

The time has come – Change the Massachusetts flag and seal

For more than 50 years, Indigenous leaders have been calling for the Flag and Seal of Massachusetts to change. On January 6th, 2021, the Massachusetts Legislature, after stalling for 37 years, finally approved a bill to establish a Special Commission Relative to the Seal and Motto of the Commonwealth, and to invite Native leaders from the region to sit with legislators, historians, and others on this 19-member panel. The Special Commission is charged with making recommendations for changes to the Massachusetts flag and seal, and for an educational program on the history and meaning of the flag and seal. Our voices in support of this historic process are needed now. The time has come to change the Massachusetts flag and seal.

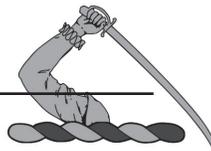


The original Massachusetts Bay Colony seal from 1629 depicted an indigenous person wearing a loincloth of leaves and calling out: “Come over and help us.”

Take a closer look at the symbols in the current state flag and seal

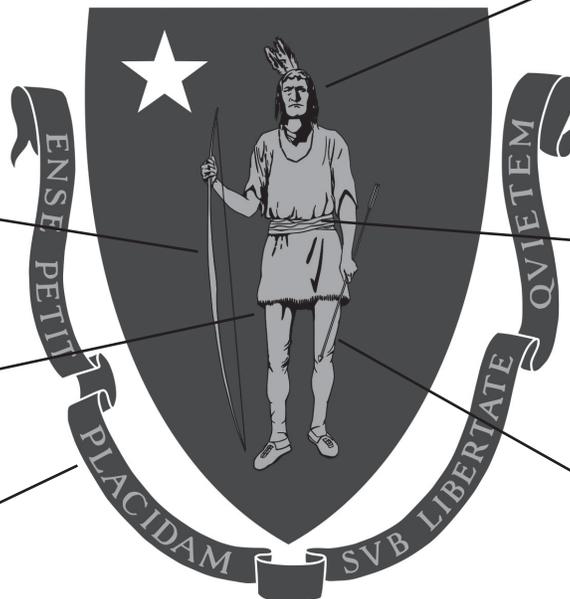
Illustrator Edmund Garret used a Frankenstein approach to create an “ideal” Native American image for the Massachusetts flag and seal. His design was formally adopted by the legislature on June 14, 1898.

The sword is modeled on Myles Standish’s broadsword, kept at the Pilgrim Hall in Plymouth. Standish was the military commander for the Plymouth Colony, known for ambushing and killing Native people.



The facial features came from a photograph of Thomas Little Shell, a Chippewa chief from Montana. Garret called him “a fine specimen of Indian” though not from Massachusetts.

“The bow is an accurate representation of one taken from an Indian shot and killed in Sudbury in 1665.”
–Edmund Garret



Garret patterned the belt after the red flannel belt of Metacomet (King Philip), housed in the Peabody Museum in Cambridge. Metacomet was a leader in the first Native war of resistance against English colonization. His severed head was impaled on a pike and displayed in Plymouth for more than 20 years as a war trophy.

Proportions of the body were modeled on a Native skeleton dug up in Winthrop.

He wears no quiver. The downward pointed arrow indicates a ‘pacified’ Native person.

The Latin motto begins: “By the sword we seek peace...”

Listen to Indigenous Voices. Support the Mass Indigenous Legislative Agenda (MalIndigenousAgenda.org). Tell your local legislators to approve these Indigenous-backed bills awaiting action in the legislature today.

- (S.2493) Retire Native Mascots
- (S.382 – H.651) Celebrate and Teach Native History in Public Schools
- (S.2027 – H.3191) Indigenous Peoples Day Now!
- (S.2239 – H.3377) Protect Native Heritage.

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