

White House
1945-52



Merry Christmas
to Mrs. Roosevelt
from
The White House Social Staff

1945

The President's Seal

The Executive Order issued by President Truman on October 25, 1945, establishes for the first time a legal definition of the President's Coat of Arms and his Seal. The design of the Coat of Arms and the Seal has been changed slightly from the former design, and the Presidential Flag has also been changed. The Flag will consist of the Coat of Arms in full color, surrounded by 48 white stars on a blue field.

The former Presidential Flag was adopted in 1916 by President Wilson. Prior to that time the Army and the Navy had had separate flags for the Commander in Chief. President Wilson instructed his Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the Aide to the Secretary of the Navy, Commander Byron McCandless, U.S.N., to design a Presidential Flag which would be suitable for use by both the Army and the Navy. On May 29, 1916, President Wilson signed an Executive Order adopting the flag suggested by Assistant Secretary Roosevelt and Commander McCandless. The Flag consisted of the Presidential Coat of Arms on a blue field with a white star in each of the corners. That flag was in use from 1916 until today.

In March of this year, President Roosevelt discussed with his Naval Aide, Vice Admiral Wilson Brown, the advisability of changing the President's Flag. It seemed inappropriate to President Roosevelt for the flag of the Commander in Chief to have only four stars when there were

five stars in the flags of Fleet Admirals and Generals of the Army, grades which had been created in December 1944.

It was natural that President Roosevelt should turn at this time to the officer who had worked with him in 1916, and who now holds the rank of Commodore, Byron McCandless.

For many years Commodore McCandless, who now commands the U.S. Naval Repair Base at San Diego, California, has studied the histories of the various flags of the United States. When Vice Admiral Brown wrote to him, at President Roosevelt's request, late in March for suggestions for a new design for the President's Flag, Commodore McCandless prepared several designs based upon early American flags. His proposed designs arrived in Washington after the death of President Roosevelt and President Truman did not have the opportunity of seeing them until early in June.

The President and members of his staff examined them carefully and, preferring one design to the others, the President made several suggestions to Commodore McCandless concerning it. The President believed that all of the states in the Union should be represented on the Commander in Chief's Flag, and he asked Commodore McCandless to submit a new design with a circle of 48 stars around the Coat of Arms.

Commodore McCandless sent a painting of the proposed flag, with the circle of 48 stars,

to the White House in July and when the President returned from Berlin in August, he tentatively approved that design.

It was then sent to the War and Navy Departments for comment and suggestions. The Chief of the Heraldic Section of the Office of the Quartermaster General of the Army, Mr. Arthur E. DuBois, like Commodore McCandless, has studied the history of flags and heraldic emblems for many years. Mr. DuBois made several suggestions to the President. He pointed out that there was no known basis in law for the Coat of Arms and the Seal which had been used by Presidents since 1880 and which was reproduced on the Flag. The Seal had originated during the administration of President Hayes, apparently as an erroneous rendering of the Great Seal of the United States.

It is a curious fact that the eagle on the Great Seal faces to its own right, whereas the eagle on the seal in use by Presidents since 1880 faces to its own left. According to heraldic custom, the eagle on a Coat of Arms, unless otherwise specified in the heraldic description, is always made to face to its own right. There is no explanation for the eagle facing to its own left in the case of the President's Coat of Arms. To conform to heraldic custom, and since there was no authority other than usage for the former Presidential Coat of Arms, the President had Mr. DuBois redesign the Coat of Arms in accordance with the latter's suggestions.

In the new Coat of Arms, Seal and Flag the eagle not only faces to its right -- the direction

of honor -- but also toward the olive branches of peace which it holds in its right talon. Formerly the eagle faced toward the arrows in its left talon -- arrows, symbolic of war.

The President also decided that the eagle on his Seal and his Flag should appear in the full color of the natural bird as is customary in most flags, rather than in white as it had been on the former flag.

The 48 stars in the circle represent the states collectively; no single star represents any particular state.

If one of the territories should become a state, the President's Coat of Arms, Seal and Flag will have an additional star added at the same time that another star is added to the Flag of the United States.

There will be no change in the bronze impression of the Seal at the front entrance of the White House, in the Seal as it appears in the ceiling of the President's office in the West Wing, or in the cornerstone of the new East Wing, and the President has issued instructions that the present supplies of stationery and documents bearing his former Coat of Arms or Seal be used until exhausted.