



Plaza Flagpoles

INFORMATION SHEET

The Supreme Court Building has two flagpoles located symmetrically on the front plaza. At seventy-five feet high, each pole assembly includes an eight-tiered bronze base, a fluted pole connecting the base to the flagpole, and an American eagle as the crowning ornamentation.

The bases of the flagpoles have elaborate decoration. The lowest tier of each base consists of a concrete octagon. Each of the eight sides contains swags of drapery in carved relief. The second tier, also octagonal, is made of bronze and exhibits a shield and rinceau (or scrolling-pattern) motif. Each face depicts a central shield with swirling leaves concluding in a flower bloom radiating from the shield. The third level contains horizontal layers of small circular buds interspersed among reed-like shoots. Eight mollusk shells connected by intertwining fish with distinct scales adorn the fourth tier.

Four cherubs in loosely fitted robes kneel upon the fifth tier. One cherub holds the scales of justice as well as a sword, symbolizing authority. Another holds a book, symbolizing learning. The next holds the mask and the torch, symbolizing light removing the mask of untruth. The last cherub holds a Pen and Mace, symbolizing legislation. Between the cherubs are swags with four medallions above. Portrayed in the medallions are the four elements: air is represented by an eagle, water by a fish, earth by a lion's head, and fire by a tripod of flame.

The sixth tier contains acanthus leaves with pine cones and pine fronds above. The seventh tier features a row of snails. Egg and dart molding emerges vertically from foliage on the eighth tier. Finally, the ninth tier depicts anthemion, ornaments consisting of foliated forms arranged on a flat radiating cluster, similar to a palm frond.

Above this elaborate base arises a high fluted pole, culminating in an eagle. The flagpoles were designed by Cass Gilbert, the Supreme Court Building's architect, and they were completed by John Donnelly & Co. in 1935.



Detail of the Flagpole Bases

