

My 49-Star American Flag and Pawn Stars

On July 4, 1959, Alaska joined the United States as the 49th State of the Union. I was a teenager at the time and lived in a single-family home in Shaker Heights, Ohio, with my parents and older sister. Shortly after Alaska was admitted, it was announced that Hawaii would, on July 4, 1960, become the 50th State.

On all major holidays my parents would fly the American Flag in front of our house. The 48-star flag had been the official flag since 1912 when Arizona and New Mexico were admitted to the union. When Alaska became the 49th State (and feeling very patriotic) my parents wanted to retire their 48-star flag and replace it with the new the 49-star flag. But there was a dilemma: Since Hawaii would soon be admitted and the flag would change to 50-stars, why not wait a few months and replace the 48-star flag with the just- announced 50-star flag? They reasoned that if they purchased a 49-star flag it would soon become a collector's item since most people would wait for the 50-star flag to become official.



48-star flag
(6 rows, 8 stars in each row)

So they bought a 49-star flag as soon as it became available and, shortly thereafter, the 50-star version:



49-star flag
(7 rows, 7 stars in each row)



50-star flag
(5 rows of 6 stars mixed with 4 rows of 5 stars)

In July 1960 they retired the 49-star flag and kept it in a safe place. When they passed on in the early 1980s, I took possession of it.

Fast-forward to 2009. One of most popular cable television shows was (and is) **Pawn Stars**. It airs weekly on the **History Channel** and is viewed around the world. Launched in July of that year, this reality show features a Las Vegas family-owned business, **Gold & Silver Pawn**. I found each episode fascinating as



Me and my 49-star flag in front of Gold & Silver Pawn, Las Vegas

customers would come in with what they believed was a valuable historic artifact to pawn or sell. The owners often would bring in an expert to authenticate the item, give its history and provide an estimate of its retail value. (Fakes and counterfeits are often revealed.) The seller then barter with the store's owners, often without being able to make a deal. Typical pieces include works of art, antique firearms, old toys, rare books, unusual musical instruments or an autographed working script from a classic motion picture. Since Sally and I visit Las Vegas often, I thought, why not sell my 49-star American Flag and get famous in the process?

I wrote to the **Pawn Stars** producers, told them about my 49-star flag and gave them the dates that we were next going to be in Las Vegas. They called me back and interviewed me on the phone—they were interested!

We set a date for filming: Tuesday, November 20, 2012. I was going to be on international TV—I was so excited, I couldn't contain myself! Sally decided (wisely) not to go to the filming. My instructions were to

arrive at **Gold & Silver Pawn** at 9 am for the filming that would begin at 10:30 am. I wondered why it would take 90 minutes to get set up. I found out why: Paperwork. Although on TV the customers appear to walk into the pawn shop in a random fashion, it is all rehearsed. And there was lots of papers to sign in advance of the filming. There were waivers, hold harmless agreements and indemnifications—all in their favor. Also, I (and my heirs, forever and always) would be prohibited from ever bringing any sort of legal action against the pawn shop, its employees, agents, and the show’s producers. I would have NO compensation, NO film ownership or editing rights and absolutely NO recourse for any of the following:

1. If my segment was not aired;
2. If I did not come to agreement to sell my item; and
3. I had no say if my segment was aired multiple times and/or used for promotional purposes.

I must have signed my name 25 times giving away all my rights!

The big moment finally came: Just me and Rick Harrison, the owner. Cameras rolling, I walk in the front door carrying my 49-star American Flag. I set it down on the counter and described to Rick a brief history of the 49-star flag and how it was only the official USA flag for only 12 months. With all the cameras zoomed in on my face, Rick announces the following to me: “You know, Bob, they only made 15 of these flags—15 MILLION OF THEM. YOUR FLAG IS NOT WORTH ANYTHING!” I was devastated, destroyed, humiliated and embarrassed—



**Me and Rick Harrison
November 20, 2012**

I’m sure it showed in my face! Rick’s advice: Keep it for my kids or show it to a high school history class. NO SALE!

Nonetheless, I waited over a year for my segment to air—I never missed recording and watching a single episode. Maybe I was a fool, but I was going to be on television! My segment never aired.

Several months after filming, I had a call from one of the **Pawn Stars** producers: He asked me if I understood that if my segment did NOT air, I had no recourse. Yes, I said, I understood that.

I’m certain that the film of me and my 49-star flag were properly disposed of, and, hopefully recycled. I’m still a fan of **Pawn Stars**, but after years of thinking about this, I’m fairly certain as to why the producers did not air my segment. My encounter with Rick Harrison was not the norm for this reality TV program: They NEVER embarrass the seller; their customers are always treated with respect—I was not. I never got to see any of the film and I’m certain that my segment ended up on the “cutting room floor.” It’s probably a good thing.

Yes, I still have the 49-star flag.

Links

Pawn Stars web site	https://www.history.com/shows/pawn-stars
Wikipedia article on Pawn Stars	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pawn_Stars
Web article on why 49-star flags are not valuable	https://www.leuten.com/49-StarFlag.jpg