

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 8, 1951

Early Impressions Of the Great Seal

It is not known the amount of money paid to Albert Kuner for the engraving or the die for the Great Seal of the State of California, nor is it known as yet the time taken by Kuner in the engraving or the date of delivery of the die to Lyon. It is thought by historians, including the historian, Central Record Depository at Sacramento, that Kuner was probably paid about \$150, according to the amount paid for the engraving of the seal for the Supreme Court in 1850.

The earliest impression of the seal so far found is dated December 5, 1849, and is certified by Lyon. It is quite evidently one of the several made on red wax by Lyon as presented to his friends. This one was given to Jacob P. Leese of Monterey, as a "present" to this early pioneer. During the century the wax has become cracked but fortunately the broken parts still adhere to the paper, according to the writing of J.N. Bowman

It has now been treated for protection and framed for further preservation. It was found in the Leese scrapbook in the Society of California Pioneers, through a reference from Col. F.B. Rogers of Berkeley. From the date on this impression it is inferred that the master die was made sometime during November, 1849.

In the convention report of October 11, Lyon was to deliver the "seal, press and all appendages" to the secretary of the convention and by him it was in turn to be delivered to the new Secretary of State appointed in accordance with the Constitution.

Whether this was done has not been learned to this date, but judging from the impression of December 5, it probably was not. Quite evidently it was delivered to Peter J. Burnett, the governor, at an unknown date and used by him the day after his inauguration in sealing his appointment of William Van Voorheis as Secretary of State on December 21st, undoubtedly the first official use of the seal.

This first appointment, appropriately framed at an unknown date, was long lost, but during the removal of the carpenter shop from the basement of the Capitol building at Sacramento to the new quarters on R. street, it was found in the lumber storage room, and now hangs in the office of the Secretary of State.

The day after the use of the seal on the van Voorheis appointment the seal was affixed to the credentials of the newly elected senators and representatives before their departure for Washington on January 1, 1850, and on the appointment of the three Supreme Court Justices. On the 15th of the following month the Seal was still in the possession of the governor. This is assured by the statement of John Bidwell in proposing the bill for payment of the \$1,000 to Lyon – Senate Journal, original in State Archives.

Still unknown is the history of the original press for the Seal of 1849. It quite evidently was not sufficiently powerful to make a clear impression. In the Old Custom House in Monterey there is an early day press of the State Seal. I remember a try at the time of preparations for the 1946 Flag Raising Centennial, to get an imprint for this old seal but in vain, for no matter how much pressure was used no imprint could be made.

The original credentials were part of the Library of Congress exhibit in the State of California Centennial. These showed no impression to the naked eye, according to those who saw them, but when examined under a strong light with a reading glass the full impressions were evident. The original master die was in use for almost 60 years. Kuner had to collect scrap metal in the neighborhood for the making of this master die.

In 1883 an impression of a second seal appears on the governor's proclamation, and the first seal was then used intermittently on the proclamations until October 4, 1906. The dominant characteristics on the proclamations of the 1849 seal are the bear with lowered head and none of his feet visible, the broken range of mountains in the background, all the ships as sailing vessels, the miner's pick shown as below and in front of the bow of a large ship, the rocker as flat with three compartments and no handle, the handle of the shovel extending over the edge of the pit, the spear point to KA of Eureka, the stars with six points, the shield rising above the Goddess' thigh, only her left hand resting on the shield, and the fingers of her left hand extending to the right of the right elbow relative to the spear.

The second seal was secured from an unknown engraver and at an unknown date in or before 1883. The earliest impression is dated August 4, 1883, and only appears occasionally until March 22, 1917.

(More Tomorrow)