

First Official 50-Star Flag

In the Oval Office on August 21, 1959, President Eisenhower signed a proclamation making Hawaii the 50th state, at which time a flag was presented to him which he hung in the Oval Office.

While in office, President and Mrs. Eisenhower worshipped with the Gettysburg Presbyterian Church, and then joined officially in 1963 after they moved to Gettysburg.

This flag, according to church members, hung in the Oval Office until President Eisenhower presented it to this Church in 1960 (as indicated on the plaque on the flagstaff in the display case).

The Church placed it in the front of the sanctuary (worship area) where it hung on its vertical staff. By 2011, the flag was looking a little shabby. A church member replaced it with a new national banner, and the pastor moved the 'Eisenhower flag' to the Eisenhower Room.

There it hung until 2013 when Charles Teague initiated and secured funding for the effort to properly display and preserve the flag in the church. An informal Flag Team was formed of Charles Teague, Harry Winsheimer, Pastor David Wright, John Shuss and Ralph Lambert.

For preservation considerations of no sunlight and minimum natural and artificial light, the narthex (foyer) was chosen to display the flag. John Shuss designed and built the flag display case and the picture display. The flag display case is built on a base of ¾ inch plywood with black walnut wood for the frame and trim. Black walnut wood was also used to mount the flagstaff. The flagstaff is in two pieces and is normally screwed together with the flag fastened to the top section. In our display, the top section is mounted horizontally and supports the flag in the display case. The bottom section of the flagstaff is mounted vertically so that the brass plate can be read. As the flag grew old hanging on the flagstaff in the sanctuary, it stretched slightly out of shape. When observing the flag, this stretching can be seen as the flag no longer hangs straight. The eagle that topped the staff now roosts on the top of the case.

After signing the proclamation, an AP photographer caught President Eisenhower displaying the first official 50 star flag. This picture is reproduced and mounted in a picture display case. It is followed by the following text:

America's first 50-star flag was presented to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the White House on Friday, August 21, 1959. The occasion was his signing the proclamation declaring Hawaii to become the 50th State in the Union. Also present were Vice President Richard Nixon, House Speaker Sam Rayburn, Secretary of Hawaii Edward Johnston, Representative-elect Daniel K. Inouye, and the Chief of the US Army Heraldic Branch. When Eisenhower returned to Gettysburg to retire, he gave his Oval Office American flag to Gettysburg Presbyterian Church, where he and Mamie were members. For decades it graced the front of the sanctuary. (Photo courtesy of the Associated Press.)

Chad Dick provided the layout and printing of the picture and text.

Ralph Lambert oversaw the mounting of both the flag display case and the picture display case.

Several people gave advice and assistance to the Flag Team during the preservation process. Thank you!

The Team hopes that over many years to come that countless people will have the opportunity to learn a bit of national and church history from the 'Eisenhower Flag'.