FROM THE EDITOR

Between Two Anthems

By Erich Eiselt, IMLA Assistant General Counsel and Editor



In its two conference sites this year--Anchorage and Baltimore--IMLA celebrates much of what is remarkable about our nation.

One venue epitomizes our origins as a polity. Baltimore harbor is the birthplace of the nation's anthem penned by Francis Scott Key, a 33-year old lawyer, two centuries ago. The sight of our flag as morning broke over embattled Fort McHenry spawned words now synonymous with America itself, honoring the sacrifice required of the new republic to wrest and keep autonomy from a distant monarch. That city is today the largest metropolis in Maryland, a state whose iconic octagonal capitol building in Annapolis serves as the nation's longest continuously–operating legislative state house, dating to the beginnings of colonial independence. We will gather in Baltimore in September to participate in an epical 200-year tribute to The Star Spangled Banner.

The other locale, where IMLA convened in mid-May, epitomizes the enduring values of pioneering and persistence, attributes that built the lower Forty Eight and continue to animate the Last Frontier today. To Americans who explore Alaska from an armchair it seems nearly mythical, with parklands larger than many states, peaks twice as high as anything else in the nation, and wildlife on a scale not seen elsewhere on earth. To those who actually make the trip to Anchorage and beyond, the scale and magnificence of the place simply surpasses easy description—as evidenced by some of the photo's in this issue. It is not a matter of serendipity that Alaska's state song would be a paean to the land itself, equal parts gratitude and awe. Like the Star Spangled Banner, Alaska's anthem "The Great North Star" honors a flag and all that it symbolizes:

> Eight stars of gold on a field of blue,
> Alaska's flag, may it mean to you,
> The blue of the sea, the evening sky,
> The mountain lakes and the flowers nearby,
> The gold of the early sourdough's dreams,
> The precious gold of the hills and streams,
> The brilliant stars in the northern sky,
> The "Bear," the "Dipper," and shining high,
> The great North Star with its steady light,
> O'er land and sea a beacon bright,
> Alaska's flag to Alaskans dear,
> The simple flag of a last frontier.

The summer of 2014 has thus aligned to provide our members and their families an opportunity to celebrate both ends of this national history—the foundational and the recent. Each is rock-solid, in its own way, and each contributes to the character of America itself. As IMLA members, we are lucky to experience them both, from the perspective of citizens who discern the basic ingredients that make city centers such as Anchorage and Baltimore--or hamlets, like Kotzebue, Alaska on the Arctic Circle or Crisfield, Maryland on the Chesapeake Bay--function. Those components include transparency, compromise, community involvement, public service—and above all, respect for the rule of law. This is the path on which we spend our days and where we choose to make careers, sometimes forgetting just how rewarding the journey is. But that choreography to which we aspire, if not always achieving—local governance, free of corruption, bias, and injustice—is the thing which commonly eludes other polities as they attempt to take wing around the world. Clearly it is less challenging to cast off the old order than to inculcate the basic values which legitimize and preserve the new.

So as we appreciate the superlatives in our IMLA venues this summer, whether primordial glaciers calving into endless seas or tall ships and pyrotechnics to rival the biggest America has ever seen, we can take quiet pride in being an integral part of the weft and warp which holds it all together—from the Star Spangled Banner to the Great North Star. ML

