

## The Old North State: North Carolina

Tim Barton

North Carolina has been referred to as the "Old North State" in reference to the fact that it was established prior to South Carolina (which was carved from the original North Carolina) and is situated north of its southern neighbor. North Carolina has some interesting state symbols approved by the General Assembly. For any given category, the year of its adoption as a state symbol will be enclosed in parentheses.

The state shell is SCOTCH BONNET (1965) It is abundant at depths between 200 and 500 feet.

The state mineral is GOLD (2011). In 1799, Conrad Reed discovered a 17-pound nugget in Cabarrus County while on a fishing trip. This locale is now a historic site where gold can still be recovered, however, the gold did NOT originate here. The last I heard, the gold dirt was imported from the Cotton Patch Gold Mine! Today, good sources for gold are at the Thermal City Gold Mine and Lucky Strike Gold Mine, both situated just north of Rutherfordton.

The state rock is GRANITE (1979). Near Mt. Airy is the "largest open face granite quarry in the world" ("North Carolina State Symbols" 2014) at 1 mile long by 1,800 feet wide. Closer to home, the Vulcan company operates quarries in Penrose (outside Brevard) and in Hendersonville.

The state stone is EMERALD (1973). It is found at Hiddenite at the Adams Farm and the North American Emerald Mine (NAEM, formerly the Rist Mine). Another prominent mine is the Crabtree Emerald Mine in Little Switzerland. The largest uncut emerald, from the North American Emerald Mine, was 1,869 carats (Emerald Crystal Pockets of the Hiddenite District Alexander Co. NC by Ed Speer 2008). It is valued at over 51 million and resides in the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences in Houston, Texas. Of the cut stones, a 30.8 carat pale stone came from Mitchell County. The "Carolina Emerald" (found at NAEM), weighing 13.14 carats, is owned by Tiffany and Company of New York (valued at over \$100,000 in 1970). The "Carolina Queen" (found at NAEM), at 18.85 carats, had a value of 51 million in 1998.

The state fossil is the MEGALODON SHARK TOOTH (2013]. These teeth are found at Aurora. The phosphate pit used to allow a busload of rockhounds to collect here periodically. The spoil piles made for some good fossil hunts on land, but with the change of management, the site was closed for such collecting opportunities. Stay tuned for any revisions in policy. However, the museum is very nice, with complete jaws of several kinds of sharks, scenic murals, and an outside sand pit where you can discover fossils to take home.

For more interesting state symbols of the Old North State, google "North Carolina State Symbols." It makes for some interesting reading about the Tarheel State.