

## **JOHN A. GALE**

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### **News Release**

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### **Great Seal noted on anniversary of Nebraska's statehood**

LINCOLN – With Nebraska celebrating its 145<sup>th</sup> statehood birthday on March 1, it is a good time to honor the oldest and venerated symbol of Nebraska's state origins, the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska, according to Secretary of State John Gale.

Legislation creating the state seal dates back to 1867, the year Nebraska gained statehood. The secretary of state is the keeper of the seal and authorized to preserve and protect the integrity and use of the image.

The original design of the Great Seal was introduced by state Rep. Isaac Wiles of Cass County with assistance from Judge Elmer Dundy. The two met in Dundy's Omaha hotel room and discussed the drafting of the bill.

Wiles already had the elements of the picture he wished to represent: the Missouri River, the Rocky Mountains, growing crops upon a farm and a blacksmith to represent the mechanic arts. Dundy gave the descriptive order of these parts of the picture, which became the final draft of the bill that Wiles introduced in the legislature. The seal included Wiles' proposed motto "Equality Before the Law."

The bill was adopted and signed into law by Gov. David Butler on June 15, 1867. The legislature appropriated \$25 for the seal. To stamp the seal, a cast-iron press in the shape of a lion's head was purchased.

While the original plates of the lion's head press remained the same, the design of the Great Seal used in state government evolved away from its original design. The blacksmith acquired a beard. The stalks of corn disappeared. The mountains became the Sandhills. The shanty became a cabin.

The lion's head press was used for official business for a remarkable 138 years. In 2005, Gale retired the lion's head press after experts determined it was subject to possible breakage. He put it on public display in his office.

The new Great Seal plates were designed to reflect the original concepts, and state agencies were ordered to use the new design, discarding the various designs that departed from the original.

The original lion's head press played a key role in the relocation of the state capital from Omaha to Lincoln in 1868, according to historical accounts. There are conflicting stories on how the seal press was moved.

According to one account, then-Secretary of State Thomas Kennard transported the seal press from Omaha to Lincoln by horse and wagon. There are those who say Kennard did this very discreetly, so that no one in Omaha would secure an injunction preventing the Great Seal from leaving Omaha in order to frustrate the process of Lincoln becoming the new capital.

A large oil painting done by the late Harold Wilkins of Bellevue depicts the scene of Kennard loading his wagon with the seal press. The canvas, painted in 1972, now hangs prominently in the reception area of Gale's office. The Wilkins family donated the painting to the office.

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