

In 1919-20 when the State of Nebraska held a nationwide design competition to find an architect to create a third Capitol, Thomas R. Kimball, FAIA, advisor to the Capitol Commission, established... “The Capitol of a State is the outward sign of the character of its people. Their respect for its traditions and history, their belief in its importance and worth, and their love of its fair name; all find expression in its Capitol. Of Nebraska... highway of progress, provider of man’s necessities, battleground of freedom, distributor of learning, home of the volunteer let the new Capitol be a symbol.” Winning architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue designed the Nebraska Capitol to symbolically fit its location. In his competition statement he indicated... “The site is a square in the heart of the city of Lincoln, the point of intersection of two great avenues; while the surrounding country is generally level. Therefore, from the very beginning the authors of the design herewith submitted have felt impelled to produce something quite unlike the usual... As their studies have progressed this impression has but deepened, finally taking form in a vast, though rather low structure, from whose midst rises a great central tower, which, with its gleaming dome of golden tiles, would stand a landmark for many miles around.” In keeping with the competition’s stated desire... “the actual building project to provide, under the guidance and control of the Architect, for real collaboration of Architect, Sculptor, Painter, and Landscapist” Goodhue identified Lee Lawrie as sculptor, and Hildreth Meiere as mosaicist. The artists placed Nebraska’s state symbols, the state bird, the state mammal, the state fossil, the state tree and the state flower within the sculptural and mosaic detail of the building. Interestingly, Nebraska’s state seal does not appear in the decoration of the Capitol. A Goodhue designed seal, ultimately rejected by the Legislature, was designed and carved into the Capitol’s Indiana limestone façade.

NEBRASKA STATE SYMBOLS



Nebraska’s state tree is the Cottonwood. Hildreth Meiere represented the Cottonwood, left, in Guastivino tile in the upper arches of the Great Hall. Other native trees in the arches are Willow, Pine and Hackberry.

Nebraska’s state flower, the Goldenrod, is interwoven with the state’s motto in Goodhue’s proposed state seal, right. Below is a close-up view of the Goldenrod and state motto on the seal in the Supreme Court Chamber.



The White-tailed Deer is Nebraska’s state mammal. The deer is one of 28 native animals Hildreth Meiere included in the arches around the mosaic tile Vestibule dome.



The Columbian Mammoth is Nebraska’s state fossil. Meiere’s black and white marble Rotunda floor mosaics include other fossil creatures found in Nebraska by University of Nebraska Paleontologist Erwin Barbour. Visit the University of Nebraska State Museum to see the mammoth fossils in Elephant Hall.



The Western Meadowlark, the state bird, is carved in the railing surrounding the Rotunda. Lee Lawrie also carved a bison skull and vertical corn panels in the 4” thick carved onyx railing. In this image the sun shines through the translucent stone.