

JOHN A. GALE
Nebraska Secretary of State

P.O. Box 94608
State Capitol, Suite 2300
Lincoln, NE 68509-4608
Phone: 402-471-2554
Fax: 402-471-3237
www.sos.state.ne.us

News Release

Oct. 27, 2005

Contact: Gary Seacrest
402-471-8408, gary.seacrest@sos.ne.gov

Historic lion's-head seal retired from active duty

LINCOLN – Since Nebraska became a state in 1867, every secretary of state has authenticated official documents with the same iron-cast seal, which is in the shape of a lion's head.

After 138 years, the seal is getting a well-deserved rest and is being retired from active duty by Secretary of State John Gale.

Gale recently bought a new toggle-hand seal that will be used day to day by his office to affix the state seal, officially known as the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska. The new seal was purchased for \$3,560 from the J.P. Cooke Co. of Omaha.

“The amazing lion's-head seal was purchased for \$25 by authorization of the first legislature,” Gale said. “It has authenticated tens of thousands of official documents.

“However, the passage of time had taken its toll on the seal. The experts we consulted told us it was becoming brittle and in danger of breakage.”

Although it is assuming emeritus status, the seal will not be forgotten. It has been refurbished and will be prominently displayed in the office, along with Nebraska's first state flag. School children and tourists may still use the seal under supervision to make souvenir state seals.

“It's remarkable that the Secretary of State Office's has had a working piece of equipment that dates back to the time of statehood,” Gale said. “The seal is probably one of the best investments the state has ever made.”

According to historical accounts, the lion's head seal played a key role in the move of the state capital to Lincoln from Omaha, which served as the Nebraska territorial capital.

Although there was legislative authorization to move the capital and construction of a capitol building in Lincoln was nearing completion, there were doubts whether the move of the capital to the fledging town of Lincoln would actually occur.

Two state officeholders at the time, Gov. David Butler and Secretary of State Thomas Kennard, were eager to move the capital to Lincoln and took action to cement the relocation.

Kennard sneaked the seal out of the Capitol in Omaha on a Sunday in 1868 and took it to Lincoln by horse and buggy. The seal was then used to affix the state seal on Butler's official proclamation that the Capitol was now in Lincoln and was open for business.

After the new seal was delivered in late August, Gale turned again to the J.P. Cooke Co. – this time to repair the lion's head seal. After 137 years, the seal was returning to Omaha, its first home.

The absence of the seal was kept a secret, and it was stored in a fireproof vault while in Omaha. "We didn't want to take the chance that any harm would come to it," Gale said.

In early October, Gale personally drove to Omaha to pick up the repaired seal and return it to Lincoln.

"The trip left me feeling a little like Thomas Kennard," Gale said. "But I felt it was my personal responsibility to return the seal to its official home."

#