



MARCY Molinaro wears cotton gloves to handle a resin replica of the seal of Queen Victoria from 1837. The Marshall Museum curator ordered a range of historical replicas to supplement the traveling exhibit on the Great Seal, from the ancient seals of the Indus Valley in the Middle East to other royal seals, including one for "Queen Anne of Virginia," showing a Native American kneeling to the British monarch in submission. Molinaro noted that the royal seals were relatively large, showing the importance of the monarchs.



MARCY MOLLINARO slides the panel of an interactive display revealing the meanings of the symbols and Latin mottoes on the obverse (front) and reverse (back) design of the Great Seal. The reverse design has never been cut as a die for a seal, but the pyramid has been shown on the back of the \$1 bill since 1935. BELOW, the Great Seal has been reproduced on flags, currency and even in needlepoint, as shown here in this photo, included in the traveling exhibit, of a piece by a North Carolina chapter of the American Needlepoint Guild. (All photos by Kit Huffman)

# The Great Seal

## Marshall Museum Puts Own Stamp On Traveling Exhibit

By KIT HUFFMAN

The image is striking, but familiar.

The bald eagle, head firmly turned to its right, flutters motionlessly in space, wings up-spread in a stylized arc.

It's a busy bird, both sets of talons grasping symbols of power — 13 sharp arrows for war in the eagle's left claw and a 13-fruited olive branch for peace in his left. His fierce beak, too, is occupied, clamped down on a ribbon-like scroll bearing the famous motto: "E Pluribus Unum." Even his chest is taken, magically supporting a shield with 13 vertical stripes surmounted by a solid bar. Above the eagle floats a constellation of 13 stars surrounded by a ring of 19 puffy clouds, thus breaking the numerical pattern.

We see this image — the Great Seal of the United States — every time we glance at the back of a \$1 bill. Along with the eagle, we might notice its partner image on the left: a curiously truncated pyramid topped with a wide-staring eye, the pyramid nearly encircled by two more Latin mottoes, "Annuit Coeptus," or "Providence favors our undertakings," and, below, "Novus Ordo Seclorum," meaning "A new order of the ages."

Both designs were created as part of the United States official seal, with the eagle created for the "obverse," or front side, of the seal and the pyramid planned for the "reverse," or back. Only the eagle, though, was ever cut into a die for the official stamp.

The image of the Great Seal is familiar, but what do we know about its evolution

and history? What is the Great Seal, anyway, and how and why is it used?

These questions are answered in a traveling exhibit at the George C. Marshall Museum, entitled "Celebrating the 225th Anniversary of the Great Seal: Past, Present, and Future." The Marshall Museum is the first stop in the exhibit's nationwide tour.

### An Exhibit Is Born

"People are passionate about the Great Seal, and I found that passion contagious," said Priscilla Linn, senior curator at the United States Diplomacy Center who created the exhibit.

Linn, whose talk tomorrow at the Marshall Museum has the working title of "The Great Seal of the United States: Branding Unity, Strength and Independence," noted that her immediate impetus for the exhibit was the 225th anniversary of the casting of the first Great Seal.

However, not being too fixated on numbers or anniversaries, she acknowledged a more personal motivation for the show: honoring Paul Claussen, a diplomatic historian for the State department who had recently died. "He was a master historian," she said.

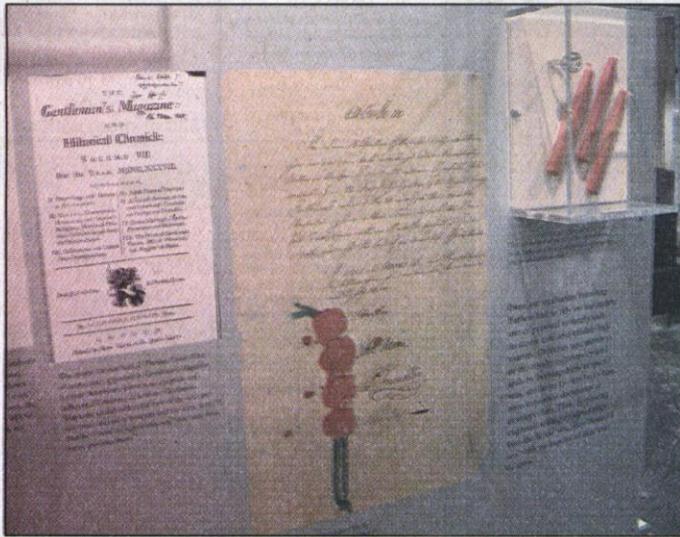
The exhibit first opened last February at the State Department in Washington, D.C., where Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice — the official keeper of the seal — did the honors. At the opening, for a few hours only, the first Great Seal, an artifact dating to 1782, was on display from the National Archives.

Linn, who holds a doctor of philosophy degree from Oxford University in social anthropology, studying cultural symbols, noted that the topic of the Great Seal fit in well with her interests.

"Seals have been important through history as an indicator of civilizations," she said. "Seals came about with the first



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INSTEAD OF the Great Seal, the 1783 draft of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War, was sealed with red wax stamped with the family signet rings of Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, John Adams and David Hartley, representing George III. The Great Seal was first used in September 1782 on a document authorizing George Washington to negotiate with the British for the exchange and better treatment of prisoners of war.



"KNOW YE, that reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity and abilities of George C. Marshall Jr. ..." So begins the official commission promoting Marshall to a captain of the Infantry on July 20, 1916. The document, taken from the Marshall archives to display with the traveling exhibit about the Great Seal of the United States, is signed by President Woodrow Wilson and stamped with the dark blue seal of the War Office. Bob James, vice president of the Marshall Foundation and director of outreach programs, who helped bring the exhibit to Lexington, points out the presidential signature on the document.

THE NEWS-GAZETTE, LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2008, SECTION C, PAGE 5

## Seal

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cities and settlements. They're a measure of production and transactions, and also of protection. Most important, a seal validates and authenticates, and that's what it does today."

Besides discovering the high passions elicited by the Great Seal, Linn encountered some exciting historical personalities in the course of her research for the exhibit.

One of these was Pierre Eugene du Simitiere, a talented draftsman and portrait artist who made the first sketch for the seal in 1776. (That early sketch included six symbols of European nations, to reflect the origins of the American population, but no eagle.) Linn learned that du Simitiere was also an early historian and the founder of the first history museum of the United States — especially interesting, she said, to one in the museum field. (Unfortunately, that first museum has disappeared, Linn said.)

Also emerging as an interesting personality was Charles Thomson, secretary of the Continental Congress, who ultimately came up with the basic design of the Great Seal, complete with eagle, motto and coat of arms. "Thomson was one of the least known of the Founding Fathers," Linn observed, "yet so important in his period. He was respected, honest and trustworthy."

Linn noted that Thomson's home, Harrison House in Bryn Mawr, Pa., is set to be the next site for the exhibit.

Another figure in her research was Stephen Pleasonton, keeper of the seal during the War of 1812, who rescued some important early documents by stuffing them into linen bags and taking them out of the burning capital. The original Great Seal was also spared, though exactly how that occurred is a mystery, she said.

Finally, among the constellation of figures in Great Seal history, Linn learned about a chief of presidential appointments in the 1950s who worked to find a secure location for the seal.

"During and after World War II, the Great Seal had a peripatetic existence, floating from office to office," Linn said. "Clydia Mae Richardson pleaded for a better home for the seal. She thought it wasn't respected enough. By 1955, she got it displayed in a place of honor in the mezzanine of the old State Department building. It came to the current State Department building in 1961.

"I admire her dedication," Linn concluded. "She did what she had to do."

### Marshall Installation

As assembled by Linn, the Great Seal exhibit is displayed on three, four-sided kiosks for a total of 12 panels. Transported to Lexington from the State Department by truck, the kiosks were then arranged in the downstairs exhibit space by Marshall Museum curator Marcy Molinaro.

Entering the room, one first sees a giant silver-painted reproduction of the Great Seal, mounted on the front panel of the first kiosk. Instinctively, the visitor circles the kiosk in a counterclockwise direction, learning about the origins of seals and seals in the American colonies, before moving on to the second kiosk, covering the creation of the Great Seal, and then the third, containing facsimiles of 20th century sealed documents.

This last display also includes an amusing story about the \$1 bill. The bill, first printed with the Great Seal in 1935, was redesigned as an afterthought by FDR who initially approved the first layout, with the eagle on the left and the pyramid on the right, and

then changed his mind, reversing their order.

"The beauty of exhibits like this is their flexibility of installation," said Molinaro, as she put the finishing touches on the Marshall Museum exhibit. "It's even more fun for the original curator to see his or her traveling exhibit in all the different venues, as well as the changes of interpretation," she added.

Noting that the original exhibit was in a "huge vast room" at the State Department, Molinaro said she relished finding the ideal arrangement for the exhibit in the Marshall Museum space, as well as adding artifacts and documents from the Marshall Museum.

"Exhibit designing is my passion, so this was a great opportunity," she said. "I have 25 years of experience in the museum field and I love playing with artifacts, doing the research and designing, so this project brought it all together."

For a long wall in the exhibit space, she selected three parchment documents from the War Office — Army commissions promoting George Marshall to first lieutenant, captain and general. The documents, each sealed with the dark blue seal of the War Office, bear the original signatures of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Mounted next to the documents are enlarged photographs, also from the museum archives, of Marshall from each of those periods.

In a glass case along another wall, Molinaro displayed "incredible documents of history," including letters of commission signed by Harry Truman appointing William C. Foster to serve in the European Cooperative Administration, an outgrowth of the Marshall Plan.

A second glass case contains an

### Linn, Estrada To Speak At Opening

An opening reception for the exhibit, "Celebrating the Great Seal of the United States: Past, Present and Future," will be held at the Marshall Museum tomorrow, Thursday, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Speaking about the Great Seal will be Stephen Estrada, acting director of the State Department's United States Diplomacy Center, and Priscilla Linn, the Diplomacy Center's senior curator, who created the traveling exhibit.

The exhibit may be viewed at the Marshall Museum through Labor Day. The museum and exhibit will be open for free on Friday, July 4.

array of replicas of historical seals, from ancient times to Queen Victoria, ordered by Molinaro as an addition to the traveling exhibit.

Also for local exhibit, a children's interactive component has been created by intern Ashley Roeder, a recent graduate of Southern Virginia University.

Molinaro's credentials as a curator are impressive. Having earned a bachelor's degree in art history from the University of Iowa and a master's degree, also in art history, from George Washington University, she worked in the education department of the National Gallery and for Art Services International as exhibition curator, organizing exhibits for museums overseas and planning exhibits in museums in this country. She was also director of interpretation and collections at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's site in Montpelier, in Orange County.

Later moving to Maine, she became director of the Bricks Store Museum in Kennebunk, Maine. During that period, she traveled to the opening of an exhibit at the presidential library and museum of one of the Maine museum's most illustrious neighbors, George H.W. Bush.

Most recently, she spent some years in Germany, where she taught art history survey classes at the college level but, most importantly, "played" on the

continent, reveling in the riches of Europe's many art museums.

Bob James, Marshall Foundation vice president and director of outreach programs, recalled how he helped bring the traveling exhibit to Lexington.

"We were invited up to the exhibit's grand opening in Washington, D.C., in February. Condoleezza Rice opened the show, and the director of the National Archives was there. I was standing with Steve [Estrada, director of the Diplomacy Center] and I said to him, 'I want it.'"

The story of the Great Seal is "a significant piece of American history that a lot of people don't have a chance to see or know about," James said. "The exhibit reveals a 225-year history, from the initial design concept to the present Great Seal, as well as future ideas, as illustrated by school children, so it's about the past, present and future."

For James, the process of applying the Great Seal was also interesting.

"It's fascinating how the seals are stamped," he said. "It's still all done by hand today. They save up the documents, and make the seals only after they've been signed by the president. At the opening, they did it while we watched. It was incredible."