Virtual Snapshot Series

New Jersey’s State Seal
It’s Official!

An official seal represents the authority and the sovereignty (the right to self-govern) of a state. New Jersey’s State seal is used on official government documents.

Today, when a governor is sworn into office, they are handed the original New Jersey State seal. The Secretary of State is considered the keeper of the State seal and determines its appropriate usage.

So where is the original State seal? It’s kept at the New Jersey State Archives in Trenton! The original State seal was pressed onto melted wax so that a raised imprint was left on documents.
The Legislature’s Request

On October 3, 1776, New Jersey’s State Legislature (the branch of government that makes laws) met in Princeton, New Jersey. The legislators created a resolution requesting the creation of a State seal. A resolution is a joint statement that is not a bill or law, but needs approval from the governor.

The resolution described the seal as “a Silver Seal, which is to be round, of two and a half Inches Diameter, and three-eighths of an Inch thick; and that the Arms shall be three ploughs in an Escutcheon (a shield), the Supporters Liberty and Ceres, and the Crest a Horse’s Head.” The task of finding an artist and silver smith to create the design was given to Francis Hopkinson, a New Jersey legislator and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.
The Designer

In 1776, the contract to create the State seal was awarded to Pierre Eugène Du Simitière, a Swiss artist who was living in Philadelphia.

Du Simitière was one of a group of artists chosen to design the Great Seal of the United States. He would later design the state seals of Delaware and Georgia, and also paint the first known portrait of George Washington, which was later used on the 1791 one-cent coin.

Du Simitière would add more elements to the seal’s design, including a helmet under the horse’s head and the Roman numerals indicating New Jersey’s year of independence, 1776 (MDCCLXXVI), at the bottom. While these changes were not in the Legislature’s resolution, they still accepted Du Simitière’s design in May 1777. His version of the seal was used for over 150 years.
As time passed, unofficial versions that looked different than the 1777 version of the seal emerged. Sometimes the female figures on the seal would look to the left instead of forward. Some versions of the seal included a helmet beneath the horse’s head; others did not. The cornucopia would change direction from pointing upward to pointing down.

In 1928, the New Jersey Legislature created a joint resolution to resolve the differences between the original legislative resolution and Du Simitière’s design. This resolution solidified the inclusion of various elements in the design such as the helmet, the date 1776, and the words, “Liberty and Prosperity.” The 1928 version of the seal is still in use today.
Liberty and Ceres

The female figures pictured in the State seal are Liberty and Ceres, also known as Prosperity.

Liberty, on the left, carries the red liberty cap on her staff. The liberty cap signified freedom for Roman slaves, who would shave their heads and wear an undyed felt cap upon gaining their freedom. Later, freedom caps were worn as a symbol of rebellion by patriots in the colonies during the Revolutionary War.

Ceres, the Roman goddess of grain, is on the right. She holds a cornucopia filled with harvested produce, symbolizing abundance. Fun fact: The word cereal is derived from the name Ceres.
The Center Elements

The horse’s head signifies strength and power. The helmet, which was added to the design by Pierre Eugène Du Simitière, represents sovereignty, the right to self-govern. Below the helmet is a shield with three plows. The plows show the importance of agriculture to the state’s economic power.
The Banner

When the alterations to the State seal were approved in 1928, the major addition was the banner at the feet of Liberty and Prosperity.

The Roman numerals added by Pierre Eugène Du Simitière were replaced by a more modern version of the date, 1776. The words “Liberty and Prosperity” also were added. This phrase is considered New Jersey’s State motto.
The Seal in Decorative Use

Today the New Jersey State seal can be found on more than just official documents. At the State House, you’ll see the seal embedded in floors, in elevators, and even on the door handles!

New Jersey’s State seal is featured on our State flag. The New Jersey State flag displays the official State colors: Jersey blue and buff. The colors were chosen by General George Washington in 1779, while he was headquartered in New Jersey during the Revolutionary War. These were the military colors used by the New Jersey troops.