

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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History of the Bear Flag

"The Grizzly Bear," the official publication of the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, told its readers in a recent issue that a bill had been signed by Governor Warren making the California Grizzly bear the State animal. The bill also puts a picture of what the bear should look like right into the law books. As a result flag manufacturers will have no excuse in the future to produce the California Bear Flag with bears that look like wolves or worse.

California already has a State fish, the Californian golden trout; a State bird, the California valley quail; a State tree, the California redwood, and a State flower, the California poppy.

Also of interest to all Californians is Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 56, recently adopted by the California Legislature, relative to instruction in the Bear Flag history and the designation of Bear Flag Day, which reads as follows:

"Whereas there are many new residents of this State having no knowledge of the history of the Bear Flag of California; and

"Whereas, the Bear Flag stands as a symbol and reminder that the pioneers not only won the independence of California as a republic so that it could join the Union of States, but also supplied the wealth in gold which made possible the preservation of that Union; and "Whereas, the children of this State, as its future leaders, should be taught the history of the Bear Flag; now therefore, be it

"Resolved, that the Chief Clerk of the Assembly is directed to transmit copies of this resolution to Roy E. Simpson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Roger H. Sagouspe, chairman of the Flag Observance Committee of the Grand Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden West."

It was Roger H. Sagouspe who prepared the resolution embodying four points: 1. To study the history of the Bear Flag in the schools; 2. To set June 14 as Bear Flag Day; 3. To have a scroll about the Bear Flag and send it to all schools and cities; 3. To fly the Bear Flag alone with the American Flag on all holidays.

The Bear Flag Monument at Sonoma, where the first Bear Flag was raised over the California Republic, June 14, 1846, was dedicated June 14, 1914, and was sculpted by John MacQuarrie. It stands on a 40-ton pedestal of rough-hewn granite, on the front of which is a bas relief in bronze depicting the raising of the first Bear Flag.

The inscription on the plaque reads:

"This monument was erected by the Native Sons of the Golden West and the State of California to commemorate the raising of the "Bear Flag" on this spot June 14, 1846 by the Bear Flag party and their declaration of the freedom of California from Mexican rule. On July 9, 1846, the Bear Flag was hauled down and the American Flag here raised in its place by Lieutenant Joseph W. Revere, U.S.A., who was sent to Sonoma from San Francisco by Commander John B. Montgomery of the U.S. sloop of war "Portsmouth," following the raising of the American Flag at Monterey July 7, 1846, by Commodore John Drake Sloat."

The centennial celebration of the raising of the Bear Flag at Sonoma was held in that city June 14, 15 and 16, 1846. Not far away from Sonoma is Fort Ross, where the Russian Trading Company flew its flag as an outpost of the Russian Empire from 1809 to 1841.

That Russian flag and the Bear Flag are two of eight flags that have flown over California in these last three centuries. Cabrillo raised the Spanish flag in 1542; and Sir Francis Drake the English flag in 1579. The flag of the short-lived Mexican Empire under Iturbide flew in 1822; of the Mexican Republic eight months later; of a raiding party from Buenos Aires in 1816; and finally the beloved Stars and Stripes of the United States was raised in 1846.