

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Benson, John Ben, 1913-1972

Benny Benson Alaska Flag Collection

MS 4-37-23

1 Folder
b&w photographic print
Color photograph
Sheet music
4 postcards
Article

Processed by: Alea Oien, Apr. 2009
Revised by: Anastasia Tarmann
Revised by: Jacki Swearingen, Feb. 2017

ACQUISITION: The collection was donated by Charlotte (Benson) Irvin to the Alaska State Library Historical Collections and is accessioned as 2002-006.

ACCESS: The collection is unrestricted.

COPYRIGHT: Request for permission to publish or reproduce material from the collection should be discussed with the Librarian. Photocopying does not constitute permission to publish.

PROCESSING: This collection has been described at the item level. All items have been placed in mylar and into a pH-neutral folder. 2 b&w photographic negatives, corresponding to MS 4-37-23-1, were sleeved and placed in the negative file cabinet in the cooler in the vault.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Ben "Benny" Benson (1913-1972) designed Alaska's flag at age 13. Benny received news that his design of eight gold stars on a blue background won a contest sponsored by the American Legion in 1927. He was attending the Jesse Lee Methodist Mission home and school in Seward at the time. Benny's flag design earned him an inscribed watch, a \$1,000 scholarship to the school of his choice, and was adopted by the Territorial Government and the State of Alaska as the official flag.

Benny was born in Chignik, Alaska, to an Aleut-Russian mother and a Swedish fisherman father. His mother died of pneumonia when he was three years old. His father sent him and his younger siblings to the Mission located at Unalaska. In 1925 the Mission moved to Seward, Alaska.

Benny's father purchased Ugaiushak Island where he and Benny trapped blue foxes. The fur market crashed in 1934. In 1938 Benny moved to Seattle and used his scholarship to attend diesel school. While living in Seattle he married and had two daughters, Charlotte Benson Irvin and Anna Mae [May] Benson Bell. He ran diesel tenders and during the wartime he helped build Coast Guard picket boats in a Kirkland, Washington, shipyard. He then raised mink for several years before returning to Kodiak, Alaska, with his daughters. He fished for a year or so and then learned airplane mechanics. Benny donated the watch he won in the flag contest to the Alaska State Museum in 1963. [From *Ben Benson, Designer of Alaska's Flag Tells of Early Life in the Aleutians*, by Miriam J. Angell, June 27, 1961].

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

Biographical article, Benson family photo, and postcards of the Jesse Lee Home. Lyrics and music of Alaska Flag song; photograph of composer Marie Drake.

SUBJECTS

Alaska's flag, Alaska's Flag song, Benny Benson, Marie Drake

INVENTORY

Folder 1 of 1

1. b&w photograph of Benny Benson with daughters Charlotte and Anna May.
 - 1a. [Photocopy of original of photograph 1 and verso notes] Charlotte, Anna May, ~~1954~~ 1952?
2. "This is the new building - or in other words the new dining room & kitchen, bakery -

etc." [Jesse Lee Home building; b&w postcard]

3. "This is what Jesse Lee Home looks like at present. Isn't it pretty? Seward. McNeese. [b&w postcard]
4. Unalaska, Alaska, June 25th, 1915. [b&w postcard]
5. No. 508 Alaska Flag [color postcard with a picture of Alaska's flag and the verses to the Alaska's Flag song]
6. Juneau, wrote Alaska flag poem, Marie Drake 1959 [color photograph]
7. [Sheet music for the Alaska's Flag song by Marie Drake and Elinor Dusenbury]
8. "*Ben Benson, Designer of Alaska's Flag Tells of Early Life in the Aleutians*", by Miriam J. Angell, June 27, 1961 (5 pages)