

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 12, 1951

The End of the Great Seal

The original Great Seal for the State of California may be in Monterey – one of the most interesting of the many exhibits in the Old Custom House. There are in existence three known seal presses purporting to be the original presses of 1849; one in the Custom House, another at Sutter's Fort Museum in Sacramento, and the third, the hand press, still in use in the Secretary of State's office at the Capitol.

The first press, was provided by Caleb Lyon in 1849. In 1853 the Legislature authorized the purchase of a press not to cost over \$150, but the warrant register refers to a claim for the "repair of the State Seal," \$59.95.

No further data relative to the first presses has been found by the researchers. Mrs. Mary L. Greene, curator of the Monterey Custom House states that she has no knowledge of the early history of the press in her custody, and that no marking or serial number are to be found on it.

The press at Sutter's Fort came from the Sleeper Stamp and Stationery Company in Sacramento; the present store owner has told authorities that the press was part of the old Wing store established about 1870 and acquired by his father in 1899, when the tradition at that time was that it was the original press of 1849. It is marked "Hoe & Co.", but without a serial number. The curator at the Fort – a State Monument – has learned from the present Hoe Co., New York, that their 1854 catalogue presents pictures of seals similar to the Custom House press; the company has no present record of a sale to the State in 1849. On the basis of this similarity it could be inferred that this Monterey press was probably the original seal press of 1849, if it can be established that it was ever in the possession of the Secretary of State.

Monterey also has claim to another historic item supposed to have been used in designing the Great Seal for the State. There is on display at Colton Hall a framed picture of the original painting of a California grizzly bear, which it is said was used to design the first Great Seal. The gift came to Monterey through Miss Nellie K. Smith of Pacific Grove from Mrs. Augusta Nahl Allen of Portland, Oregon, who related that the painting had been done by her brother, Charles C. Nahl. Whether

Nahl had been commissioned by Major R.S. Garnett, the designer of the original seal adopted at the Monterey Convention in 1849, or by Caleb Lyon, who presented the design to the delegates, it is not known. But the water color painting of the famous California bear, certainly matches the engraving of the bear on the Great Seal.

D. Bowman brings his theory of the history of the Great Seal to conclusion with the statement: "There has been and is only one Great Seal, there have been many redesigns and reproductions of the seal – but there is only one Great Seal."

Dr. J.M. Bowman, from whom much of the information in this series of Diaries on the Great Seal, has come, was the speaker last Thursday at the luncheon meeting of the California Historical Society held in the Comstock Room at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. Dr. Bowman is the historian of the California Archives and Central Record Depository of the Office of the Secretary of State at Sacramento. Dr. Bowman spoke on "The Passing of California Historical Traditions."