



Great Seal of the United States of America (front and back) – Photo Credit: Winetta Owens

On July 4, 1776, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were given the task of creating a seal for the 13 United States of America. The delegates of the Constitutional Convention believed an emblem and national coat of arms would be evidence of an independent nation and a free people with high aspirations and grand hopes for the future. The Great Seal was finalized and approved six years later on June 20, 1782. The symbols on the seal reflect the beliefs and values that the Founding Fathers wanted to pass on in history.

The Secretary of State is the official custodian of the seal. It is affixed to certain documents, such as foreign treaties and presidential proclamations. The Great Seal is displayed on the federal building sign at our Regional Office in Sacramento, Calif.

THE FRONT

Eagle: In the center of the seal is the bald eagle (our national bird). The eagle holds a scroll in its beak inscribed with the Latin motto *E Pluribus Unum* - which means Out of Many, One (one nation created from 13 colonies). The eagle grasps an olive branch in its right talon and a bundle of thirteen arrows in its left. The olive branch and arrows are symbols for the power of peace and war.

Shield: A shield with 13 stripes covers the eagle's breast. The shield is supported solely by the American eagle as a symbol that Americans rely on their own virtue.

Cloud: Above the eagle's head is a cloud surrounding a field containing 13 stars which form a constellation. The constellation denotes that a new state is taking its place among other nations.

THE BACK

Pyramid: The seal's reverse side contains a 13-step pyramid with the year 1776 in Roman numerals at the base.

Eye: At the top of the pyramid is the Eye of Providence with the Latin motto *Annuit Coeptis* in the sky above - meaning It (the Eye of Providence) is favorable to our undertakings or He favors our undertakings.

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Scroll: Below the pyramid, a scroll reads *Novus Ordo Seclorum* - Latin for New Order of the Ages, which refers to 1776 as the beginning of the American new era.

Both sides of the Great Seal can be seen on the back of a U.S. \$1 bill



For more information on the Great Seal of the United States of America, please visit:

<http://www.asis.com/users/stag/seal.html>

<http://www.wvwd.uscourts.gov/outreach/education/seal.html>