



Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott  
STATE OF ALASKA

Why I Love Alaska

By Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott

Governor Bill Walker issued a proclamation designating 2017 as a “Year of History and Heritage” in recognition of Alaska’s sesquicentennial — the 150th year since Russia ceded its possessions and interests in Alaska to the United States. Governor Walker’s proclamation encourages all Alaskans “to study, teach, reflect upon our past, and apply its lessons to a brighter, more inclusive future.”

Our goal for this coming year of History and Heritage is to be inclusive of all Alaskans — the indigenous, the native born, and those who have chosen to move here and make their lives as our neighbors.

During 2017 events and projects will be presented for the enjoyment and education of Alaskans, including theatrical plays and special curriculum for school children; panel discussions by historians about the causes and consequences of the Treaty of Cession with Russia; a traveling exhibit of the original painting depicting the Treaty of Cession negotiations; special events commemorating the 150th anniversary; and a magazine, to be printed and distributed by Alaska Dispatch News, that will include brief essays (150 words or less) from 150 Alaskans on the theme, “Why We Love Alaska.”

I’m sure we share many of the same reasons we love Alaska — its scenic splendors, recreational pleasures, unique history, career opportunities, and because, for most of us, Alaska has proven so hospitable to raising our families in safe, enriching communities.

At the core of our love of Alaska is that this is our home. For many of you who have moved out of state, you retain your love of Alaska. Home truly is where our hearts reside.

For all of the above, I love Alaska. But more particularly I love and honor Alaska for giving me and so many of my family, friends, and colleagues opportunities we were unlikely to have found elsewhere. In regards to those of us who are Alaska Natives, we take great pride that our predecessors took it upon themselves to win the rights and responsibilities we enjoy today.

There is another perspective, one of resentment, disappointment, and confusion about why so many Alaskan are bound by poverty, discrimination, and exclusion. I grew up with plenty of that: alcoholism cast its dark shadow on my family and friends, poverty crushed the spirits of far too many people I have known, and Alaska Natives remain at the top of all measures of social injustice. Let us all accept the challenge before us: to make Alaska an ever-more equitable society.

In picking out one of the many, many reasons I love Alaska, in less than 150 words, I offer this:

My friend, Dr. Walter Soboleff

He was born in November 1908 in the tiny Tlingit village of Killisnoo. Educated in Russian Orthodox and Protestant boarding schools, and at a Midwest college where he was ordained a Presbyterian minister, Walter retained fluency in Tlingit and deep ties to his cultural traditions. With the exception of his college years, Walter lived in Alaska until his passing in 2011.

From the time of his birth, 14 years would lapse before Alaska Natives attained status as citizens. He lived 36 years before he could be assured entry to commercial establishments, and for most of his life expressions of crude prejudice were common. Yet throughout his 102 years, Walter radiated dignity, good will, and love. Truly a wise man, his friendship enriched my life and the lives of so many others. Being the man he was, Walter Soboleff helped make a brighter and more inclusive future for all Alaskans.

For more information, see:

[dnr.alaska.gov](http://dnr.alaska.gov) for “150th Anniversary” information and “statewide calendar of events.” For Sitka activities, go to: [alaska150.com](http://alaska150.com)

[I invite my fellow Alaskans to share why we love Alaska — in 150 words or less — by emailing to my office through [gov.alaska150@alaska.gov](mailto:gov.alaska150@alaska.gov), who can also provide further information.]

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Byron J. Halverson". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.