

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Medallion from West Point

This year West Point celebrates its 150th anniversary. The commemorative medallion designed for this event has been sent to the Monterey History and Art Association as a memento of the occasion. It carries the official coat of arms of the United States Military Academy and on the reverse side a symbolic interpretation of the Academy's twofold mission.

The Academy's coat of arms was originally adopted on Oct. 13, 1898. The information accompanying the medallion states that it was devised by a board consisting of Col. Charles W. Learned, professor of drawing; Col. Edgar W. Bass, professor of mathematics; and Col. Samuel E. Tillman, professor of chemistry, mineralogy and geology. This board was appointed to design a heraldic symbol that could be used on diplomas, invitations, publications, insignia, corps of Cadets colors, buttons, and sculptured decorations on public buildings of the Academy.

The first public display of the coat of arms was on the new battalion colors of the Corps of Cadets adopted in 1902. It first appeared as an architectural ornament on the building erected as part of the construction program stimulated by the West Point Centennial in 1902.

Between 1902 and 1923, when the official coat of arms was adopted, the design was variously delineated. However, each version contained the same elements and general arrangements as the present coat of arms, which consists of the emblem of the military academy borne on a shield and surmounted by a crest. The crest is composed of an eagle displayed and a scroll bearing the motto, "Duty, Honor, Country," with the words, "West Point, 1802, U.S.M.A.

The emblem borne on the shield consists of the helmet of Pallas Athene, the ancient goddess of wisdom and learning, over a Greek sword representing the military profession. The two together symbolize the military and educational functions of the United States Military Academy.

Research tells us that the motto "Duty, Honor, Country" was not used prior to 1898, when it was incorporated in the original coat of arms. However, in the early writings the superintendents of the Military Academy, the ideals

set forth in these words constantly re-occurred. In the words of Maj. Gen. Bryant E. Moore, the late superintendent of the U.S.A., who died while serving in Korea, "This trinity of principal is the heritage of the American people. West Point received it from the founders of the Republic – Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson and Monroe – who were also the founders of the academy. It has been tried in the fire of experience and found equal to the test."

The designer of the medallion was Laura Gardin Fraser (Mrs. James E.), a member of the National Academy, the National Sculptors Society, and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. She has received many awards for her work in sculpture and medal design and is represented in many museums, including the Brookgreen Gardens of South Carolina. Perhaps she is best known for the equestrian statue of Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. (Stonewall) Jackson recently erected in Baltimore.