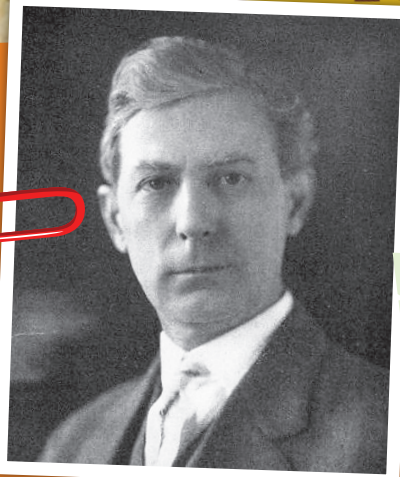


THE STATE SEAL OF

O K L A H O M A



Symbols are around us every day. From traffic signs, to images on coins, even school mascots are symbolic. Some symbols mean only one thing, like a stop sign, but many symbols have more than one meaning. In some cases, a large or important symbol can be made of smaller symbols that together mean something completely different than they would alone. The Great seal of the state of Oklahoma is one such symbol.



Frank H. Greer 1862-1933
It was the office of Frank H. Greer in Guthrie that the Grand Seal of the Territory of Oklahoma was designed.

The Great seal took many years to create, and was inspired by many different historical events and peoples. It began with the Grand seal of the Territory of Oklahoma, created by the Territorial Government, in 1893. Aside from designing seals, the Territorial Assembly was responsible for passing laws for the Oklahoma Territory. Frank H. Greer, a newspaper owner from Guthrie, OK, and an influential citizen of the Oklahoma Territory, helped design the Territorial seal and put forth the proposal for the seal before the Territorial Assembly.

You can see the Territorial seal in the center of the Great seal, surrounded by a green laurel. In the Territorial seal, Columbia, a national symbol of equality, justice, and freedom, overlooks a pioneer and an American Indian shaking hands. All three figures are standing over the horn of plenty, a symbol of prosperity. This represented the equality and prosperity of both white and Indian settlers in Oklahoma, under the laws of the United States. Over the figures are the words, Labor omnia vincit, a Latin phrase meaning: Labor conquers all. This phrase came from a 2,000-year-old poem written by a Roman poet named Virgil. This phrase had a special meaning for the people of Oklahoma who struggled to farm the difficult soil of the prairie.



The parts of the state seal outside of the old Territorial seal were first designed during the Sequoyah Convention of 1905. In 1905, Oklahoma was still two separate territories: the Territory of Oklahoma and Indian Territory. The people of Indian Territory held a constitutional convention and petitioned the federal government for admittance to the United States as the state of Sequoyah. As part of the petition, they tasked Muskogee Reverend A. Grant Evans to design a seal for the new state.

Labor omnia vincit is a Latin phrase meaning "work conquers all". The phrase is adapted from Virgil's Georgics. The poem was written about 29 B.C. in support of Augustus Caesar's "back to the land" policy, aimed at encouraging more Romans to become farmers. The phrase is found in a section of the poem describing the growth of agriculture from primitive beginnings.



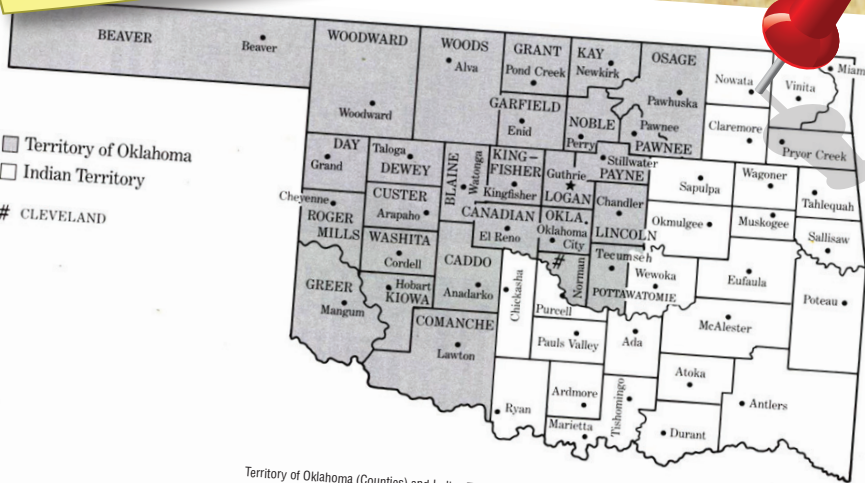
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Territory of Oklahoma (Counties) and Indian Territory (Recording Districts), 1906

Cherokee Nation

Muskogee/Creek Nation

Seminole Nation

Choctaw Nation

Chickasaw Nation

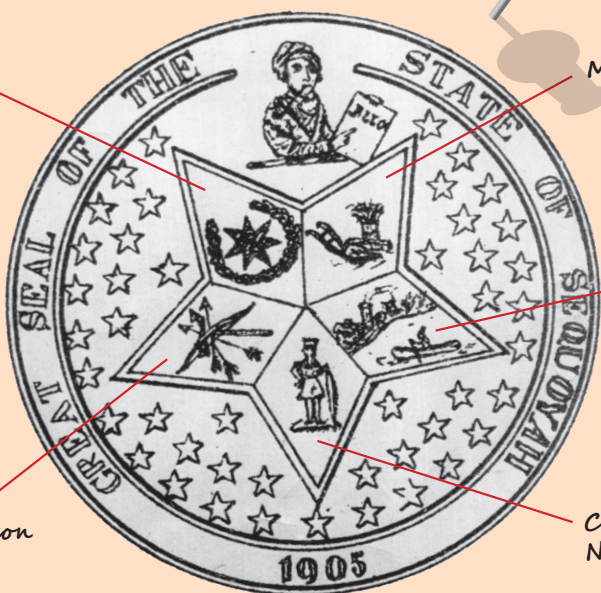


Image courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Department

Reverend Evans began with a five-pointed star in the center, often in the flags and seals of the United States, stars represent the heavens and the goals to which man has always aspired. Inside the large star are the symbols of the five tribes: the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole. Starting with the upper left section is a seven-pointed star wreathed in oak leaves. This is the symbol of the Cherokee Nation. It represents the seven original clans of the Cherokee Nation and the oak trees commonly found in the Carolinas, the original home of the Cherokee Nation. Next are a plow and a sheaf of wheat. This is the symbol of the Muskogee, or Creek, Nation. It represents the prosperity and agricultural achievements of the Creek Nation. Next is the symbol of the Seminole Nation, a man paddling a canoe across a lake towards a village. This represents peace and plenty. The next symbol is from the Chickasaw Nation. It is a Chickasaw warrior and represents the warrior tradition of the Chickasaw. The final symbol is from the Choctaw Nation. It is an unstrung bow with arrows. This symbolizes a desire for peace, but preparedness to defend one's people.

Above the central star is the image of Sequoyah, the namesake of the proposed state. The text he is pointing to says, "We are brothers," in Cherokee syllabary. Sequoyah developed the Cherokee syllabary, a set of phonetic symbols that represent all the sounds of the Cherokee language, in 1821. Finally, surrounding the central star are 45 other stars, representing the states that were already part of the United States in 1905. The Sequoyah Constitutional Convention approved this symbol, but Congress never made Sequoyah a state. In 1907, though, when the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention took place, many of the delegates had participated in the Sequoyah Convention so when the topic of a state seal was discussed, the idea of incorporating the Sequoyah seal was brought up.

The Oklahoma Indian Education Resource

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1878-1953
Gabe Parker became known as "Great Seal Parker" after his service as chairman of the committee appointed to oversee the design of the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma.

Image courtesy of Oklahoma Heritage Association

Gabe E. Parker was designated the delegate in charge of the seal committee, and he agreed that the Sequoyah seal should be used. His committee brought the old territorial seal together with the seal from the Sequoyah Convention to make a new seal for the state of Oklahoma. The committee made some minor changes: they rotated the star to point upwards, they rearranged the 45 stars, and they removed the image of Sequoyah. When the convention delegates accepted the design for the state seal proposed by Parker's committee, it added a description of the seal to the proposed constitution. Article 6, section 35 of the Oklahoma state constitution contains the official, legal description of the seal. This is an important part of the state constitution, since the state of Oklahoma uses the Great Seal to designate official legal documents.

The state seal of Oklahoma is an interesting and complex symbol. It took many people, 2 territories, 2 proposed states, and over 24 years for the state seal to become an official part of the state of Oklahoma. The state seal represents all of the things that helped create the state of Oklahoma and much more. The state seal also represents the people of Oklahoma and their government today.

Design your own Seal

Seals have been used for thousands of years. Many seals share similar designs. For example, the back of quarters has a piece of the Great Seal of the United States on it. It shows an eagle holding an olive branch and arrows. The olive branch has been a symbol of peace for thousands of years, while the arrow is a symbol of war. This means that Great Seal of the United States says that the nation wants peace, but is prepared for war.

Take a moment to look back at Oklahoma's seal. Then, use the template to design your own!

Don't Forget!

1. Seals use symbols and figures
2. Seals often have sayings like "Labor Omnia Vincit" written on them

When you've finished designing your seal, show it to your friends, parents, or teacher and explain to them why the symbols and sayings you've used are important to you!

