

The horse head stands for speed and strength, and is the state animal.

The forward facing knight's helmet represents sovereignty and self-government.

The female allegorical figure of "Liberty," with the "Liberty Cap" on her staff (see below).

The three plows on the shield reflect the importance of agriculture to the state's economy.

Ceres, the Roman goddess of grain holding a cornucopia filled with harvested produce, symbolizing abundance.

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT NEW JERSEY'S GREAT SEAL

by GORDON BOND

What's so "great" about New Jersey's "Great Seal"?

The concept of a state seal dates as far back as ancient Mesopotamia, when officials would roll engraved cylinders on wet clay to mark documents. From ancient Egyptian pharaohs to the 18th century's European monarchs and ecclesiastical officials, metal stamps and signet rings were used to imprint their emblems into wax as proof that a document was authentic and carried their authority.

Wax seals were also used by ordinary people on folded letters as security against prying eyes. A letter could not be opened without breaking the seal. Seals are found in many cultures around the world.

Americans inherited the practice from Europe, specifically from England where the Great Seal of the Realm was used to symbolize the monarch's authority. Forgery was a capital offense. During the English Civil War, when James II attempted to flee to

France in 1688, he threw his Great Seal into the Thames River so it could not be captured and used by his enemies.

NEW JERSEY AND THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

With the idea of a seal of state already part of the culture, it isn't surprising that the practice was adopted by the United States. Indeed, it was considered so important that when the Continental Congress declared

independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776, they also named the first committee to design a seal the same day. It was comprised of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. As brilliant as the three men might have been, they were somewhat clueless when it came to matters of heraldry. Since the seal was essentially the coat of arms for the new nation, they sought the advice of Pierre Eugene du Simitiere. But more about him later!

It took, however, six years, three committees, and the contributions of fourteen men before the Congress finally accepted a design in 1782. The final product was actually a combination of elements from the various designs submitted over the period—and New Jersey men played a role in that creative evolution.

On March 25, 1780 a second design committee was formed, which consisted of James Lovell of Boston, John Morin Scott of New York and William Churchill Houston of South Carolina. Houston, however, became a Jersian when he attended the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) and fought with the American militia in Somerset County. He went on to represent the county at New Jersey's convention to ratify the Constitution and was twice New Jersey's delegate to the Continental Congress—between 1779 and 1781 and again in 1784 to 1785. He also has the dubious distinction of being the first of the founding fathers to

die. He succumbed to tuberculosis in 1788 while in Frankford, Pennsylvania.

They brought in Francis Hopkinson (1737-1791), a Jersian with expertise in heraldry. In fact, he would do much of the actual work. It was Hopkinson who had put his signature on the Declaration of



Top: Thomson's original sketch.
Left: The first die based on his sketch.

Independence on behalf of New Jersey, along with Richard Stockton, John Hart, John Witherspoon and Abraham Clark. Hopkinson had a penchant for design and created the layout of the \$50 continental paper money note as well as—and not without some controversy—claiming credit for the American flag.

On May 4, 1782, the third committee was formed, this time consisting of John Rutledge and Arthur Middleton, both of South Carolina and Elias Boudinot of New Jersey. Boudinot hailed from Elizabethtown and served as New Jersey's representative to at the Continental Congress as well as the body's President from 1782 to 1783. Arthur Lee of Virginia had replaced Rutledge, although he was not officially appointed. They too sought the assistance of someone with heraldic experience, this time it was William Barton from Pennsylvania.

On June 13, 1782, the designs of the three committees were

turned over to the Secretary of the Congress, Charles Thomson, an Irish-born patriot from Philadelphia. What he came up with was a conglomeration of ideas from all the committees that would become the basis for the final design. It was first used by Thomson on September 16, 1782, to verify signatures on a document which authorized George Washington to negotiate an exchange of prisoners with England.

The design would be refined and revised in 1825, 1841, 1877, 1885 and finally arrived at a form familiar to us today in 1904.

THE GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

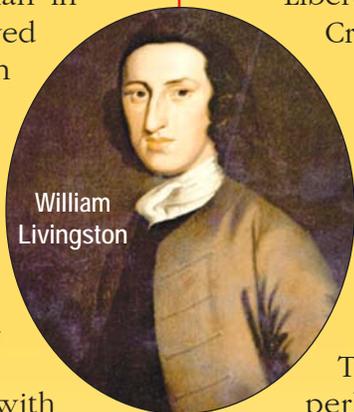
A sense of how important the concept of a seal was to the conducting of official state business can be sensed by how rapidly it was adopted by the newly minted governments—and often under less than ideal conditions.

When the New Jersey legislature met in the summer of 1776, as far as the British were concerned, they were an illegal body of traitors on the run. Yet they found a place to meet in the library of the College of New Jersey at Princeton (later Princeton University). There, on July 2, 1776, they ratified the first state constitution. In doing this, they officially created a real government for a real state—and real governments needed a seal. So, the same day, they appointed a joint committee to take care of it.

John Fell of Bergen, NJ suggested for the moment they use the coat of arms of "his Excellency William Livingston,

Esquire.” A native of Albany, New York and a Yale-educated lawyer, Livingston had been behind a rabble rousing publication in New York, *The Independent Reflector*, that took on the city’s Anglican elite.

He became a Jersian in 1772, when he moved to an estate in Elizabethtown, New Jersey (Liberty Hall still stands and is a museum) and then became delegate to the Continental Congress from 1774 to 1776.



William Livingston

When the war with England came in April of 1775, he was commissioned that October as a brigadier general in the militia. The following year, however, he was elected as New Jersey’s first non-Royal Governor. He replaced the Loyalist, William Franklin, who had been arrested at Perth Amboy and took the provincial seals with him.



Francis Hopkinson

So with Livingston as the head of the new state, there was a logic to Fell’s suggestion that his coat of arms be used to represent it, albeit temporarily. In the words of the resolution, it was just to be used “till another shall be made.”

Francis Hopkinson was also tapped to help with the design. As seen, he would go on to work with the designers of the United States’ Great Seal.

SYMBOLS

Four months after forming the commission, the legislature had the basic specifications for a

design. It was to be, “a Silver Seal, which is to be round, of two and a half Inches in Diameter, and three-eighths of an Inch thick; and that the Arms shall be three Ploughs in an Escutcheon, the Supporters Liberty and Ceres, and the Crest a Horse’s Head.”

The form was dictated largely by classical rules of heraldry, but the specific symbols were chosen to reflect the self identity of the place.

The three plows are perhaps the most obvious. The vast majority of North America was rural in the 18th century. But New Jersey’s agrarianism had been all the more accentuated thanks to it being bookended by the urban centers of New York and Philadelphia. The English Army and American forces alike

tended to view the fertile Raritan Valley as both a highway between them and as a larder. During the war, both sides raided farms for supplies.

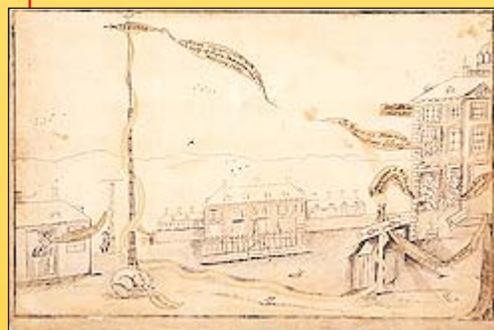
But more than that, the plows represent the ideal of the free yeoman farmer standing as the foundation of republican power in the new nation.

Having the shield flanked on the one side by the allegorical female figure of “Liberty” was an obvious choice. Yet the “Liberty Cap” on the staff she is

often depicted as holding might seem odd to modern eyes.

The influence of Roman and Greek mythology in Western culture was an extension of the neoclassical movement that had emerged in the mid-18th century. The cap is a reference to the “Phrygian cap,” a soft, red conical hat worn by priests in ancient Anatolia. Its association with liberty was likely a confusion with a similar hat found in ancient Greece called a “pileus.” Freed slaves were often given one, thus making it emblematic of manumission. It would appear frequently in allegorical images in Europe and America.

The staff on which the Liberty Cap is slung also has a symbolic history. In an age when buildings rarely reached more than three or four stories and church steeples dominated the skyline even of cities, a simple tall wooden pole would stand out. They would be used as flagpoles or even to hoist a Liberty Cap as a defiant symbol. Patriots would



A Liberty Pole erected in New York in 1770, drawn by Pierre Eugene du Simitiere.

put them up and Loyalists would try to tear them down. Liberty’s holding of a staff, topped by the cap, was a scaled down representation of that spirit.

If one is familiar with Roman mythology, the selection of Ceres on Liberty’s other side is also very obvious.

To the Romans, Ceres was the goddess of growing plants, particularly cereals, and of nurturing, motherly love. She is often depicted holding a sheaf of wheat and would eventually hold a cornucopia in the final seal design. This was frequently generalized as the goddess of agriculture or prosperity. Given the centrality of farming to New Jersey's self-image at the time, she was a good choice.

But she was also symbolic of other concepts—Ceres is interpreted as reflecting the state's hopes for prosperity and abundance, compassion and nurture.

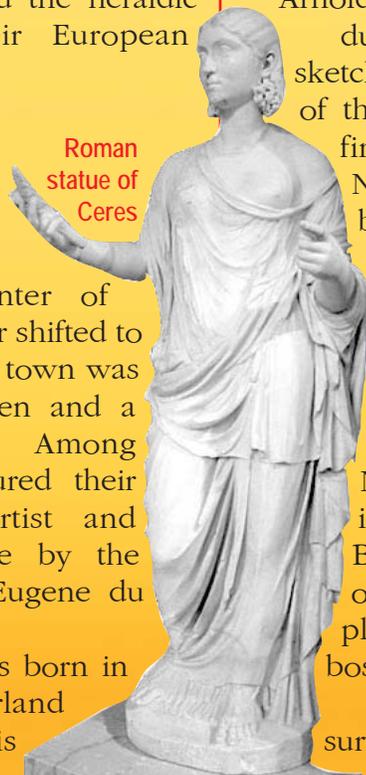
Similarly, the selection of a horsehead to top the shield both evoked an agrarian identity along with conceptual ideals. True, the animal was of use on the farm, but it was also symbolic of strength and speed.

The instructions described a seal that was a mix of ancient mythological allegories drawn from what they saw as the roots of civilization and the heraldic heritage of their European ancestors.

Pierre Eugene du Simitiere

With New York under British control, the center of Continental power shifted to Philadelphia. The town was home to statesmen and a cultural center. Among those who captured their eye was an artist and philosopher there by the name of Pierre Eugene du Simitiere.

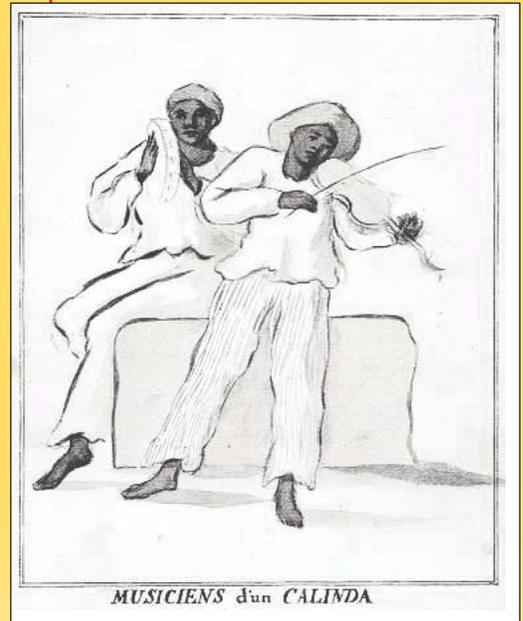
du Simitiere was born in Geneva, Switzerland in c.1736. His



Roman statue of Ceres

family moved to the West Indies when he was 14-years-old and he spend the next fifteen years there before moving to New York and settling in Philadelphia in 1766. There, he joined the American Philosophical Society and was a noted collector of curiosities

This ink wash sketch by du Simitiere of Jamaican musicians, made c.1760, is reminiscent of the impressionism that would follow in the next century.



and manuscripts—in 1782, he opened the American Museum to display it all.

But he made his living as a portrait painter, his sitters including such luminaries as George Washington, Baron Steuben, Silas Deane, Joseph Reed, Gouverneur Morris, General Horatio Gates, John Jay, William H. Drayton, Henry Laurens, Charles Thomson, Samuel Huntingdon, John Dickinson, and Benedict Arnold.

du Simitiere offered two sketches for the Great Seal of the United States to the first design committee. None were accepted, but that didn't prevent him from also working on seals for Delaware, Georgia and Virginia. He was also tasked with refining the description from the New Jersey legislature into a finished product. But he had some ideas of his own, which didn't please his fastidious bosses.

One of his changes survived into the modern

design—the addition of a knight's helmet between the shield and the horse's head.

This was a heraldic device. The fact it faces forward denotes the idea of sovereignty and self-government—both of which were certainly important ideas. Still, this aristocratic symbol (it was said to be the helmet of a prince) offended the republican sensibilities of some Legislators. Nevertheless, it remained part of the design, though some state printers took it upon themselves to omit it on the seals adorning the covers of the annual sessions of law they printed.

Below the shield, he added a somewhat less controversial item: "MDCCLXXVI." This is 1776 in Roman numerals! This would be converted into Arabic numbers in 1928, when it was incorporated into the ribbon with the new state motto (which we'll come back to later).

So New Jersey's official state seal owes actually owed much of its design to the interpretation of a Swiss immigrant artist from Philadelphia who took some artistic liberties!

Adoption and Refinement

Despite any misgivings about the symbolism, the New Jersey Legislature would approve du Simitiere's design in 1777. It's possible they were distracted by more pressing issues—like the war that had forced them to move yet again, this time to the second floor of the Indian King Tavern in Haddonfield.

The Great Seal of the State of New Jersey was rendered in silver as a stamp and would be handed down from Governor to Governor thirty-six times, until 1928. In the intervening 141-years, it had become too worn to be used. New

Governor A. Harry Moore, who signed the resolution to modify the original state seal in 1928.



stamps had been made for actual use. And the inclusion of that knight's helmet still bothered enough people that its removal was considered, though it never was. But that original, worn seal retains its ceremonial role as the physical link to New Jersey's founding as a state.

Amazingly, the discrepancy between the Legislature's original instructions and du Simitiere's final design—as represented by that pesky helmet—still bothered people as late as 1928 when it was decided the emblem needed a facelift.

Still, it was decided to keep it and a different change was suggested. By then, "Liberty and Prosperity" had become the unofficial motto of New Jersey. It was likely a nickname for the

seal, which was also featured on the state flag. The two ladies on either side of the shield, after all, represented both ideals. Indeed, the words were sometimes used in place of the Roman numerals 1776 of the original.

So when the Legislature decided to spruce up the old emblem, it was a good time to officially incorporate the sentiment. The "MDCCLXXVI" was replaced by the ribbon, on which the motto and a "1776" now appear. The words of the statute reflect both the original instructions and the new change—and also formally accept the troublesome helmet!

52:2-1. Description of great seal of state The great seal of this state shall be engraved on silver, which shall be round, of two and a half inches in diameter and three-eighths of an inch thick; the arms shall be three ploughs in an escutcheon [shield], azure [blue]; supporters, Liberty and Ceres. The Goddess Liberty to carry in her dexter hand a pole, proper, surmounted by a cap gules [red], with band azure at the bottom, displaying on the band six stars, argent; tresses falling on shoulders, proper; head bearing over all a chaplet of laurel leaves, vert; overdress, tenne; underskirt, argent [silver]; feet sandaled, standing on scroll. Ceres: Same as Liberty, save overdress, gules; holding in left hand a cornucopia, or, bearing apples, plums and grapes surrounded by leaves, all proper; head bearing over all a chaplet of wheat spears,

vert. Shield surmounted by sovereign's helmet, six bars, or; wreath and mantling, argent and azure. Crest: A horse's head, proper. Underneath the shield and supporting the goddesses, a scroll azure, bordered with tenne, in three waves or folds; on the upper folds the words "Liberty and Prosperity" ; on the under fold in Arabic numerals, the figures "1776." These words to be engraved round the arms, viz., "The Great Seal of the State of New Jersey."

\$1,000 was appropriated to cover the design and production expenses. Both houses passed the resolution unanimously and it was signed by then-Governor A. Harry Moore on March 26, 1928. Both the original and current seals are preserved for the Secretary of State by the New Jersey State Archives.

Pierre Eugene du Simitiere died in Philadelphia in October of 1784—only a little over a year after the Treaty of Paris officially ended the war with England. It is perhaps fitting that this immigrant who fully adopted America as his home should have made such a mark on the new nation. In addition to the work on designing national and state seals, he was the one who first sketched the "Eye of Providence" above the pyramid, which was used on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States, which we see on the back of our one dollar notes. He also first suggested *E pluribus unum* (Out of Many, One) for our national motto.

So what's so "great" about our Great Seal? Turns out a lot of really interesting history!

