

# THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*Design Began 1776 – Design Completed 1782*

## OBVERSE



**E Pluribus Unum** – ‘Out of Many, One’: the union of the thirteen original states

**Eagle** – Symbol of strength and power and always turned to the olive branch as preferring peace; clutching our national symbol— ‘E Pluribus Unum’

**Olive Branch** – Represents peace; Thirteen leaves and Thirteen olives

**Blue** – Signifies vigilance, perseverance and justice

**White** – Signifies purity and Innocence

**Red** – Signifies hardiness and valor

**Constellation** – Denotes a new State taking its place and rank among other sovereign powers (with thirteen stars)

**Chief** (upper part of shield) – Represents Congress unifying the original thirteen states

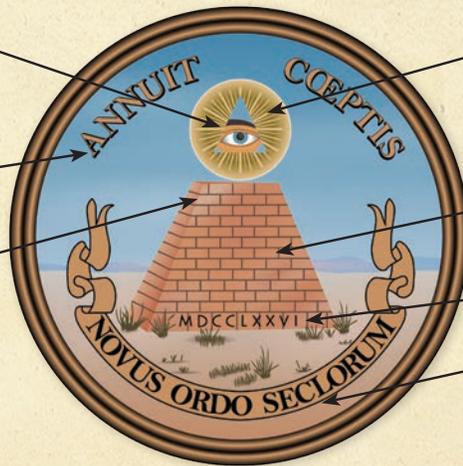
**Pieces** – In alternating colors representing the original thirteen states all joining in one solid compact supporting the Chief

**Thirteen Arrows** – Power of war prepared to defend Liberty which power is vested in Congress

**Escutcheon** (shield) – Protecting the American Eagle without any other support to hold the shield; America ought to rely on its own virtue for the preservation of the union through Congress

## REVERSE

(Often referred to as the Spiritual side of the Shield)



**The Eye of Providence** – Alludes to the many signal interpositions of God in favor of the American cause

**Annuit Coeptis** – ‘He’ (God) has favored our undertakings

Thirteen layers of an unfinished pyramid representing the thirteen original colonies building a new nation based on new ideas and concepts of self-government never before attempted

**Glory** – The light of God, the Providence shining on a new nation based on God-given unalienable rights

**Pyramid** – Symbol of strength and duration

**1776** – The year of America’s birth

**Novus Ordo Seclorum** – ‘New order of the Ages’: symbol of a new nation built on the concept of permanent, unalienable (God-given) rights for all versus vested, man-made and non-permanent rights

# THE MEANING OF THE GREAT SEAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

---

*“Symbolically, the Seal reflects the beliefs and values that the Founding Fathers attached to the new nation and wished to pass on to their descendants.”*

- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs

---

## CHARLES THOMSON’S “REMARKS AND EXPLANATION,” ADOPTED BY THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, JUNE 20, 1782.

“The Escutcheon is composed of the chief [upper part of shield] & pale [perpendicular band], the two most honorable ordinaries [figures of heraldry]. The Pieces, paly [alternating pales], represent the several states all joined in one solid compact entire, supporting a Chief, which unites the whole & represents Congress. The Motto alludes to this union. The pales in the arms are kept closely united by the Chief and the Chief depends on that union & the strength resulting from it for its support, to denote the Confederacy of the United States of America & preservation of their union through Congress.

“The colours of the pales are those used in the flag of the United States of America; White signifies purity and innocence, Red, hardiness & valour, and Blue, the colour of the Chief, signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice. The Olive branch and arrows denote the power of peace & war which is exclusively vested in Congress. The Constellation denotes a new State taking its place and rank among other sovereign powers. The Escutcheon is born on the breast of an American Eagle without any other supporters [figures represented as holding up the shield] to denote that the United States of America ought to rely on their own Virtue.

“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 Era, which commences from that date.”

## USES OF THE GREAT SEAL

The Great Seal is used to guarantee the authenticity of a U. S. document. It is used to seal documents several thousand times a year. Custody of the Seal is assigned to the U. S. Department of State with the master die produced by the U. S. Bureau of Engraving. The Seal can only be affixed to a document by an office of the Secretary of State.

## HISTORY OF THE GREAT SEAL

It is extremely significant that the responsibility of the design of the Great Seal was first given in 1776 to Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, the primary author and contributors of the writing of the Declaration of American Independence. Artist Pierre Eugene du Simitiere assisted with his knowledge of shields and coats of arms.

A second committee of James Lovell, John Morin Scott and William Churchill Houston worked on the design with consultant Francis Hopkinson.

A third committee of John Rutledge, Arthur Middleton, Elias Boudinot and William Barton worked on the design with Charles Thomson, Secretary of Congress, considering all previous recommendations. Congress adopted the design on June 20, 1782, six years after the design began.