

SYMBOLS

“Commonwealth”

Pennsylvania shares with Virginia, Kentucky, and Massachusetts the designation “Commonwealth.” The word is of English derivation and refers to the common “weal” or well-being of the public. The State Seal of Pennsylvania does not use the term, but it is a traditional, official designation used in referring to the state, and legal processes are in the name of the Commonwealth. In 1776, our first state constitution referred to Pennsylvania as both “Commonwealth” and “State,” a pattern of usage that was perpetuated in the constitutions of 1790, 1838, 1874, and 1968. Today, “State” and “Commonwealth” are correctly used interchangeably. The distinction between them has been held to have no legal significance.

“Keystone State”

The word “keystone” comes from architecture and refers to the central, wedge-shaped stone in an arch, which holds all the other stones in place. The application of the term “Keystone State” to Pennsylvania cannot be traced to any single source. It was commonly accepted soon after 1800.

At a Jeffersonian Republican victory rally in October 1802, Pennsylvania was toasted as “the keystone in the federal union,” and in the newspaper *Aurora* the following year the state was referred to as “the keystone in the democratic arch.” The modern persistence of this designation is justified in view of the key position of Pennsylvania in the economic, social, and political development of the United States.

State Seal



The State Seal is the symbol used by the Commonwealth to authenticate certain documents. It is impressed upon the document by an instrument known as a seal-press or stamp. The State Seal has two faces: the obverse, which is the more familiar face and the one most often referred to as the “State Seal,” and the reverse, or counter-seal, which is used less frequently. The State Seal is in the custody of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. When Pennsylvania was still a province of England, its seals were those of William Penn and his descendants. The transition from this provincial seal to a state seal began when the State Constitutional Convention of 1776 directed that “all commissions shall be . . . sealed with the State Seal,” and appointed a committee to prepare such a seal for future use. By 1778 there was in use a seal similar to the present one. The seal received legal recognition from the General Assembly in 1791, when it was designated the official State Seal.

The obverse of the seal contains a shield, upon which are emblazoned a sailing ship, a plough, and three sheaves of wheat. To the left of the shield is a stalk of Indian corn; to the

right, an olive branch. The shield’s crest is an eagle, and the entire design is encircled by the inscription “Seal of the State of Pennsylvania.” These three symbols – the plough, the ship, and the sheaves of wheat – have, despite minor changes through the years, remained the traditional emblems of Pennsylvania’s State Seal. They were first found in the individual seals of several colonial Pennsylvania counties, which mounted their own identifying crests above the existing Penn Coat of Arms. Chester County’s crest was a plough; Philadelphia County’s crest was a ship under full sail; Sussex County, Delaware (then attached to provincial Pennsylvania) used a sheaf of wheat as its crest. The shield of the City of Philadelphia contained both a sheaf of wheat and a ship under sail. It was a combination of these sources that provided the three emblems now forming the obverse of the State Seal. The reverse of this first seal shows a woman who represents liberty. Her left hand holds a wand topped by a liberty cap, a French symbol of liberty. In her right hand is a drawn sword. She is trampling upon Tyranny, represented by a lion. The entire design is encircled by the legend “Both Can’t Survive.”

Coat of Arms



Pennsylvania’s Coat of Arms, while not used in the same official capacity as the State Seal (although it contains the emblems of the seal), is perhaps a more familiar symbol of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It appears on countless documents, letterheads, and publications, and forms the design on Pennsylvania’s State Flag. Provincial Pennsylvania’s coat of arms was that of the Penn family. A state coat of arms first appeared on state paper money issued in 1777. This first coat of arms was nearly identical to the State Seal, without the inscription. In 1778, Caleb Lownes of Philadelphia prepared a coat of arms. Heraldic in design, it consisted of a shield, which displayed the emblems of the State Seal – the ship, plough, and sheaves of wheat; an eagle for the crest; two black horses as supporters; and the motto “Virtue, Liberty and Independence.” An olive branch and a cornstalk were crossed below the shield. Behind each horse was a stalk of corn, but these were omitted after 1805.

Numerous modifications were made to this coat of arms between 1778 and 1873, chiefly in the position and color of the supporting horses. In 1874, the legislature noted these variations and lack of uniformity and appointed a commission to establish an official coat of arms for the Commonwealth. In 1875, the commission reported that it had adopted, almost unchanged, the coat of arms originally designed by Caleb Lownes 96 years earlier. This is the coat of arms in use today.

State Flag

Pennsylvania's State Flag is composed of a blue field, on which is embroidered the State Coat of Arms. The flag is flown from all state buildings, and further display on any public building within the Commonwealth is provided for by law. The first State Flag bearing the State Coat of Arms was authorized by the General Assembly in 1799. During the Civil War, many Pennsylvania regiments carried flags modeled after the U.S. Flag, but substituted Pennsylvania's Coat of Arms for the field of stars. An act of the General Assembly of June 13, 1907, standardized the flag and required that the blue field match the blue of Old Glory.

State Animal

The Whitetail Deer is the official state animal, as enacted by the General Assembly on October 2, 1959.

State Game Bird

The Ruffed Grouse is the state game bird, as enacted by the General Assembly on June 22, 1931. The Pennsylvania ruffed grouse, sometimes called the partridge, is distinguished by its plump body, feathered legs, and mottled red-dish-brown color. This protective coloring makes it possible for the ruffed grouse to conceal itself in the wilds.

State Dog

The Great Dane is the state dog, as enacted by the General Assembly on August 15, 1965.

State Fish

The Brook Trout is the state fish, as enacted by the General Assembly on March 9, 1970.

State Flower

The Mountain Laurel is the state flower, as enacted by the General Assembly on May 5, 1933. The mountain laurel is in full bloom in mid-June, when Pennsylvania's woodlands are filled with its distinctive pink flower.

State Insect

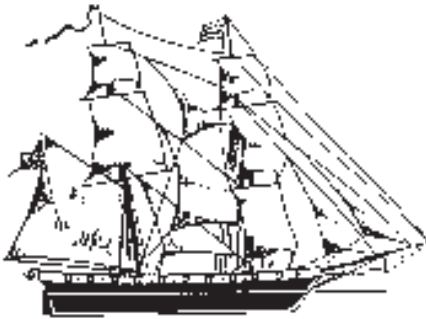
The Firefly is the state insect, as enacted by the General Assembly on April 10, 1974. Act 130 of December 5, 1988, designated the particular species of firefly "Poturris Pennsylvanica De Geer" as the official state insect.

State Beverage

Milk is the official state beverage, as enacted by the General Assembly on April 29, 1982.

State Tree

The Hemlock is the state tree, as enacted by the General Assembly on June 23, 1931.

State Ship

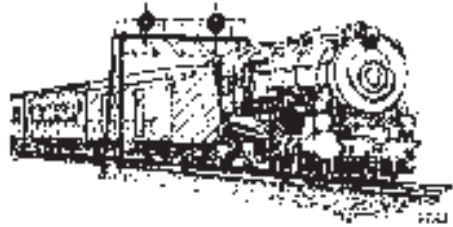
The restored United States Brig Niagara is the Flagship of Pennsylvania, as enacted by the General Assembly on May 26, 1988. The Flagship Niagara, under Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, was decisive in the Battle of Lake Erie, defeating a British squadron September 10, 1813. Its home port is Erie.

State Plant

The Penngift Crownvetch is the official beautification and conservation plant, as enacted by the General Assembly on June 17, 1982.

State Fossil

Phacops rana (a small water animal) is the state fossil, as enacted by the General Assembly on December 5, 1988.

State Steam Locomotive

The Pennsylvania Railroad K4s is the state steam locomotive, as enacted by the General Assembly on December 18, 1987. More than four hundred models of this class of locomotive were built between 1914 and 1928. This type of engine served as the main power for Pennsylvania Railroad passenger trains for thirty years. The two surviving K4s locomotives are owned by railroad museums in Strasburg and Altoona.

State Electric Locomotive

The Pennsylvania Railroad GG1 Locomotive Number 4859 is the state electric locomotive, as enacted by the General Assembly on December 18, 1987. Built at Altoona in 1937, this high-speed engine powered regular passenger trains and World War II troop trains, as well as coal, freight, and commuter runs in later years, remaining active until 1979. Restored in 1986, it is on display at the Harrisburg Transportation Center.