

Pennsylvania's
STATE FLAG





THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE FLAG



Historical Background

The official flag of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was authorized by an Act of the Pennsylvania General Assembly on June 13, 1907. This legislation required that the background of Pennsylvania's flag be of the same color as the blue in the flag of the United States, that the Coat of Arms of the Commonwealth be in the center of the flag, and that its edges be trimmed with a fringe of knotted yellow silk.

The origin of the Pennsylvania flag can be traced to a much earlier date. Although there is no record or evidence of use of a particular flag by colonial Pennsylvania, Benjamin Franklin did design a series of military flags in 1747, and such emblems were later used by Pennsylvania military companies during the American Revolution. In 1799, the General Assembly authorized a flag with a coat of arms embroidered on a blue field.

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Coat of Arms



A State Coat of Arms first appeared twenty-two years prior to this and was printed on Pennsylvania paper money used during the Revolutionary War. In 1778, Caleb Lowmes of Philadelphia prepared a coat of arms virtually identical to the one used today. It consisted of a shield; an American Bald Eagle for the crest; two harnessed black horses as supporters; and the State's motto, "Virtue, Liberty and Independence," printed at the bottom. An olive branch and cornstalk were crossed below the shield. Behind each horse was a stalk of corn, but these stalks were later omitted. Upon the shield were emblazoned the following: a black ship with white sails resting upon a blue sea, to symbolize the very extensive commerce sent forth from the State to every part of the world; a deep red plough, which signifies the natural mineral and plant resources of the Commonwealth; and three golden sheaves of wheat, which symbolize not only the splendid agricultural harvests of the State, but also her vast wealth in the field of human thought and action.

Numerous modifications were made to the coat of arms between 1778 and 1873, mainly in the position and color of the supporting horses. In

1874, the Legislature noted these variations and appointed a commission to establish an official Coat of Arms for the Commonwealth. After a one-year study, the commission reported that it had adopted, almost unchanged, the coat of arms originally designed by Caleb Lowmes 96 years earlier, and this design remains in use today.

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A Prototype for Civil War Battle Flags

In response to the outbreak of the Civil War, the Pennsylvania Legislature, in May 1861, approved legislation requiring Governor Curtin to procure battle flags for each Pennsylvania regiment. Many of these regimental flags were made by substituting the Pennsylvania Coat of



The Commonwealth issued this flag to the 79th Pennsylvania Regiment. As was customary, the names of the battles the regiment fought in were painted on the flag.

Arms for the field of stars in the American flag. Other flags had the Commonwealth Arms as the central symbol on a blue field, much like the present flag, but with a ring of stars around the Arms.

The legislation which required the Governor to provide battle flags also required that these flags be returned to the Commonwealth after the War. Civil War veterans took their tattered flags to Philadelphia on July 4, 1866, where a parade was held. Since that time, these banners have been in the possession of the Commonwealth in Harrisburg.

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Display of the State Flag

When the flag of Pennsylvania is flown on the same flagpole with the American flag, the latter must be at the top. When the flags are flown from adjacent staffs, the flag of Pennsylvania should be hoisted after the American flag and lowered first, and the American flag is always placed in the position of honor – to its own right. When displayed on a podium, the Pennsylvania flag should be placed to the left of the staging area, and the American flag to the right. The Governor decides and so orders when the State flag is to be lowered to half-mast, usually upon the death of a present or former State official.

The use of the State flag, for display on any public building of the Commonwealth, was authorized by legislation enacted in 1913 by the General Assembly.