

The Seal of the City of Pittsburgh

The basis of the Great Seal of the City of Pittsburgh is the family coat of arms of **William Pitt the Elder, Earl of Chatham (1708–1778)**, who was Great Britain’s secretary of state during the Seven Year’s War (1756–1763) and later Prime Minister (1766–1768).



After the defeat of the French at Fort Duquesne, **British General John Forbes named the city on November 27, 1758 in honor of William Pitt**. Pitt devised the military strategy that enabled Britain to beat the French in this region—and around the world. He was the man most responsible for seeing that British General John Forbes’ army of more than 5,000 soldiers and Virginia colonists was kept well-supplied in 1758 as they marched through the wilderness to the Point. The conflict that started in the Western Pennsylvania wilderness in 1753 between France and Great Britain, known as the French and Indian War in America, became the Seven Year’s War (1756–1763) in Europe.

In 1816, when Pittsburgh was officially chartered as a city, a City Seal was created based on William Pitt’s family coat of arms. However, all papers documenting the original design of the City Seal were apparently destroyed in the Great Fire of 1845. Therefore, after the Great Fire, a gentleman named Mr. Jones was hired to make a seal based on the recollections of people who had actually seen the seal.

According to Doug MacGregor, museum educator at the Fort Pitt Museum, “The origin of the **three gold coins** goes back to Byzantine times. They are **actually called bezants** and represented real money and it became **a symbol of honesty in coats of arms**. While making the seal of Pittsburgh in 1816, the draftsman was confused as to what they were called and thought they were called ‘pheasants’ instead of bezants. The draftsman thought pheasants were not a majestic enough bird for our seal so he made them eagles on the Pittsburgh seal. **Blue and white were the Pitt family livery colors**, the colors they wore on their robes when going into Parliament.” The **checkerboard pattern symbolizes finance and commerce**, suggesting a cloth with coins placed on it, creating a checkerboard pattern.

So we have a shield with a black background, crossed by a blue-and-white checkerboard, showing three gold coins—all elements from the Pitt family coat of arms—with embossed American eagles, topped by a castle. A castle symbolizes “city” in the language of heraldry.

Therefore, the City Seal can be translated to mean “the City of Pitt in America.” (“burgh” is another word for city or town).

In 1950, Pittsburgh officially adopted the Pitt family motto for the City: *Benigno Numine*, a Latin phrase meaning “By Divine Providence.”

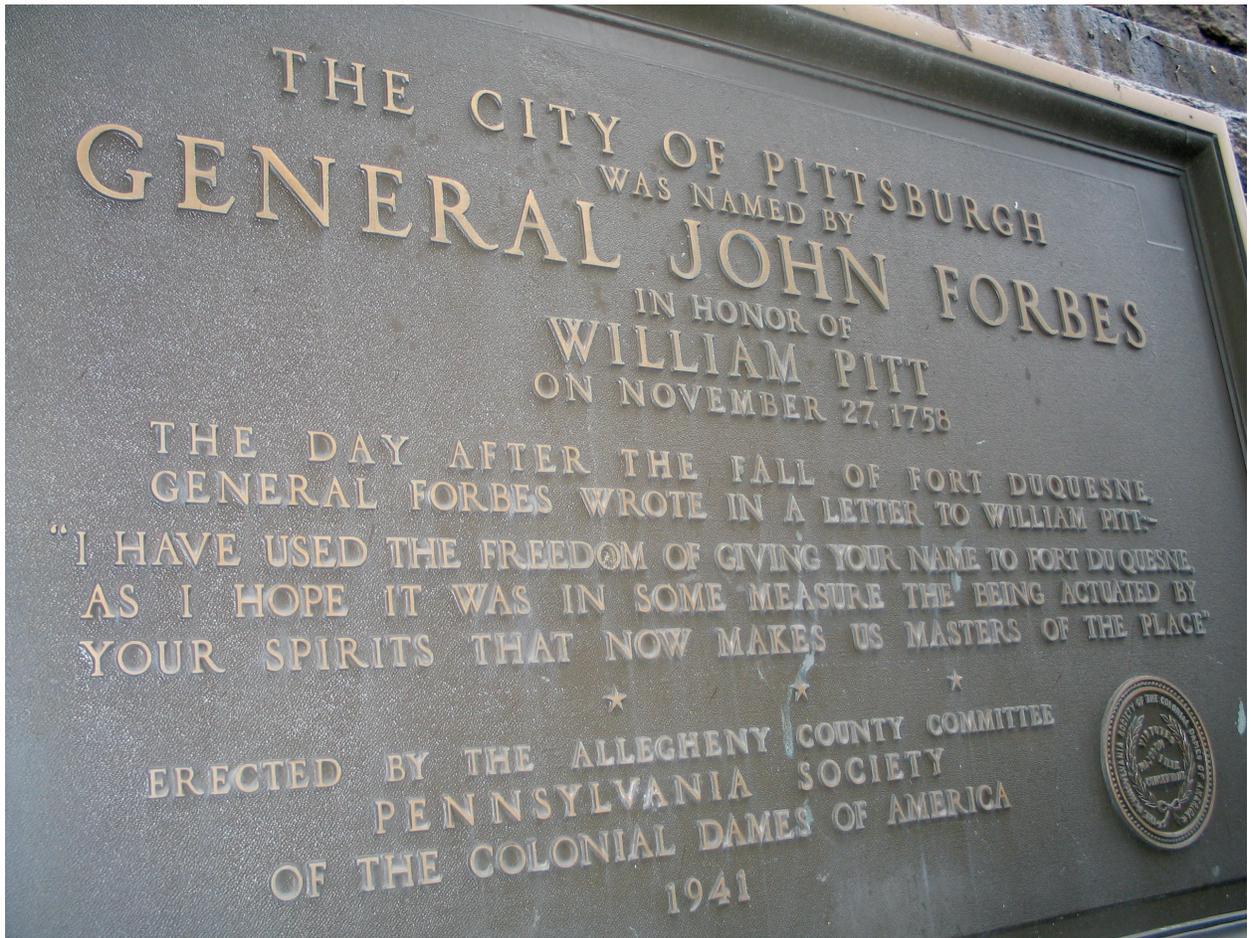
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A portrait of William Pitt the Elder, for whom Pittsburgh is named, and his family coat of arms, as seen in the floor of the Fort Pitt Museum, Point State Park, Pittsburgh. **Our city colors of black and gold come from the Pitt family coat of arms too.**



A plaque on the Allegheny County Courthouse, 436 Grant Street, Pittsburgh

