

# Great Seal of the United States Information Sheet

The United States seal has a rich history beginning with our founding fathers in 1776 when the first Continental Congress resolved that Dr. Franklin, Mr. Jefferson, and J. Adams "bring in a device for a seal for the United States of America." Both sides of the Great Seal can be seen on the back of a U.S. one-dollar bill.

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 to their descendants.

## Symbols on Obverse of The Great Seal

**Eagle:** In the center of the seal is a bald eagle (our national bird). The eagle holds a scroll in its beak inscribed with our original national motto: "**E Pluribus Unum**," which is Latin for "one from many" or "one from many parts" (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 thirteen red and white 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.

The red and white stripes of the shield represent the states united under and supporting the blue, which represents the President and Congress. The color **white** is a symbol of purity and innocence; **red** represents hardiness and valor; and **blue** signifies vigilance, perseverance, and justice.

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

## Symbols on Reverse of The Great Seal

The reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States is composed of four symbolic elements derived from nature and culture that combine to create a dynamic design whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In the zenith of an unfinished pyramid, an eye in a triangle is surrounded with rays of golden light.

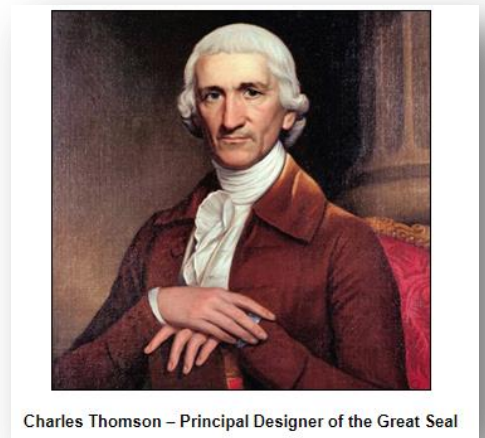


**Pyramid:** The seal's reverse side contains a 13-step pyramid with the year **1776** in Roman numerals at the base (the year independence was declared).

**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."

**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.

In addition to the formal heraldic description of the Great Seal adopted by Congress on June 20, 1782, Charles Thomson included his "Remarks and Explanation" of the symbolism – the only official comments about the meaning of the Great Seal.



Charles Thomson – Principal Designer of the Great Seal

## Remarks and Explanation

by Charles Thomson (June 20, 1782)

- The shield (escutcheon) is composed of thirteen stripes that represent the several states joined into one solid compact, supporting the chief (top section of the shield) which unites the whole and represents Congress. The stripes are kept closely united by the chief and the chief depends upon that union and the strength resulting from it.
- The motto E Pluribus Unum alludes to this union.
- The shield is born on the breast of an American Eagle without any other supporters to denote that the United States of America ought to rely on their own virtue.
- The olive branch and arrows denote the power of peace and war which is exclusively vested in Congress.
- The constellation of thirteen stars denotes a new state taking its place and rank among other sovereign powers.
- The pyramid signifies strength and duration.
- The Eye over it and the motto Annuit Coeptis allude to the many signal interpositions of providence in favor of the American cause.
- The date 1776 underneath is that of the Declaration of Independence and the words Novus Ordo Seclorum under it signify the beginning of the new American Era, which commences from that date.
- Reverse. The pyramid signifies Strength and Duration: The Eye over it & the Motto allude to the many signal interpositions of providence in favour of the American cause. The date underneath is that of the Declaration of Independence and the words under it signify the beginning of the new American Æra, which commences from that date.