



Petoskey Stone Celebrates 55 Years as Michigan's State Stone

05/27/20



Most Michiganders (or Michiganians, depending on your preference) know that the [Petoskey stone](#) is the state's official "state stone." But just how and when did that come to be?

Let's go back...way back...for a bit of geological history first.

Glaciers moved rocks, fossilized ancient coral, bedrock and soil throughout what is now Michigan millions of years ago, carving out the Great Lakes and depositing a wealth of natural treasures beneath them. Over time, the waves churned these waters and in turn polished pieces into rocks of all shapes, sizes and configurations—including Petoskey stones.

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In the early 1900s, there were mentions of Petoskey stone in regional newspapers, but these referred to rocks harvested from shoreline gravel banks by the Petoskey Stone & Lime Company (incorporated in 1904), not the identifiable hexagon laden stones coveted and collected today.

One of the earliest printed accounts of actual "Petoskey stones" appeared in a handful of newspapers in October 1923—including the *Palladium-Item* of Richmond, Indiana and *The Ithaca Journal* in Ithaca, New York—as part of a Q&A section, authored by Information Bureau Director Frederick J. Haskin out of Washington D.C.

- How is Petoskey stone polished? — C.A.L.
- Petoskey stone is silicified fossil and is polished like agate. Various polishing powders, such as tin-oxide, chromium-oxide and iron-oxide are used.

A fascinating story appeared in the March 3, 1924 issue of the *Battle Creek Enquirer* in Battle Creek, Michigan about a large Petoskey stone that served as a paperweight on the desk of Phil Ross of the Central National Bank. At some point, E.M. Brigham, curator of the museum of the Battle Creek Public Schools, was consulted about the stone and its origin.

"Petoskey stone, rare? Why hardly, as many stones of that type are to be found between Lake Avenue and Coldwater Street [in Battle Creek], as there are in all of the Petoskey sector.

"Well then,' said his inquirer, 'why are Petoskey stones called by that name?'

"The answer was 'Battle Creek people haven't time to run around town picking up stones. In Petoskey all they have to do is wander over the beaches and they naturally run on to the stones, which of course have to be polished before they take the luster which makes them so popular. Petoskey curio dealers have helped the thing along by polishing them in not too large numbers and placing them in their windows for sale, along with some other stones, which are not native to the region.'"

This region of Michigan seemed to have a particular interest in Petoskey stones, as the paper ran another story on August 30, 1931 which read:

"The pretty Petoskey stone which was plentiful 20 or more years ago, appears like a coral formation. The native children along the shore of the lake in the vicinity of Petoskey watch for the waves to wash up these pretty stones with each incoming wave, and gather them for the tourist trade. The stones are sold

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October 2022

September 2022



to the souvenir booths. They are given a high polish which turns each spot into a gleaming eye.”

So, while these unique natural souvenirs have been rolling around the Lake Michigan shoreline for eons, they weren't actually identified, sold and widely collected for the past 100 years or so (that we know of).

Fast forward to the spring of 1965.

In May, Michigan State Representatives Eugene R. Cater (D-Ludington) and Stanley Powell (R-Ionia) introduced House Bill 2297 to designate the Petoskey stone as the state's official stone. It passed by a vote of 79-19 on Wednesday, May 19, 1965. The next month, Michigan Senator Thomas F. Schweiger (R-Petoskey) introduced a similar bill in the Senate which was passed 23-9 on Monday, June 14, 1965.

From there, it was off to Governor George Romney for signing during a special ceremony on Monday, June 28, 1965. Also in attendance were Rep. Cater, Rep. Powell and Princess Ella Jane Petoskey — granddaughter of Chief Petoskey for whom the city was named — whose participation was made possible by the Grand Valley Rock and Mineral Society. Ella presented a bit about her legendary grandfather and at the end of the ceremony was presented with the pen used by the governor in signing the bill, while Rep. Cater presented the governor himself with a tie clasp and cuff link set made of Petoskey stones to commemorate the day's significance.

Interesting enough, it wasn't until 1969 that geologist Dr. Edwin C. Stumm, Professor of Geology and Curator of Paleozoic Invertebrates at the University of Michigan, made the formal determination that what was thought to be a Petoskey “stone” was actually fossilized colonial coral of the genus and species *Hexagonaria percarinata*.

If you're looking to do a little [rock hunting](#) for Petoskey stones, we suggest the breakwall in downtown Petoskey, Magnus City Park Beach on West Lake Street and Petoskey State Park on M-119 on the way to Harbor Springs. A little tip for new hunters...spring (after the snow and ice melt) and following windy thunderstorms are prime times to find Petoskey stones as the waves have moved them along the bottom of the lake to the shoreline. Please note that Michigan law limits the amount of stones that can be collected to 25 pounds per person, per year.

And if you can't find any on your own, many of our downtown retail shops sell them ([click here to find out more](#)).



MICHIGAN STATE SYMBOLS

- State Flower: Apple Blossom (1897)
- State Bird: American Robin (1931)
- State Stone: Petoskey Stone (1965)
- State Fish: Trout (1965) (Specified Brook Trout in 1988)
- State Gem: Chlorastrolite (1972)
- State Soil: Kalkaska Sand (1990)
- State Reptile: Painted Turtle (1995)
- State Mammal: White-Tailed Deer (1997)
- State Wildflower: Dwarf Lake Iris (1998)
- State Fossil: Mastodon (2002)



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About the author

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