

A Report by the Historical Society of Cecil County

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The Cecil County Seal

A Study of the Historical Record



Prepared by the Historical Society of Cecil County

For the Cecil County Information Technology Department

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Purpose

The study, undertaken at the request of Cecil County Government's Information Technology Department sought to answer the following question: What is the history of the County's seal? The report consists of a background briefing, a presentation of the historical record, a timeline, and conclusions.

Records Consulted

This study consulted the Board of Commissioners meeting minutes and the holdings of the Historical Society, primarily local newspapers and vertical files.

Background

Seals, flags, banners and standards are used to proclaim the authenticity and rights of the bearer or user. Since earliest recorded history, the finalizing of an important document, has been made official and final by impressing an identifying design in wax and attaching it as the seal of control or ownership to a document or object. The use of seals became common over the year and today many documents use a seal to indicate ownership, for security reasons, and to formalize contracts and agreements.

Cecil County, Maryland's tenth county, was established in 1674 from Baltimore and Kent counties by proclamation of the Captain General (Governor) of Maryland, Charles Calvert. The first proclamation was dated the 6th of June 1674. The second proclamation, narrowing the boundaries of the county, was issued on the 19th of June. Justices of Peace for the county were commissioned on the day the first proclamation was issued and the first court was held on June 10th, 1674. The county was named for Cecilus Calvert, second Lord Baltimore and founder of the colony.

The Data

In 1968, the Commissioners established an official seal.¹ This took place on June 11 when the Board approved a "resolution to establish an official seal for Cecil County," because there was a "certain controversy" over what constituted the seal and because a "diligent search of various records" had failed to reveal that an official seal was previously adopted." It is described in the county code: "The official seal of the county shall consist of a river scene which will reflect the water itself, together with a scene of the sky on which shall be shown a male mallard duck in flight, and underneath the male duck shall be a female mallard duck also in flight. In addition to the

¹ Cecil County Commissioner's Minutes, June 11, 1968, Pg 220-1; *Cecil Democrat*, "Seal Has Mallards," June 19, 1968

left of the heads of the ducks in flight shall be shown a cluster of cattails and reeds.²

There was controversy over this action. The Hunters Association appeared before the commissioners, arguing that the ducks should be canvasbacks. Allen Purner, a seasoned county hunter, wrote a letter to the editor saying that "when the county seal was designed about a hundred years ago mallards were few if any in this locality, but since the invention and use of corn-pickers . . . and the raising of mallard ducks . . . they have become quiet numerous. . . . At that time the canvasbacks in great flocks frequented our rivers and bays so some person paints a pretty picture of a pair of mallards and the contractor makes a slight mistake in the shape of the ducks heads on our court house. So some group of persons changes our hundred year old seal." He concluded by pointing out that when apparently "insignificant things are changed then it grows to greater things like State and Federal Constitutions. "When all has been altered or distorted what have you and darn it, I still says they're canvasbacks."³ The Historical Society also wrote to the commissioners indicating that a seal had been adopted prior to this action. As evidence, it noted, amongst other points, in 1951 the Society adopted the "Seal of Cecil County, which features wild ducks on a background of crimson," as the official seal of the organization.⁴



Figure 1. Cecil County Seal

In 1989, when the subject came up again, Sheriff John F. DeWitt referred to a letter that stated that in 1961 a sophomore at Elkton Senior High School drew the seal, which is currently be used. The original description called for canvasback ducks, "but being only 16 years old and not familiar with ducks, he drew mallards instead of canvasbacks," he said.⁵

When the county prepared to celebrated its 300th birthday in 1974, the Board of Commissioners launched a county-wide contest to have an official flag designed. Beverly B. Martin, designed the current one, consisting of two equal fields, one of crimson, the color of the ensign assigned by the Council of Maryland in 1694, and one of white. The official seal, overlaid on the field of white, reaches from the top to the bottom. For the prizewinning design, which was adopted as the official flag, Martin received

² The Code of Cecil County Maryland, Michie City Publications: Charlottesville, VA – 1970, Sec. 31 – 10 County Seal, p. 310; Cecil County Commissioner's Meeting Minutes, June 11, 1968, PG 220-1

³ *Cecil Whig*, Letters to the Editor – "They're Canvasbacks," June 26, 1968, Allen Purner

⁴ *Cecil Whig*, "County Seal," Morton Taylor, July 3, 1968

⁵ Cecil County Commissioner's Minutes, September 5, 1989, page 227

a prize of \$100. The official presentation of the flag coincided with the opening of the county's tricentennial celebration.⁶

In 1986, former Delegate Richard D. Mackie asked the commissioners to replace the seal with what researchers at the State Archives determined was the original seal. It was designed when the county was established in 1674, and was based on the lesser seal at arms of Lord Baltimore in England, according to the archivist. The lesser seal was used by the Lords Baltimore in England and appears occasionally on documents sent to Maryland. The seal consists of a shield emblazoned with Black and Gold vertical stripes with a diagonal stripe in alternating colors. The shield is ensigned by a Baron's Coronet and over this is a helmet. Behind the helmet is some scroll work. Atop the helmet a second coronet consists of a decorated circlet with nine gilt balls. From the second coronet two staves rise, with a triangular shape flag flowing. The shield is supported by two gold leopards with black spots. At the top of the shield are the words Cecil County. Below the shield is a ribbon which usually carries a family's motto,

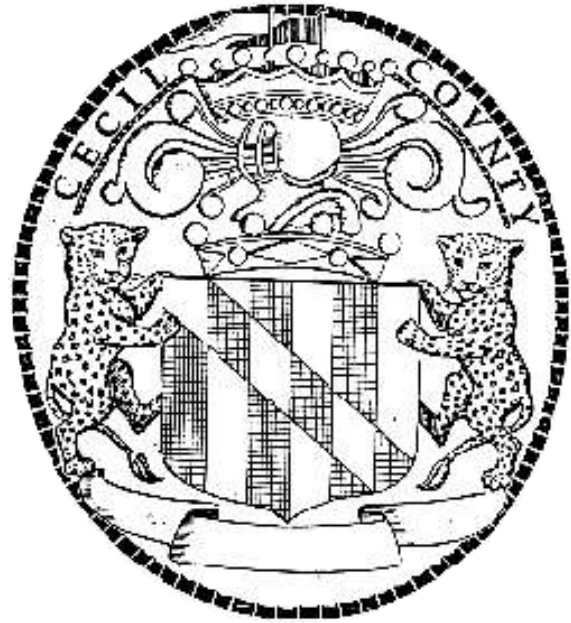


Figure 2. Original County Seal

but in this place it carries the date the county was established, 1674.⁷

The Board agreed to replace the seal depicting the ducks with the one from 1674, but a confusing situation developed. After making a motion to adopt the colonial-era mark, Commissioner Merritt B. Dean made a motion to rescind his original motion to recognize the 1674 seal. He said this opened "a whole bag of worms. Now there are two or three seals." The commissioner was referring to the fact that another seal depicting sheaves of wheat had come to light. Howard Henry said: The flap over the ducks vs. leopards is ridiculous since neither one is the true seal. The seal was a recent imaginary thing and the ducks are mallards, the wrong breed of duck. And leopards aren't indigenous to the area." But no one seconded the motion so it died.⁸ Sheriff DeWitt suggested the commissioners write to

⁶ *Cecil Democrat*, April 10 1974, County Flag

⁷ *The Archivist Bulldog*, Vol. 11 No. 14, July 28, 1997, Cecil County Seal by Robert Barnes; *Cecil Whig*, February 12, 1986, "Mackie Supports new County Seal"

⁸ *Cecil Whig*, Mackie Supports New County Seal," by Carl Hamilton; February 12, 1986; *Cecil Whig*, Ducks Out, Leopards In, by John Gwillim *Cecil Whig*, September 27, 1889, "County Seal Subject Comes up Again (footnote continued)

Gregory A. Stiverson, Assistant State Archivist to ask him to confirm that this is in fact the county seal. "That should take any political personalities out of it," he said. Regardless, Senator Walter Baker and the state delegation refused to support the commissioner's decision to change the seal. At that time, Baker said he had no plans to introduce the bill necessary to change the county code and thus the seal. He said he found the adoption of the original seal unnecessary, probably costly, and best left up to the people to decide, perhaps as a referendum issue. I'm opposed to change for the sake of change, Baker said.⁹

TIMELINE

Year	Action
1968	Board of Commissioners passed proclamation adopting official seal
1974	Board adopts official flag
1986	State Archives say it identified the original county seal
1989	State Delegation refused to introduce legislation changing seal

Conclusion

Although Cecil County is one of Maryland's oldest counties, its official seal is of modern design. It was adopted in June 1968 by the Board of Commissioners. It had been designed sometime prior to that point and some argued that it was designed in the 1870s, but evidence supporting that assertion has not been found. Research at the State Archives in the 1980s unearthed what is probably the first county seal, created at the time the county was founded in 1674. The Board of Commissioners passed a motion requesting that the State Legislature approve the older seal, but the delegation refused to submit the request.

. . . and is Tabled Again," by Joy Gwillim; *Cecil Whig*, by Joy Gwillim, September 13, 1989, "A third County Seal Called the Real Thing."
⁹ *Cecil Whig*, September 12, 1989, by Joy Gwillim, *Baker blocks change in County Seal*.