to legislate or make laws. The role of the legislative branch is defined in the United States Constitution.

Each state elects people to represent them in the United States Congress in Washington, DC. The citizens of each state elect two senators to represent them in the Senate. They also elect representatives to represent them in the House of Representatives. The number of representatives each state sends to the House of Representatives is not a specific number like the Senate, but is based on the population of the state. The people, that are elected to represent the state's citizens in the United States Congress, are referred to as the congressional delegation.

There are 100 senators in the U.S. Senate. Each is elected to a term, in the Senate, of six years. There are 435 representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives. Each is elected to a term, in the "House," of two years.

The citizens of Alaska elect two people, like every other state, to represent them in the Senate and one person, based on Alaska's current population in the most recent federal census, to represent them in the House of Representatives.

STATE SEAL

The official state seal of Alaska was originally designed in 1910 when Alaska was still a territory and not a state. The official seal is an elaborate representation of the state's natural resources and economic assets.

The seal is 2 1/8 inches in diameter, and consists of two concentric circles surrounding intricate detailed images. The outer circle contains the words "The Seal of the State of Alaska" and two images, a seal and a fish, representing Alaska's abundant marine wildlife.

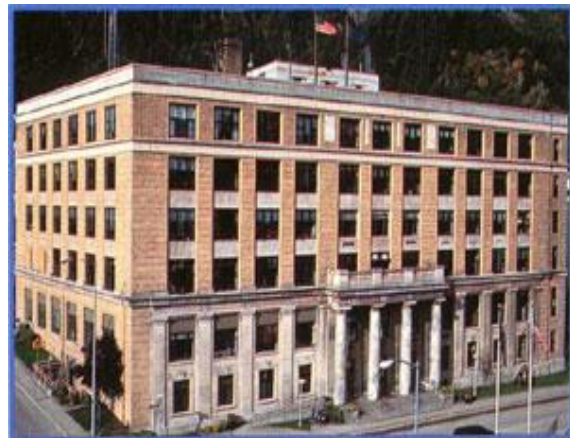


The inner circle shows the mix of Alaska's natural and industrial wealth. The Northern Lights radiate over the top of majestic mountains. Sailing ships navigate the waters. Industry and rail transportation, timber production, and agriculture are all shown on the seal. Abundant natural resources, and bustling economic activity are the themes that burst to life on Alaska's splendid seal.

STATE CAPITAL (Juneau, Alaska)

ALASKA CAPITOL BUILDING

- The United States Congress authorized the construction and an initial amount of money for the capitol building in 1911, but construction did not begin until 1929.
- Territorial Governor George A. Parks broke ground for the new capitol on September 18, 1929.
- Construction on the capitol building was finished in 1931, 28 years before Alaska became a state in 1959. Today the Alaska Capitol houses the offices of the state legislature, the governor, and the lieutenant governor.
- Construction is brick faced reinforced concrete. The lower facade is faced with limestone. The limestone and marble used in the four columns of the portico and in the lobby came from Prince of Wales Island in southeast Alaska.
- A replica of the Liberty Bell, given to Alaska as part of a promotional campaign for U.S. Savings Bonds, stands in front of the building.



STATE MOTTO

“North to the Future”

The United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867. In 1963, the Alaska Centennial Commission was organizing for the celebration of the event in 1967. In preparation, they sponsored a contest to come up with a centennial motto that would express the quality of the state. They offered a \$400.00 prize to the winning entry. In December 1963, the commission announced that they had selected Juneau newsman Richard Peter's suggestion, *North to the Future*.

The motto represents a forward-looking optimism, a state of promise. Richard Peter is quoted that the motto "...is a reminder that beyond the horizon of urban clutter there is a Great Land beneath our flag that can provide a new tomorrow for this century's 'huddled masses yearning to be free.' "

The Alaska Legislature adopted *North to the Future* as the official motto of Alaska in 1967, during Alaska's Purchase Centennial.

STATE FLAG

Alaska's state flag features the Big Dipper (*Ursa major* or Great Bear constellation) as a symbol of strength, and *Polaris* (the North Star) as a symbol of Alaska's northern location and "*the ever constant star for the mariner, the explorer, hunter, trapper, prospector, woodsman, and the surveyor...*" (quote from legislation). The blue background represents the sky, sea, lakes, and wildflowers of Alaska (the blue alpine forget-me-not is the state flower of Alaska).



The Alaska state flag (selected for its simplicity, its originality, and its symbolism) was created by Benny Benson (John Bell Benson), a 13 year old 7th grader from an orphanage in Seward, Alaska. Seward honors him with a monument on 3rd Avenue. Alaska's state song is titled "Alaska's Flag."

The North Star is also found on the state flag of Maine. The Big Dipper constellation also contains "The Delaware Diamond" (the state star of Delaware).

STATE NICKNAMES

The Last Frontier

Alaska, admitted as the 49th state to the union is thought of as "America's Last Frontier" because of its distance from the lower 48 states and because of its rugged landscape and climate. This remote and rugged perception is evidenced by the fact that only about 1/3 of the state has been organized into political units; 13 boroughs (similar to counties) are defined.

Land of the Midnight Sun

This nickname refers to Alaska's northern locations where, for a period of time, in the summer, the sun never completely dips below the horizon. The sun is visible at midnight. Parts of Alaska are bathed in 24 hours of daylight. In Barrow, the sun doesn't set for 84 days.

Seward's Folly

When the agreement to purchase the Alaska territory from Russia was struck in 1867 by Secretary of State William H. Seward, there were many in the lower 48 states who looked upon the deal with skepticism and were critical of the secrecy that had surrounded it and of the high price tag. Though Seward finalized agreement with Russia in March, it was a long and bitter battle to get final Congressional approval for the purchase and then get Congress to approve the money for the purchase. During this period, critics of Seward's agreement to purchase the Alaska territory from Russia called the plan referred to the plan as "Seward's Folly." Congress, finally relented and on October 18, 1867, in Sitka, the Imperial Russian Flag was lowered and the Stars and Stripes were raised.

Seward's Ice Box

This is another derisive name given to the Alaska territory during the battle between Secretary of State William H. Seward and the United States Congress over the purchase of the land from Russia. Other satirical names were "Icebergia," "Polaria," and "Walrussia." Critics of the purchase also chastised the President of the United State, Andrew Johnson, by referring to the Alaska territory as "Johnson's Polar Bear Garden."

STATE BIRD

Willow ptarmigan in summer plumage



Molting willow ptarmigan, nearly white for winter



The willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*) was designated the official state bird of Alaska in 1955.

There are three kinds of ptarmigan and all can be found in Alaska - the willow ptarmigan and rock ptarmigan (which are also found in Scandinavia, Russia, and northern Eurasia), and white-tailed ptarmigan (found only in North America).

The famous red grouse of Scotland is a race of the willow ptarmigan.

Ptarmigan are arctic grouse. The willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*) changes color from light brown in summer to snow white in winter for effective camouflage from predators. Another distinctive feature is its feathered toes. In winter months the willow ptarmigan eats mosses and lichens, willow buds and twigs, a little birch; seeds and berries when available. In summer their diet expands to vegetable matter and occasionally caterpillars or beetles.

Ptarmigan are sociable in winter and usually feed and roost in the snow close together. In spring flocks of several thousand sometimes appear en route to their breeding grounds. These huge flocks rapidly disperse as summer areas are reached and cocks demand elbow room for their share of the tundra.

Below, you will find 15 general questions to help review what you have learned. Use the following page(s) for documenting your answers. Older students may choose to write a State Report as well.

Review Questions:

1. List the states and/or bodies of water that border this state.
2. What was the date of statehood?
3. What is the state capital?
4. What is the state motto?
5. Name at least one state nickname.
6. Describe the state flag.
7. What is the state bird?
8. What is the state flower?
9. List at least 5 other state symbols.
10. Describe this state's government.
11. Name the major imports and exports for this state.
12. Describe the weather and climate in this state.
13. List at least 5 famous people from this state.
14. Describe at least 5 significant events in this state's history.
15. What other interesting information have you learned about this state?

Answers to Review Questions:

