Why is Kentucky called a “Commonwealth”?  In this country, “commonwealth” is another word for “state.” The term implies a commitment to the “commonweal,” or common good of the people. Several states (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, in addition to Kentucky) call themselves commonwealths. Since Kentucky was formed from Virginia, our state’s founders decided to use the term too.

Capitol vs. Capital. A capitol is a building used as a headquarters of a government. A capitol houses legislative chambers and may also have courtrooms and government offices. A capital is a city that is the seat of government of a state or nation. This building is a capitol. Frankfort is a capital.

Frankfort, Kentucky
STATE CAPITAL
KENTUCKY
of the
A Self-Guided Tour

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SECOND FLOOR – JUDICIAL BRANCH

From the top of the steps on the second floor, observe the view of the nave, or Main corridor. This spectacular space is over 300 feet long. It is lined with 36 huge, one-piece columns made of Vermont granite. Note the colorful art skylights and grand staircase. Also from here you can see the murals in the lunettes on either end of the nave. Painted by Gilbert White, the murals depict moments in the early history of Kentucky.

The one over the East wing is a representation of Daniel Boone’s first view of the Bluegrass region, or “beautiful level of Kentucky,” in 1769.

The mural to the West shows Boone and Richard Henderson concluding the Treaty of Watauga in 1775 which allowed the Transylvania Company to purchase much of the land that is Kentucky from the Cherokee Indians.

On the second floor of the Capitol you will notice many paintings. These are portraits of Justices of the Kentucky Supreme Court and judges of the former Court of Appeals.

Supreme Court. Feel free to enter the room when court is not in progress. With its Hoduran mahogany paneling and Dutch metal leafed ceiling lacquered to resemble bronze, it is one of the most impressive and dignified spaces in the Capitol.

State Reception Room. (Please help us in preserving this room by remaining on the carpet runner.) Perhaps the most elegant room in the Capitol, the state reception room was intended as a place for special events and as the reception area for the governor’s office, originally next door. Inspired by grand salons in European palaces, the room was restored in 1995 to its original grandeur. The placement of the mirrors on either end of the room creates the illusion of an infinite view, like that in the Hall of Mirrors of the Palace of Versailles in France.

Stepping outside of the State Reception Room, a small chapel, press offices, and the office of the Chief Justice (not open for tours) are on the West end of this floor.

THIRD FLOOR – LEGISLATIVE FLOOR

Senate chamber (on the West end of the building). You may enter the Senate if the chamber is not in use. Raised galleries allow the public to view the Senate’s deliberations during legislative sessions. There are desks for thirty-eight senators, who also have individual offices in the Capitol Annex. Please proceed to the other end of the third floor - the East end.

House of Representatives. You may enter the House chamber if it is not in use. The House of Representatives, like the Senate, also includes spectator galleries and desks for members. However, with 100 members, the size of the House requires some additional features. Votes are recorded electronically and displayed on panels on either side of the Speaker’s desk. Each member of the General Assembly has a desktop computer.

State Song (adopted by legislature 1963)

“My Old Kentucky Home” by Stephen Foster

The sun shines bright in My Old Kentucky Home, 'Tis summer, the people are gay; The corn-top’s ripe and the meadow’s in the bloom While the birds make music all the day

The young folks roll on the little cabin floor, All merry, all happy and bright; By 'n' by, hard times comes a knocking at the door Then My Old Kentucky Home, good night

Chorus

Weep no more my lady, Weep no more today; We will sing one song For My Old Kentucky Home For My Old Kentucky Home, far away