

Description of the Great Seal of Maryland

The Great Seal and Flag of Maryland are so intimately connected the one with the other that their history is inseparable. The flag of the State bears the escutcheon of the Great Seal—the Calvert and Crossland arms quartered. Maryland is unique in her Great Seal, and presents a marked contrast with those of the other States of the American Union, in that it consists of Armorial bearings of a strictly heraldic character, while the others bear “emblems indicative of agriculture and commerce, plenty and prosperity, or kindred subjects represented in a more or less pictorial or allegorical manner.”

The first Great Seal brought over by Governor Leonard Calvert, in 1643, was “Treacheroously and violently taken away by Richard Ingle, or his accomplices, in or about February A. D. 1644, and hath ever since been so disposed of it cannot be recovered.” In 1648, Baltimore sent to the province, through Governor William Stone, a second Great Seal cut in silver. The escutcheon bore the Calvert and Crossland arms quartered. The first and fourth quarters consisted of “six pales” or verticle bars, alternately gold and black with a bend dexter counter charged—that is, a diagonal stripe on which colors are reversed—being the Calvert arms; the second and third quarters consisted of a quartered field of red and silver charged with a Greek, or equal-limbed cross, classified as “Botany”—its arms terminating in trefoils—and also counter-charged, that is, with the colorings reversed, red being on the silver ground and silver on the red—the latter quarterings being from the Crossland, Baltimore’s maternal arms—Alicia Crossland having been the mother of the first Baron of Baltimore, George Calvert. These quarterings were surmounted by an earl’s coronet and full-faced helmet, which indicated his rank in America as that of a Count Palatine—his rank in England being that of a Baron only—a distinction which no other American Colonial charter conferred. On the helmet rested the Calvert crest, a ducal crown, with two half bannerets, one gold and one black. The escutcheon was supported on one side by the figure of a farmer, and the other by that of a fisherman—symbols of each his two estates, Maryland and Avalon. Below them was a scroll bearing the Calvert motto: “Fatti maschii Parole Femine”—mainly deeds, womanly words, or more strictly, deeds are males, words, females. Behind the escutcheons and coronets was engraved an ermined-lined mantle, and surrounding all, on a border encircling the seal, was the legend: “Scuto Bonae Voluntatis tuae Coronasti Nos”—with favor wilt thou compass us as with a shield. The heraldic terms used in describing the colors in the Calvert arms are “Or” and “Sable,” meaning gold and black.

The Obverse of the Great Seal

The obverse of the Great Seal represents Baron Baltimore as a Knight in full armor, with drawn sword and helmet decorated with feathers. He is mounted on a richly caparisoned charger, in full gallop, adorned with his paternal coat of arms, below which are engraved a strip of seashore, grass and flowers; around the whole is an inscription containing his name and titles, “Cecilius Absolutus Dominus Terrae Mariae et Avaloniae Baro de Baltimore.”

The Great Seal of the State, or Nation, stands as her symbol of honor, and the signet by which her official acts are authenticated and accredited. In colonial Maryland to every deed granting lands by the Proprietary, who held the fee therein, to the colonist settlers, was suspended by a piece of linen tape, a large wax seal, with the impression of both the obverse and the reverse of the Great Seal thereon. Upon the accession of William and Mary to the throne of England, Maryland became a Royal Province and the Church of England became the established church of the Province. During the sway of the Royal Governors, from 1692 to 1715, other seals came into use, but upon the restoration to Lord Baltimore in 1716 of the Province, “The Greater Seal at Arms” was again used. The convention of 1776 adopted the Great Seal of the Province as the Great Seal of the State, until a new one could be devised. Later, notably in 1794, and in 1817, many changes were made in it, but in 1876 a joint resolution of the Maryland Legislature was passed restoring the seal to the exact description given of it in Lord Baltimore’s Commission to Governor Stone on August 12, 1648. [From booklet entitled Annapolis, History of Ye Ancient City and Its Public Buildings, by Oswald Tilghman.]