

Lake Superior agates. Common loons. Pink and white lady's slippers and Norway pines. Walleyes and wild rice. All are characteristic of Minnesota, and all capture the essence of the state. Over the course of Minnesota's statehood, the Legislature has adopted 19 such symbols to identify the state's great resources and quality of life.

The State Seal

The Great Seal of Minnesota has been around for 150 years — even before Minnesota became a state. But its existence has not been without controversy.

It was on May 25, 1858 — two weeks after Minnesota became a state — that then Secretary of State Francis Baasen said to Gov. Henry H. Sibley that, “My office being without a seal, I can of course do no official act unless you make some direction in the matter.”

Sibley immediately authorized the use of the territorial seal until a new design could be created and agreed upon.

In 1858, the Legislature approved a vastly different seal, but for some reason it was never officially adopted into law.

Historians still aren't sure why,

but speculation has it that Sibley didn't like the design and conveniently “lost” the bill in favor of the territorial design. In any case, the Legislature, in 1861, when notified that the governor may have acted outside his authority, approved the design and it was signed into law.

So the essential elements of the territorial seal — a barefoot settler plowing a field near the Mississippi River, an American Indian riding a horse and a sunset — have remained ever since.

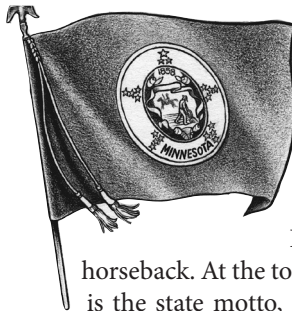
But these too, have changed slightly over the years. Prompted by American Indian objection, the Legislature, in 1983, decreed that the American Indian should face the settler by riding south rather than fleeing west.

Capt. Seth Eastman, an artist who was also the commanding officer at Fort Snelling, designed the seal. ▼

The State Flag

The Minnesota state flag was adopted by the Legislature in 1893 when it accepted the design submitted by Amelia Hyde Center of Minneapolis.

The flag depicts the state seal on a blue background. The seal



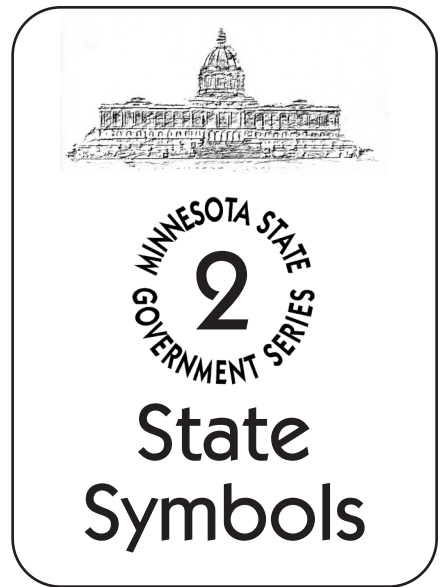
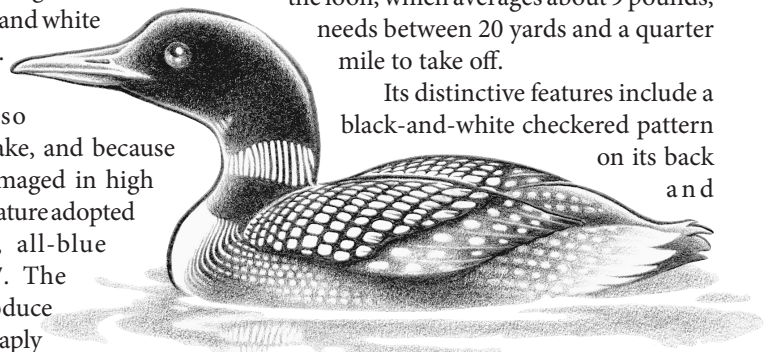
shows a pioneer plowing the virgin prairie and an American Indian on horseback. At the top of the seal is the state motto, “L'Etoile du Nord,” or star of the north. Three

dates on the flag signify the establishment of historic Fort Snelling in 1819, the acceptance of Minnesota as a state in 1858 and the adoption of the state flag in 1893.

The 19 stars on the flag symbolize Minnesota as the 19th state to be admitted to the Union after the original 13. The largest of these stars is centered above the seal to symbolize the north star state.

The original flag had two sides, blue on one side and white on the other.

But because the flag was so expensive to make, and because it was easily damaged in high winds, the Legislature adopted the one-sided, all-blue design in 1957. The idea was to produce the flag more cheaply



to urge people to display it in preparation for the state's centennial in 1958. ▼

The State Bird

The Legislature adopted the common loon as the state bird in 1961.

The sleek-looking bird can attain speeds of up to 60 mph and can travel great distances under water. The loon's legs are near the rear of its body, enabling it to dive under water quickly, quietly and with great speed.

But its legs weren't made for walking. The loon earned its name from the old English word “lumme,” meaning awkward person. The loon ventures on land only when nesting and breeding. And even then, the nest is always near the water.

Its wings are also very small. As a result, the loon, which averages about 9 pounds, needs between 20 yards and a quarter mile to take off.

Its distinctive features include a black-and-white checkered pattern on its back and

an intense red eye, which is found only in adults. Its head is a dark green but is often mistaken for black. The description applies to both males and females, making it difficult to distinguish them.

Loons are loners and prefer Minnesota's isolated lakes, leading some to label their distinctive call as "the loneliest voice on earth." ▼

The State Flower

You might think twice before picking the Minnesota state flower — the pink and white lady's slipper. In 1922, the Legislature passed a law making it illegal to pick the rare flower that is typically found in the swamps, bogs and damp woods of northern Minnesota.

In 1893, a group of women preparing an exhibit of the state's products for the World's Fair in Chicago

decided they should have a state flower to decorate their display. They



petitioned legislators to adopt the wild lady's slipper as the state flower, and the Legislature

complied. But several years later, officials discovered that the *wild* lady's slipper named in law didn't grow in Minnesota.

So during the 1902 special session of the Legislature, a new resolution was adopted that changed the state flower to the pink and white lady's slipper.

A member of the orchid family, the pink and white lady's slipper is one of Minnesota's rarest wildflowers. It blooms in late June or early July, and it takes between four and 16 years

before the plant produces a flower. Under the right conditions, lady's slippers can live for more than 100 years. The pink and white lady's slipper can grow to a height of 3 feet and is the tallest of the state's lady's slippers. ▼

The State Mushroom

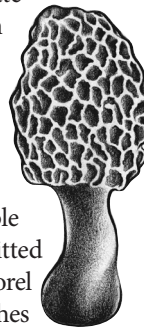
The *morchella esculenta*, commonly known as the morel, sponge mushroom or honeycomb morel, became Minnesota's state mushroom in

1984.

The morel is considered one of the most highly prized and delicious of all edible mushrooms.

The morel's cups resemble cone-shaped sponges, pitted like a honeycomb. The morel is usually 4 inches to 8 inches high.

It grows from early May to early June in the Twin Cities metropolitan area among leaves or wood ashes in open woods, along roadsides and in partially shaded meadowland. ▼



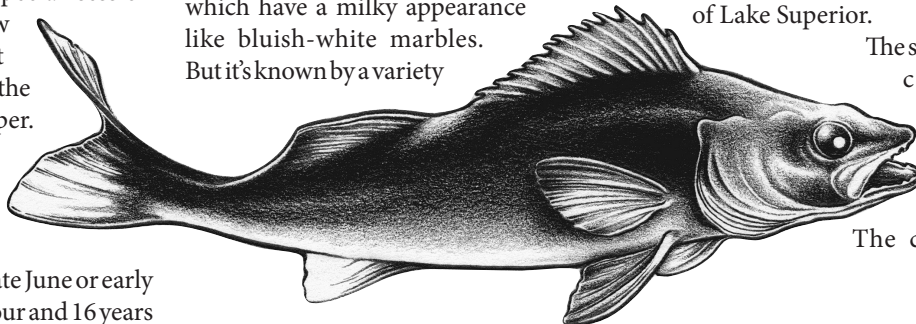
The State Fish

Of all Minnesota's state symbols, none is more eagerly sought after than the walleye — the official state fish.

Every year in Minnesota, more than 1 million anglers take to the water on one of the state's 1,700 walleye lakes in pursuit of the elusive walleye.

In May 1965, the Legislature adopted the walleye as the state fish. It was chosen for its value to both sport and commercial fishing.

The walleye gets its name from its eyes, which have a milky appearance like bluish-white marbles. But it's known by a variety



of other names, too — yellow pike, yellow perchpike and yellow pickerel.

Minnesota's record walleye, caught in 1979 in the Sea Gull River at Saganaga Lake in Cook County, weighed 17 pounds, 8 ounces. ▼

The State Soil

Although it's only found in 17 counties located in south-central Minnesota, Lester was designated the state soil in 2012.

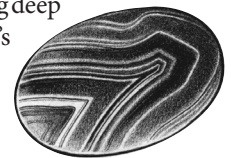
Named because of its prevalence in the area around Lester Prairie, the soil is well-drained and formed in loamy, calcareous glacial till on ground moraines. Principal crops grown in Lester soil are corn and soybeans.

According to the Minnesota Association of Professional Soil Scientists, the impetus behind the naming of a state soil is to celebrate "a century of soil science at the University of Minnesota," as well as the 40th anniversary of MAPSS. The association chose the dirt as the state's unofficial soil back in 1987. ▼

The State Gemstone

Although the Legislature didn't adopt the Lake Superior agate as the official state gemstone until 1969, agates were being formed about a billion years before that.

As the North American continent began to split apart due to molten rock moving deep beneath the earth's surface, iron-rich lava poured out of the huge crevasses. These flows are now exposed along the north and south shores of Lake Superior.



The stone's red color comes from iron, the major industrial mineral in the state. The concentration

of iron, and the extent to which the iron has oxidized, determines the color of the stone. Puddles of quartz-rich solutions that crystallize inside the gas pocket under low fluid pressure cause the white bands that are typically found in agates. The parallel nature of the bands indicates the agate's position inside the lava flow.

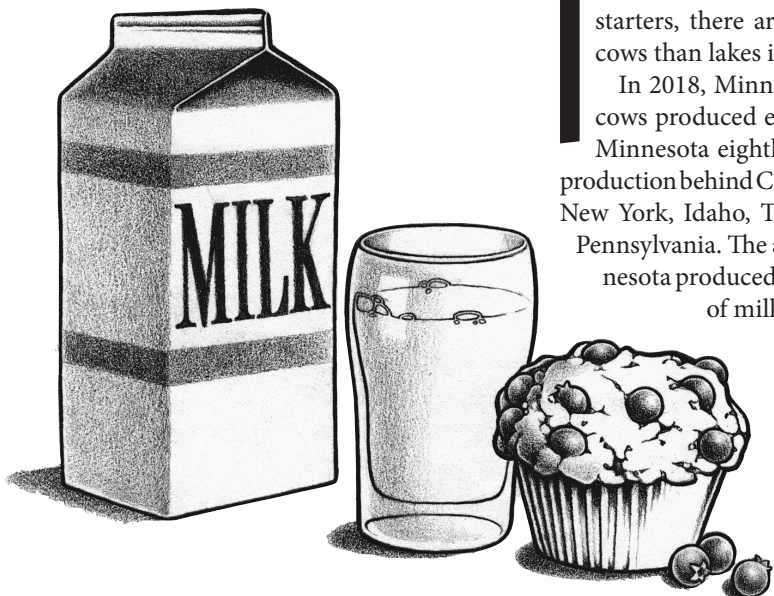
Characteristics of the agate include a glossy, waxy appearance, a pitted surface texture and iron-oxide staining. The stone is translucent. ▼

The State Muffin

As an exercise to see how a bill becomes law, a class of third-graders from South Terrace Elementary School in Carlton, Minn., proposed that the blueberry muffin be designated as the state muffin.

In 1988, their bill was signed into law. The idea for the blueberry muffin bill arose in a social studies class when the third graders were studying the state's symbols.

They asked themselves a question: If Minnesota were to have a state food, what would it be? The answer they gave was the blueberry muffin. They reasoned that wild blueberries are plentiful and popular in northern Minnesota, and farmers from across the state grow wheat. ▼



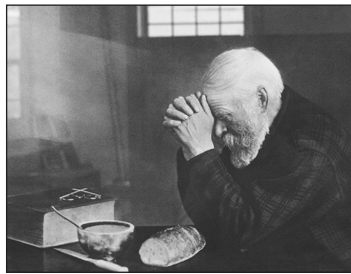
The State Photograph

A world-renowned photograph became the state's 14th state symbol in 2002.

Shot in Bovey, Minn., by Eric Enstrom in 1918, "Grace" features an elderly man sitting pensively with his head bowed and hands folded. He is leaning over a table, and on the table is a pair of spectacles resting atop a thick book, a bowl of gruel, a loaf of bread and a knife.

A copy of the state photograph is displayed in the Office of the Secretary of State in St. Paul.

Enstrom shot the photograph in black and white, but as "Grace" became more popular Enstrom's daughter, Rhoda Nyberg, began hand painting the prints in oil. ▼



The State Drink

In 1984, the Legislature designated milk as the official state drink. Why? For starters, there are many more dairy cows than lakes in the state.

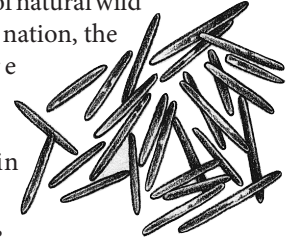
In 2018, Minnesota's 465,000 milk cows produced enough milk to rank Minnesota eighth nationally in milk production behind California, Wisconsin, New York, Idaho, Texas, Michigan and Pennsylvania. The average cow in Minnesota produced about 1,885 pounds of milk in 2018.

While state whey production is increasing, the greatest percentage of milk produced is used to make butter, cheese, ice cream and yogurt. ▼

The State Grain

For centuries, wild rice has been a staple for the American Indians of northern Minnesota.

To recognize that, and the fact that Minnesota is a leading producer of natural wild rice in the nation, the Legislature adopted wild rice as the state grain in 1977.



Wild rice, which is really a grain, grows naturally in the many lakes and rivers in the northern half of the state.

Like oats, the grain of wild rice is surrounded by a hull that is removed during processing.

The Ojibwe word for rice is "manomin," whose root word is "mano," or spirit — an indication of how important the rice was and is to the Ojibwe.

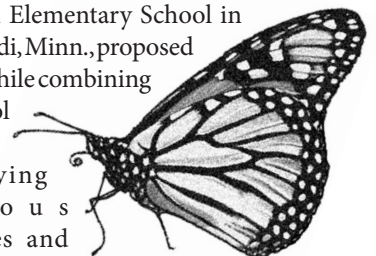
The rice was traditionally harvested by women in late August and early September. Today, the season is regulated by the Department of Natural Resources.

Sticks or flails, no longer than 30 inches long, are used to bend the wild rice grass into a boat or canoe. The stalks are then gently flailed to knock the grains loose and into the boat or canoe. ▼

The State Butterfly

Minnesota may not be the only place where the Monarch butterfly is easily spotted, but the popular fluttering insect was named the state butterfly by the Legislature in 2000.

A group of fourth-graders from O.H. Anderson Elementary School in Mahtomedi, Minn., proposed the idea while combining two school projects — studying various butterflies and learning about the lawmaking process.



The Monarch is one of six popular families of butterflies in Minnesota. Distinguished by their distinctive orange-brown wings, marked by black veins and a black border with two rows of spots, Monarchs cannot stand the cold winters here and will migrate south to Mexico every fall. Those that survive the winter travel north to Minnesota and Canada throughout the spring, laying eggs along the way. August is the best month to see Monarchs in Minnesota. ▼

The State Fruit

An assignment to write a persuasive letter led to the Honeycrisp apple being deemed the state fruit in 2006.

The fourth-grade students from

Andersen Elementary School in Bayport, Minn., and their teacher, Laurel Avery, testified and sat in on House and

Senate committee hearings on the bill throughout the process. They were also present in the House gallery for the bill's passage.

The Honeycrisp apple was produced from a 1960 cross of the Macoun and Honeygold varieties, as part of a University of Minnesota apple breeding program aimed to develop fruit that could thrive in colder climates. The original seedling was planted in 1962, and the Honeycrisp apple was formally introduced in 1991. ▼

The State Tree

Many people are familiar with the description that American Indians gave to the Mississippi River: father of waters. But far fewer know that the Ojibwe refer to Norway, or red, pine trees as “grandfathers.”

In 1953, Minnesota adopted the Norway pine as the state tree. Norway pines



typically reach heights of 80 feet and diameters of up to 3 feet; exceptional trees have grown as high as 150 feet and as wide as 5 feet.

The largest Norway pine in Minnesota is in Itasca State Park. The tree is over 120 feet tall and is more than 300 years old. It's called a red pine because of the pale red color of its heartwood and the reddish color of its bark. ▼

The State Sport

Since its inception, the Minnesota Wild has referenced Minnesota as the State of Hockey.

In 2009, the Legislature made ice hockey the official state sport — two years after fifth-graders from Groveland Elementary School in Minnetonka, Minn., proffered the idea.

In addition to the Wild, which began play in the National Hockey League in October 2000, the state has five Division I collegiate men's and women's teams and has the greatest number of high school hockey players in the country with more

than 9,500 participants on 119 girls and 154 boys teams during the 2019-20 school year. Minnesota Hockey, the statewide governing body of amateur hockey, estimates 80,000 Minnesotans play organized hockey.

St. Paul-native Herb Brooks, who also coached at the University of Minnesota and for the Minnesota North Stars (the state's former NHL team), led the U.S. hockey team to a gold medal at the 1980 Winter Olympics, often referred to as the “Miracle on Ice.”

The United States Hockey Hall of Fame is located in Eveleth. ▼



The State Song

You rarely hear it on the radio, and it has never made the top 40, but that doesn't mean it's not a popular song — especially among Minnesotans.

“Hail! Minnesota,” has been the state song since 1945.

It dates back to 1904 when it was sung in a University of Minnesota “The Apple of Discord, a Trav” a comedy about a football game.

The song was originally written by student Truman E. Rickard, then later rewritten by another student, Arthur Upson.

Through the 1920s, legislators battled over state song proposals and considered at least four, but reached no agreement. Finally, “Hail! Minnesota” was proposed.

In 1945, the university gave permission to the state to use it, as did Rickard (Upson had died). Then the words were changed slightly from “Hail to thee our college dear,” to “Hail to thee our state so dear.” ▼



The State Bee

Once widespread across the eastern United States and Upper Midwest, the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee population has declined by nearly 90 percent since 2000 and the bee has become

the first in the nation to be classified as endangered.

It remains in only about 10 states.

Minnesota is home to much of the remaining population, and in 2019 it became the official state bee.

Active from April through October, Rusty Patched Bumble Bees live in colonies that include a single queen. All Rusty Patched Bumble Bees have black heads, but workers and males have a small rust-colored spot centrally located on their back.

The designation aims to raise awareness about the role of pollinators in Minnesota's ecosystems and the importance of conservation of their habitats. ▼



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