

(MSA 50 5287 - 26-2) (John Shaw)

\* AMERICAN \*  
FURNITURE

*in the*  
*Museum of Fine Arts*  
*Boston*

RICHARD H. RANDALL, JR.

good image of desk  
in BMA catalogue.

*Museum of Fine Arts*

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*Boston, Massachusetts*

1965

name also appears on a maple country desk of about 1800 at Old Deerfield. The boldness of the foot in examples like the console table with marble top at the Essex Institute has caused the attribution of such pieces to Rhode Island, where it also occurred. (Comstock, no. 228).

This entire group of claw-and-ball furniture represents the American equivalent to English Georgian style, and it includes other pre-Chippendale pieces such as the New York sofa in the Metropolitan Museum (Comstock, 207), the van Cortlandt chairs and their relatives (Comstock, 147, 159, 161), Newport claw furniture (Carpenter, 7, 71, 72) and Massachusetts work like nos. 80 and 81 in this catalogue.

**58** DESK  
*Mahogany*  
1765-1775  
*Boston or North Shore*

This fall-front desk has an interior with seven carved fans. The central falling door of the cabinet has a reverse blocked front with a large fan, as do the outer tiers of three drawers. In between are two shaped and blocked drawers, each with two pigeonholes above with small pen drawers carved with fans. The fans on the small drawers are pierced at the bottom. The central door is flanked by document drawers with pilasters crowned with corkscrew finials, and behind it is a blocked drawer, a shelf and a small drawer with a cyma-curved lower edge. There are four large drawers in the main case with rounded corners and edges to the blocking. They are fitted with large escutcheons and brasses with bail handles. At the sides, applied to the cases, are pilasters of slightly tapering outline with corkscrew finials. A double series of moldings carry the case into the feet. The large claw-and-ball feet have slightly raked claws, deeply curved ankles and shaped brackets. There is a simple center drop on the skirt. Inside of the backboards is inscribed *ARDS/and D(?) RI*.

**STRUCTURAL NOTES:** The interior is white pine. The shelves of the interior have mahogany fore-edges. There is a crack in the left end, and a small piece of mahogany has been inlet in the lid just

above the lock. The escutcheon on the interior falling door is replaced.

H. 45 1/8 inches, W. 40 3/4 inches, D. 23 1/2 inches  
*Gift of Miss Mary Thacher. 40.792*

**HISTORY:** The inscription, which was presumably *D or R RICHARDS* before it was cut in half, is unidentified. The desk was owned by Jonathan O'Dell (1737-1818) of Newark, N. J., a minister, who lived in Burlington and Mt. Holly, N. J., from 1767 to 1776, and went to England in 1788 as Sir Guy Carleton's secretary, returning in the same year to Fredericktown, N. B. The desk was inherited by his son, Hon. William Hunter O'Dell of Halifax, N. S., and descended in his family until just before its purchase by Miss Thacher. The history suggests that this Massachusetts desk was exported to New Jersey where it was acquired by Jonathan O'Dell.

**REFERENCES:** Albert Sack, "Good, Better, Best", *Antiques*, Dec. 1949, p. 458 top.

**NOTES:** There is a group of Massachusetts desks and secretaries with applied pilasters on the case, most of which are of diverse origins. One, however, a secretary with fluted pilasters, appears to be from the same shop, as it exhibits all the special features of the desk—the falling center door of the cabinet, the fan carved pen drawers and an identity of arrangement and details such as the center drop on the skirt (*Antiques*, Aug. 1957, p. 96). At Winterthur is a Massachusetts secretary with fluted columns and carved bracket feet, which is of unusual detail and unknown locality (Downs, 226). A Salem example with a blocked lid (Sack, *Brochure*, ix, May 1962, no. 504) and a somewhat similar desk with a plain lid (*Antiques*, Oct. 1951, p. 244; detail Jan. 1954, p. 11) have smaller fluted pilasters set on a bracket.

**59** SPEAKER'S DESK  
*Mahogany veneer on pine*  
*about 1797*  
*Annapolis, Maryland*  
*By John Sparo*

The lift-top desk has a curved back, canted sides and a straight front with a false drawer. The drawer front is outlined with satinwood stringing

C. 1807

William Tucker

76/77

Date from  
BMA cat.

and is equipped with wide wooden knobs. The side and back panels are strung with simple geometric frames of satinwood, and the posts are inset on the corners with panels of burl wood of medium brown color, bordered with alternate bands of mahogany and satinwood. In the center of the curved back panel is inlaid a large oval with the eagle of the Great Seal in shaded satinwood and holly. The streamer in the eagle's beak was decorated with Xs for the states, which are now largely obliterated. The legs are tapered and decorated with round-headed stringing. The front legs are square in section, while the back ones take the shape of a sideboard leg and are of diamond section. The lift top is covered with brown morocco, and on the ledge above, with its curved gallery, is a raised tray fitted for pens, ink and a sander.

**STRUCTURAL NOTES:** The interior wood is soft pine. The morocco is old but was placed on the desk in 1963. Both the lock and the original escutcheon are lacking, and the legs have lost a small amount of height. The wooden knobs have been questioned, as a matter of taste, but from all physical evidence, they appear to be original.

H. 32 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, W. 36 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches, D. 23 inches

*Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Choate. 63.12*

**HISTORY:** Though no bill exists for this piece, the desk for the President of the Senate in the Maryland State House was billed by John Shaw in 1797, and this example may have been for the Speaker of the House of Delegates. When new furniture was constructed by John Needles of Baltimore in 1819 for the State House, he was given the old furniture as part payment. Much of the Senate furniture has descended in Annapolis families and must have been sold locally by Needles. This desk was owned by Rear Admiral Albert Ross, who lived in the Brewer House on Duke of Gloucester Street. It descended in his family for two generations, coming to Elizabeth Ross (Mrs. John Caswell), the sister-in-law of the donatrix.

**NOTES:** The Senate desk is simpler in its decoration but has a nearly identical eagle inlay. Its back is straight and certain details, like the gallery, vary. It had been converted into a table and was reconstructed by Enrico Liberti of Baltimore for

the restoration of the Senate. The bill for it exists (above) and it bears Shaw's label. The curved back of the present example agrees with the curved form of the Speaker's rostrum and is an improvement on the Senate desk as a visual center for the room. It suggests that this desk may have been made a few years later than the other.

John Shaw (1745-1829) was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and arrived in Annapolis from Liverpool about 1773 (Rosamond Beirne, "John Shaw, Cabinetmaker", *Antiques*, Dec. 1960, pp. 554-558). He worked for the State of Maryland in several capacities and had supplied furniture for the old House of Delegates between 1781 and 1785 (Honor, "John Shaw, of the Great Days of Annapolis", *International Studio*, March 1931, pp. 44-47). He favored line inlay and crossbanding on his finer pieces, and the use of rectangular panels with cut corners appears in a number of sideboards (Beirne, op. cit., figs. 5-7, and *Baltimore Furniture*, nos. 41 and 42). Large eagle inlays of similar character are seen on Baltimore desks (*Baltimore Furniture*, nos. 68 and 69).

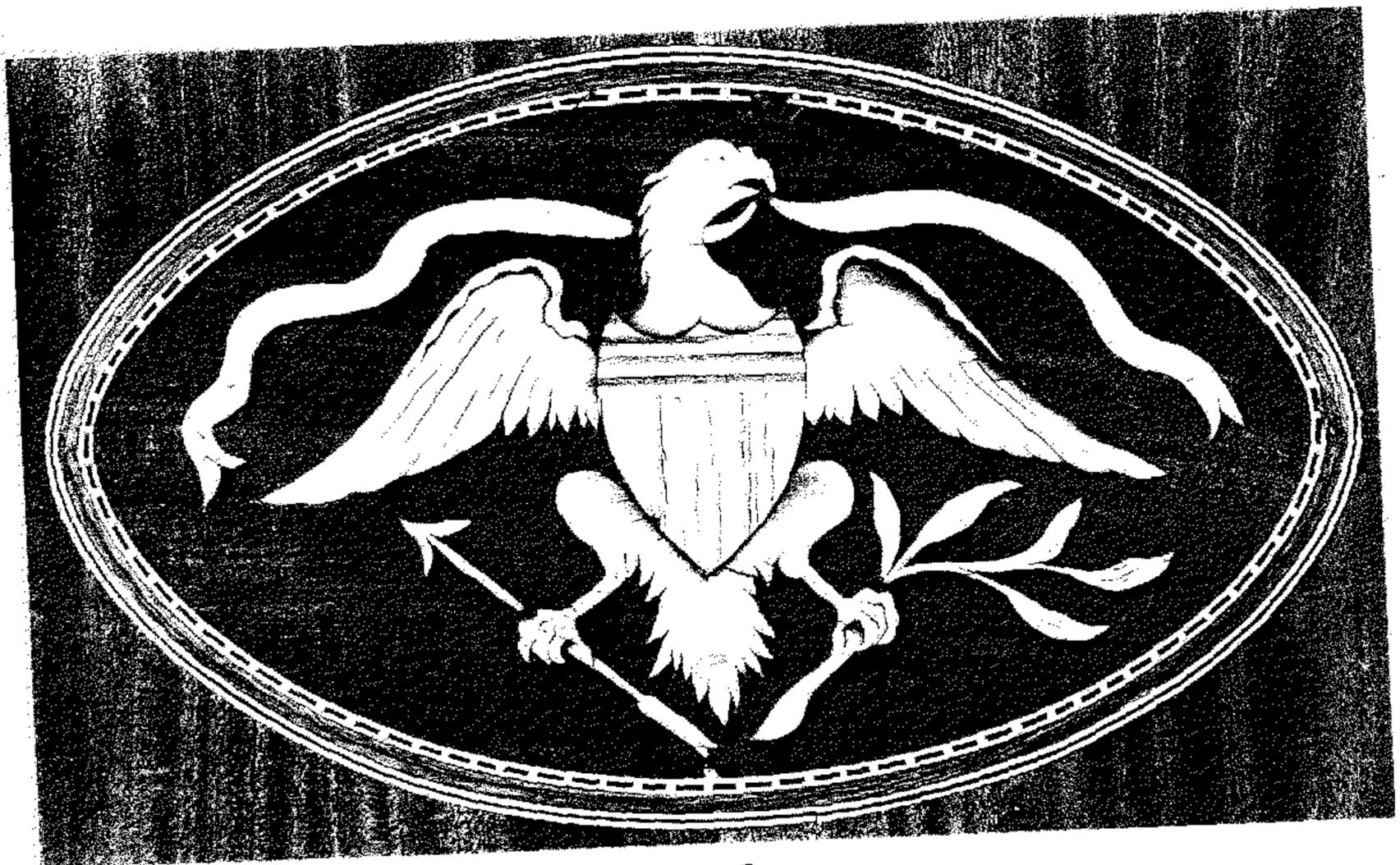
## 60 TAMBOUR DESK

*Mahogany and satinwood*  
1795-1810  
*Boston*  
*Attributed to John Seymour*

THE tambour section has a flat top with a veneered edge of mahogany and strings of satinwood. The case has three applied pilasters, inlaid with alternate bands of satinwood and a dyed black wood. The tambour shutters are each inlaid with bell-flowers pendant from three eight-pointed stars. The flowers are grouped by fives and where they meet in the swags there is a four-pointed star. The interior has on each side two long drawers of mahogany veneer, strung with satinwood rectangles, above three arch-headed pigeonholes painted blue-green. There is a heavy molding at the base of the tambour section, the front member of which is affixed to the desk flap, which is strung with dark mahogany and satinwood. The flap is covered with red baize within a cross-banded border of mahogany. The base has two long drawers, veneered with irregularly striated mahogany with



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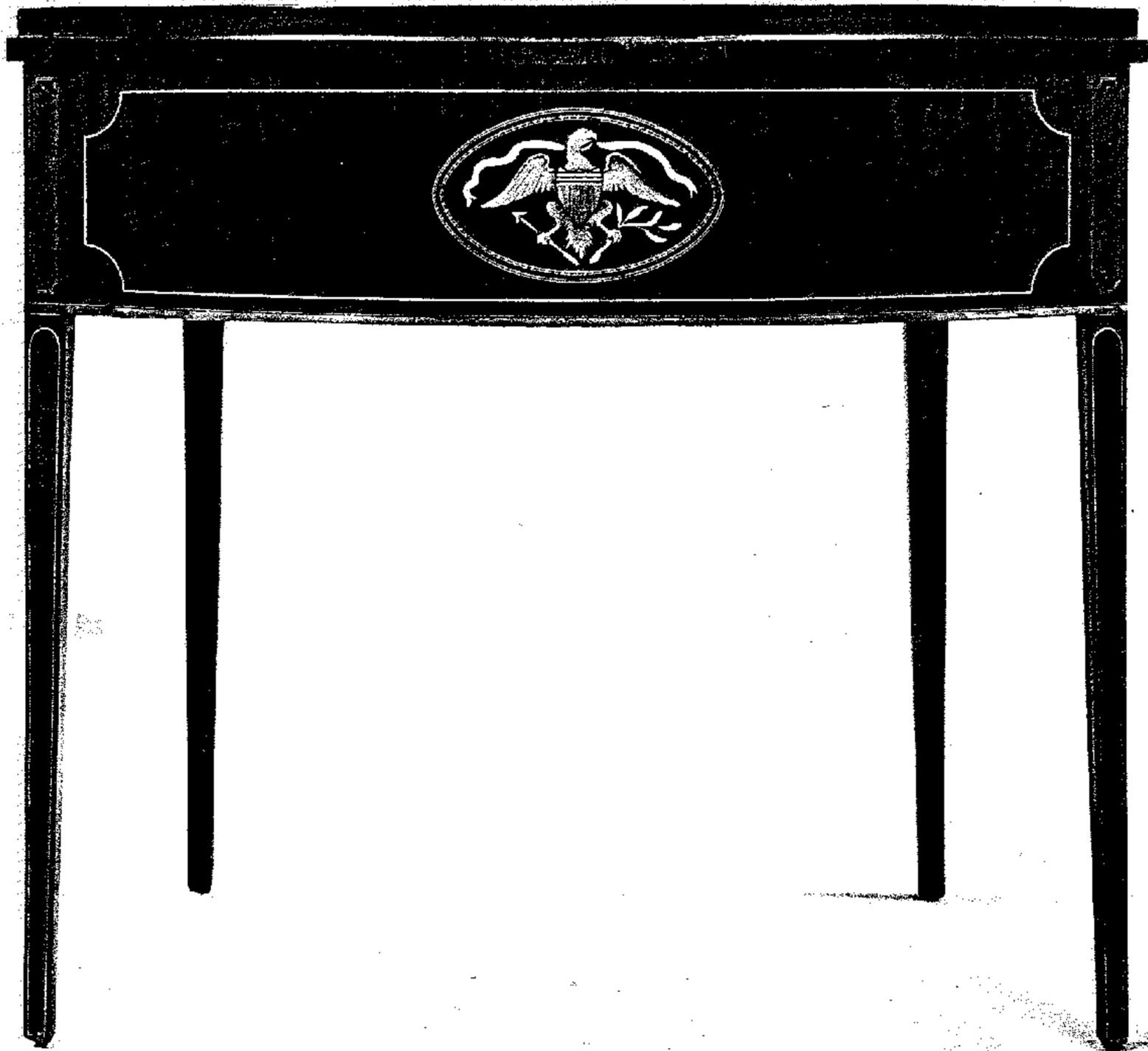
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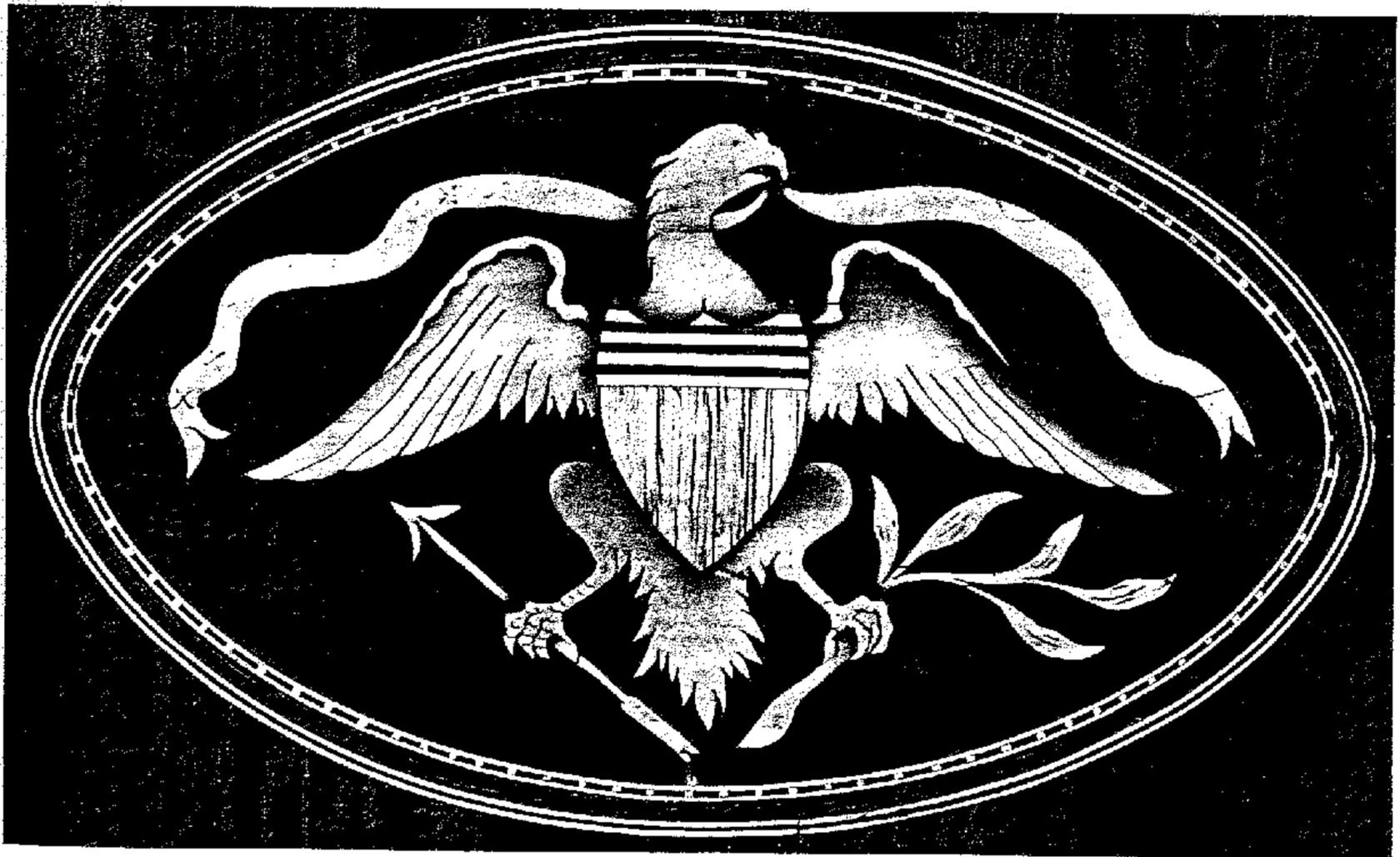
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