

Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, W. Atlee Burpee & Co. Records – Accretion 2. Grass as our National Floral Emblem. Kentucky Bankers Association, January 1959. “American National Flower Emblem Debate, May 5, 1959,” Box 347, Folder 8.

RESOLUTION

In Favor of Grass as a National Floral Emblem

Whereas, it has been suggested that the Kentucky Bankers Association, along with all other state bankers associations, endorse the adoption by the United States Congress of the Corn Tassel as our National Floral Emblem, and

Whereas, joint resolutions have been introduced in Congress to make the Corn Tassel the National Floral Emblem, and

Whereas, it has been brought to the attention of the Kentucky Bankers Association, that the Corn Tassel is not a perfect flower but is only the staminate, or male flower and in itself is of little value; and that the pistillate, or female flower — the ear of corn - is the part that produces the valuable grains, and

Whereas, the Kentucky Bankers Association recognizes the value of corn to the economy of our country, both in the past and present; but at the same time it is cognizant of the destruction of land and the terrible losses in fertility brought about by leaching and erosion due to the improper culture of corn on hilly, rolling and unadapted land, and

Whereas, the Kentucky Bankers Association has considered the merits of other plants as the National Floral Emblem and has found that GRASS, with its beautiful blooms and artistic seed heads, more nearly represents, than any other plant, the ideals and aspirations of the American people. (It is GRASS that was mentioned first, of all living things, in the story of creation; it was GRASS with its deep, penetrating roots that gave fertility and protection to the great plains and prairie soils of America; it was GRASS that sustained the buffalo whence came our forefather's food. It is GRASS that feeds the lowing cattle, the gentle sheep, the patient horse; it is to GRASS that we turn to heal our fields after they have been eroded and ravished by the plow and the cultivator. GRASS is truly the hope of the conservationist and the dream of the naturalist.)

Now, Therefore Be It Resolved, that the Kentucky Bankers Association through action of its Executive Committee, meeting on December 17, 1958, and after much consideration, endorse the adoption of GRASS as the Floral Emblem of the United States and urge its adoption by the United States Congress and request the President of the United States to declare such fact by proclamation.

Be It Further Resolved, that a copy of these resolutions and supporting documents be entered in the minutes of this meeting and copies be sent to the United States Senators and Congressmen from Kentucky, state bankers associations, state and national farm organizations, conservation associations, and the farm press and other individuals, groups and organizations interested in the conservation and welfare of our country's greatest natural resource — its soil.

MAURICE KIRBY, *President*

RALPH FONTAINE, *Executive Secretary*

GRASS is nature's forgiveness . . .

Her constant Benediction

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A Conservationist's Response to an appeal to Make the Corn Tassel Our National Floral Emblem

Why the corn tassel? The American floral emblem should be a perfect and complete flower, representing all that is best in both men and women, a united family — a united country. The corn tassel is not a perfect flower. It is only the male organ of the corn plant. It blooms, it sheds pollen, it dries up and leaves nothing to show for its existence.

The male corn flower? No! It towers over the female, it waves in the wind and dominates the field. For only a few days it is virile and then, in its last wild rampage, it scatters its pollen to the wide ranges of the compass — then fades and dies and is gone forever.

The female corn flower? Yes. Well, maybe yes. Although not so showy as the tassel, it represents stability — food (and drink), clothing, warmth, beauty, fertility and motherhood.

The corn tassel? No! They are in surplus production. Even though nine-tenths of the tassels were lost, the harvest would not be diminished. The tassels serve one purpose only — to bear, for a few hours, the pollen to fertilize the ovaries of the ear. They leave nothing to posterity.

But the female flower, the ear? Yes, well, maybe yes. The female flower and its three component parts; the cob, the grain and the husk, has intrinsic and historic values. The cob, from which emerges the golden, silver and ruby silks, is the symbol of peace. From it is fashioned the old time corn cob pipes; the "pipes of peace", so to speak. And how we need them today! The grain — each one a veritable package of atomic energy which no human can produce without the help of the Almighty, might well be the symbol of immortality. They are the links between the past and the future. In them are those sparks of God-given life which, even though buried for thousands of years will grow again and reproduce themselves a thousand fold. And the shucks that wrap the cob and precious grain — even they might well symbolize protection and care. They protect those intricate parts, the tiny embryos and fragile silks until from them the kernels have developed. From these shucks our forefathers wove their chair bottoms, braided their "welcome" door mats and fashioned their mattresses. Even the silks that wither and dry so soon after fulfilling their purpose have a nostalgic remembrance for those country boys who used them, wrapped in the thin tissues of shuck, to enjoy their first venture into youthful freedom — the pleasure of smoking a cornsilk cigarette.

And what is more beautiful than an ear of corn? Fresh buttered sweet corn; golden rich, yellow dent corn; rich, silvery, white corn. What child does not enjoy the mysteries of the exploding popcorn, and who does not admire the beauties of the colorful squaw-corn?

The tassel? Never! The ear — yes — maybe, yes. But why the rush? Why not consider other flowers? The cotton flower, for example, is a perfect combination of the male and the female blossom, the product of which represents food and fiber. Cotton has, from our early days, been the bulwark of trade and commerce. It has paid more foreign debts and brought over more foreign money than any other single American product.

But, above all, why not consider GRASS as a national floral emblem? Not just one grass — any grass — all grass. No more fitting tribute could be paid to any plant than that composed by the beloved late Senator from Kansas, John James Ingalls, who, in 1872, under the title "Blue-grass", wrote these immortal words:

"Next in importance to the Divine profusion of water, light and air, . . . may be reckoned the universal beneficence of grass. . . Grass is the most widely distributed of all vegetable beings, and is at once the type of our life and the emblem of our mortality. . . Our earliest recollections are of grass; and when the fitful fever is ended, and the foolish wrangle of the market and forum is closed, grass heals over the scar which our descent into the bosom of the earth has made, and the carpet of the infant becomes the blanket of the dead.

Grass is the forgiveness of nature — her constant benediction. Fields trampled with battle, saturated with blood, torn with the ruts of cannon, grow green again with grass, and carnage is forgotten. Streets abandoned by traffic become grass-grown like rural lanes, and are obliterated. Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish, but grass is immortal. . . Its tenacious fibers hold the earth in its place, and prevent its soluble components from washing into the wasting sea. It invades the solitude of deserts, climbs the inaccessible slopes and forbidding pinnacles of mountains, modifies climates, and determines the history, character and destiny of nations. Unobtrusive and patient, it has immortal vigor and aggression. Banished from the thoroughfare and the field, it bides its time to return and when vigilance is relaxed, or the dynasty has perished, it silently resumes the throne from which it has been expelled, but which it never abdicates. It bears no blazonry of bloom to charm the sense with fragrance or splendor, but its homely hue is more enchanting than the lily or the rose; it yields no fruit in earth or air, and yet would its harvest fail for a single year, famine would depopulate the earth. . . "

What more can we add? And what could be more beautiful than a colorful floret of grass waving gently in the breeze above a carpet of emerald green?

As for us — we cast our vote, first for GRASS, next for cotton, thirdly for the ear of corn — but as for the corn tassel — we vote "NO"!

WM. C. JOHNSTONE,
Agricultural Representative
Kentucky Bankers Association

**GRASS is nature's forgiveness . . .
Her constant Benediction**

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QUOTES

. . . *And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass . . . And the earth brought forth grass . . .*

GENESIS 1:11-12

. . . *And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle that thou mayest eat and be full . . .*

DEUTERONOMY 11:15

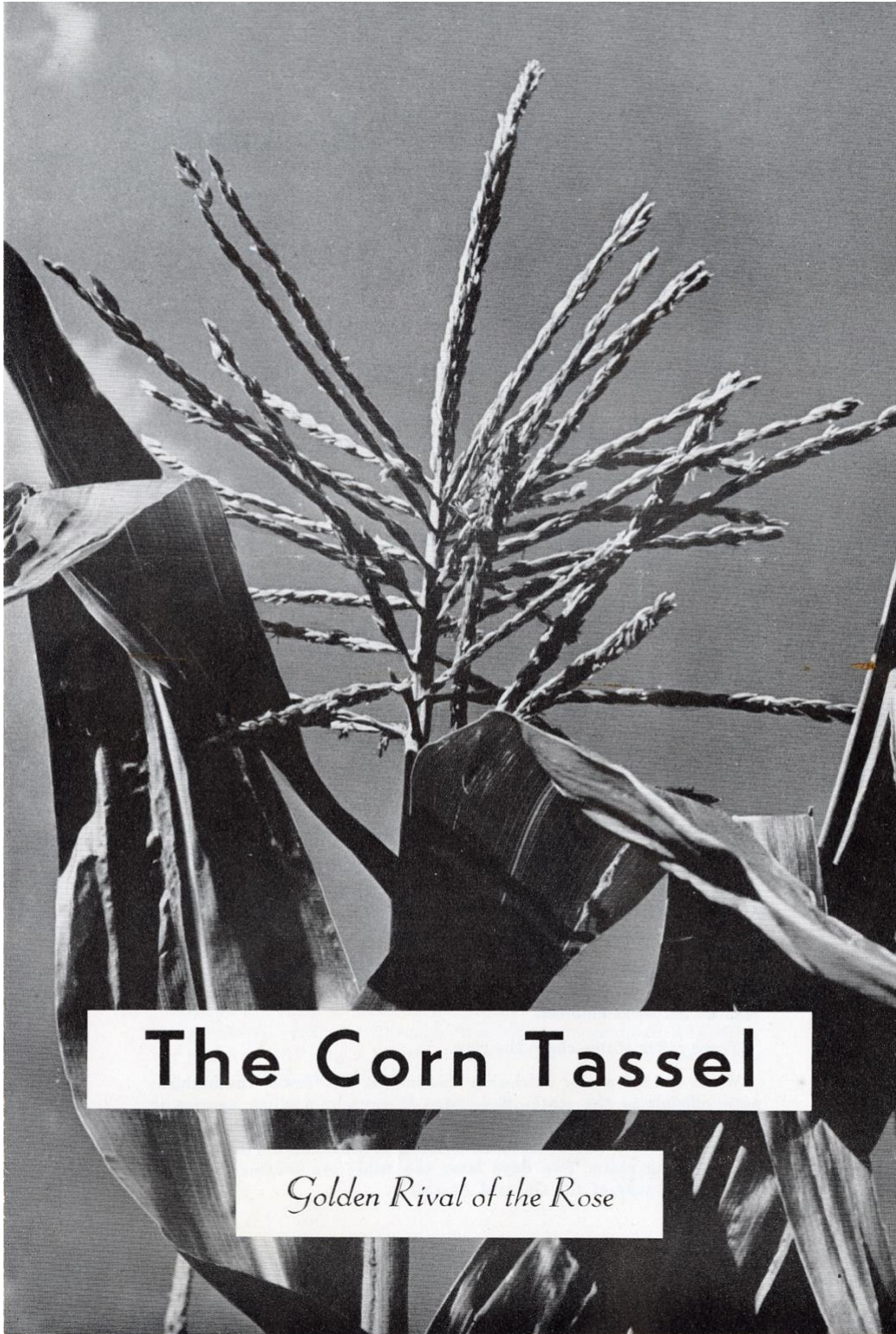
. . . *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.*

PSALM 23:1-2

. . . *For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away.*

PETER 1:24

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The Corn Tassel

Golden Rival of the Rose

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The Tassel of the Corn

It is so right that at long last an interest has been awakened in the United States in the need of selecting a national floral emblem. Nearly every other nation has made such a choice, a choice based upon reason—an historic event, a spiritual or religious inspiration, or from a deep sense of gratitude.

The shamrock of Ireland was a religious choice. St. Patrick used its three leaves to illustrate the unity of the Trinity. The thistle of Scotland, the leek of Wales, and the rose of England were based on historic events.

The "Lily of France" the iris, was a selection founded on gratitude. The pagan warrior, Clovis, the founder of France, thought defeat inevitable while waging a desperate battle. His wife, the good Queen Clotilda, was an early Christian convert. Clovis appealed to her to pray to her God for his deliverance.

While invoking divine guidance Clotilda caught the vision of iris growing in a crossing of the river, indicating shallow water, hence a place to ford the otherwise swift stream. Clovis found the ford, made a surprise attack, routing the enemy. In gratitude for their deliverance Clovis accepted Christianity and placed three golden iris upon his shield. Later, the iris was conventionalized to form the fleur-de-lis.

No flower has figured so prominently and continuously as the rose. Its history goes back to the dim days of very ancient Media. From Media it was taken by Nebuchadnezzar to adorn his famous Hanging Gardens. From there it became known as the Persian rose. It verily scents the pages of Persian poetry and prose.

However, the rose was never chosen as a national flower until after the War of Roses, the struggle between the rival houses of Lancaster and York, when England claimed it. The York rose is beloved in England and it appeared in poignant sentimentality and rare delicacy of needlework upon the wedding gown of Princess Elizabeth of York, now Queen Elizabeth.

Englishmen carried the York rose to the New World, planting it on their estates, later naming the state "New York" and selecting the rose as its floral emblem.

Three other states chose the rose.

When in 1897 a new battleship was named the "Iowa" the enthusiastic officials in the state office voted to present a silver service to the ship. Seeking an inspiration for an appropriate design they chose the native wild rose which covered the, as yet, unplowed lands of the young state. Two days later the wild rose became the state flower by a vote of the General Assembly.

The prairie rose of North Dakota, beloved of the pioneers, gained the same distinction.

The development of the stately American Beauty Rose led the District of Columbia to choose it as its emblem. However, the Better Times Rose now usually replaces the very scarce American Beauty.

Beautiful as is the rose in all its forms, and dearly as I personally love it, it holds no significance as a possible choice as the national floral emblem.

My reasons upon which a national floral emblem should be based are these:

1. It must be of American origin, born in the western world and found nowhere else.
2. It must have its roots in every state in the Union.
3. It must serve the nation, and to have served it well from the first landings of settlers in New England and Virginia to the present moment.
4. It must not alone be a flower of prettiness, but possess the rare beauty of practicality, of productivity.
5. Its choice as a national floral emblem should be based on gratitude for what it has been, is, and always will be to the people of the United States—a veritable symbol of this nation.

What flower can fill these ardent demands of reason? The tassel of the corn! It has proved itself a faithful friend to all of our land. In fading, the rose dies, but the flower of the corn in fading gives birth to the golden seed which has given sustenance, health, and infinite prosperity to the United States. Well may the vast harvests of the golden seed be called the Key to Fort Knox!

An emblem is that which is intimately associated with what it represents. Corn is so closely and historically associated with the United States that Donald C. Spaulding, writing in the "Nation's Business," states: "Corn is our largest and oldest crop—besides being the most valuable. Next to the air we breathe, probably no other substance is so intimately connected with our daily living from the cradle to the grave." This vital relationship began with our Founding Fathers, continuing through the centuries.

Corn is the basis of America's economy, the foundation of this nation's material greatness. Through its countless by-products, it is lifting our standard of living to a height never before known to man, filling our national coffers with gold.

Even as Clovis in his gratitude placed golden iris upon his shield, actually founding France on gratitude, so should we as a nation, etch the tassel of the corn on our national shield.

MARGO CAIRNS
Minneapolis

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A GLIMPSE INTO HISTORY

Food was the urgent need of the Pilgrims upon their arrival in America. Leaving the women and children on the Mayflower, the men skirted the coast. Then, apparently without direction, they beached their small boat, plunged through the concealing brush and found an Indian cache of golden seed — a sacred hour in this country's annals;

HALLOWED FLOWER

Buried deep among the sand dunes
On a shore — cold, bleak and bare,
Was an earthen bowl of manna —
Weary Pilgrims found it there,
Found the New World's gift of substance
Left by Diety's behest,
'Twas the golden maize of wonder,
'Twas the sun's supreme bequest.

Day by day this corn sustained them
In the Peniel of their faith,
Till the Pilgrims' copious harvest
Forever sped starvation's wraith.
Harvests that have fed the millions
Have increased with passing time,
Bringing fortune to this nation,
Giving health in every clime.


O great heart of Love, we thank thee:
Thy gold flower, hallowed, fair,
Given to our guardian country
Now can bless men everywhere.
Faithful, it is ever fruitful,
So the land where it was born
Lifts aloft its floral emblem —
Tassel of the golden corn!

Margo Cairns

Floral Emblem:

a plant or flower recognized as symbolic
of a nation, state, territory, or the like.

—Webster's Dictionary.

Copies obtainable through Corn Tassel National Emblem Association,  Admiral Hotel, Minneapolis 2, Minnesota.

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