

CALIFORNIA'S LEGISLATURE

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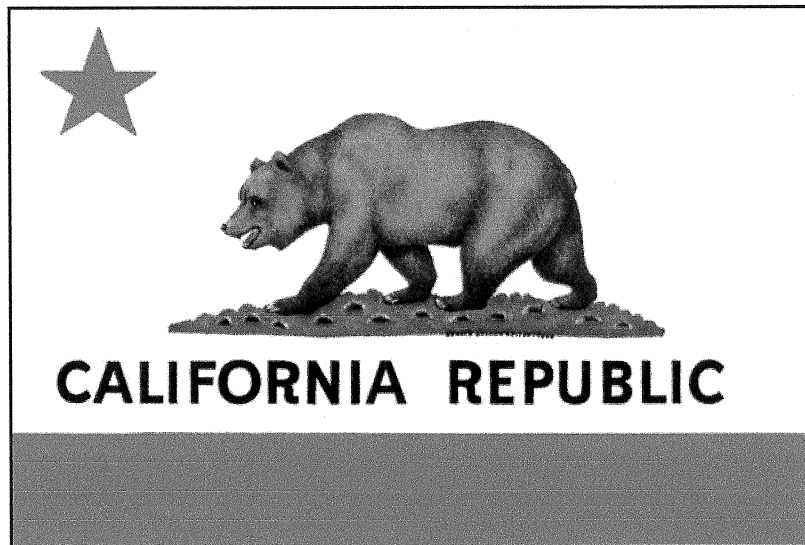
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State Flag

It is generally accepted that the “Bear Flag” was raised over Sonoma on June 14, 1846. This banner was carried by a small number of disgruntled Americans living in the north central part of California, who marched on that town and, in friendly fashion, made a prisoner of Mariano G. Vallejo, the Mexican commandant. A member of the group, William B. Ide, issued what became known as Ide’s Proclamation, which declared California to be a Republic independent of Mexico.

The color of the flag—white—symbolizes purity, and the red in the star and bar, courage. The grizzly bear, regarded as the possessor of great strength, signifies this quality. The star denotes sovereignty, emulating the Lone Star of Texas.

William L. Todd, credited with the actual making of the original flag, wrote that a piece of new unbleached cotton domestic with four-inch stripes of red flannel attached to its lower side was used, that a star was placed in the upper left-hand corner of the flag, and a grizzly bear passant was placed in the center. Beneath the bear were the words “California Republic.”



The original Bear Flag was preserved for many years in the offices of the Society of California Pioneers at San Francisco, but was destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906.

In 1911, the Legislature adopted the Bear Flag as the State Flag of California.⁷

⁷ *Statutes of 1911*, Chapter 9. See *Government Code*, Section 420. “This bill sets forth in the statutes a legal description of the Bear Flag of the State of California. There never has been legislative determination of the specifications for the Bear Flag. Each manufacturer uses his own idea as to how the Flag should look. As a result, there are State Flags with bears that sometimes look like hogs, sometimes like wolves and sometimes like a combination of both. This bill will prescribe specifically how the bear shall be portrayed and also the specific colors of the Flag which shall be included in Flags manufactured hereafter.

“The bill also establishes the California grizzly bear (*Ursus californicus*) as the State Animal. The bill also sets forth the botanical names of the two species of redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*, *Sequoia gigantea*) which shall be considered the official State Tree.”—Statement by Mr. Charles Edward Chapel relative to Senate Bill No. 1014, *Journal of the Assembly*, June 2, 1953, p. 4990.

Rumors of war, fears of American domination by native Californians, and the dissatisfaction of immigrant settlers with Mexican rule finally exploded into open hostility, culminating in the Bear Flag Revolution.⁴

The Bear Flag Revolution

On the morning of June 14, 1846, a group of American settlers, numbering from 32 to 35, unaware that a state of war existed between the United States and Mexico, captured General Mariano G. Vallejo, Mexican Comandante for Northern California, and took possession of the Pueblo of Sonoma.

William B. Ide, with the approval of the group, issued what has come to be known as Ide's Proclamation, the substance of which was to proclaim California independent of Mexico, under the title "California Republic."

The United States and Mexico had been at war since May of 1846, but the news did not reach California until several weeks later. On July 7, 1846, American marines and seamen under the command of Commodore John D. Sloat raised the American Flag over the Port of Monterey, and a courier was dispatched to San Francisco where, two days later, Commander John B. Montgomery took possession of San Francisco for the United States.

On the same day (July 9), the Bear Flag was lowered at Sonoma by Lieutenant Joseph Warren Revere, the grandson of the revolutionary patriot Paul Revere, and the Stars and Stripes unfurled in its stead. Thus ended the Bear Flag Revolution—less than four weeks after its beginning.⁵

The Admission of California

California⁶ was admitted into the Union on September 9, 1850, as a free state,⁷ and without ever having been a territory.

This great national and historical event was the result of a peculiar situation, due, partly, to the tremendous increase in population in California within a year's time (caused by the Gold Rush of 1848–1849) and to a compromise made by Congress in the Clay Omnibus Bill⁸ which, among other items, included the admission of California as a state.

The debates in Congress on the admission of California were intense and prolonged. The first compromise resolution by Henry Clay was introduced in the United States Senate on January 29, 1850, and President Zachary Taylor presented copies of California's Constitution to Congress on February 13.⁹ Many amendments, motions, proposals, and compromise offers were submitted and rejected.

The principal objections raised by opponents to the admission of California were to its acceptance as a free state, the extensiveness of its boundaries, the irregularity of the manner in which its Constitution was

⁴ For a short history of the Bear Flag Revolution, see *California Blue Book 1954*, pp. 9–10.

⁵ For brief descriptions of the Bear Flag, see *California Blue Book 1958*, p. 78; Joseph Warren Revere, *Naval Duty in California*, Bio Books, Oakland, California (1947 Centennial Edition); and, *Appendix J, infra*, p. 283; *Appendix O, infra*, p. 316.

⁶ For origin of the name California, see *Appendix L, infra*, p. 297.

⁷ The balance of power between North and South made the status of California as a slave or free state a paramount issue in Congress. At the time, the Union was composed of 15 free and 15 slave states.

⁸ An omnibus bill is a legislative bill which makes a number of miscellaneous appropriations or contains several unrelated but distinct provisions.

⁹ *Journals of the Senate and of the House*, 1st Session, 31st Congress, pp. 148, 529.