The Court Archive:
The Seal of the Supreme Court

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The seal of any governmental entity is important because it certifies a document emanating from a particular office as authoritative and valid. In the Illinois Supreme Court, seals are attached to official documents, appointments, and law licenses. In its 200-year existence, the Court has utilized only three seals. The Clerk of the Illinois Supreme Court is the official keeper of the seal.

When Illinois became a state in 1818, a seal had to be created for the Supreme Court. For some unknown reason, it took several years for the seal to be made. As late as 1822, James Duncan, the clerk of the Supreme Court, certified documents with his "private seal" because of "no judicial seal being provided." Finally in 1823, the first seal began to be used. It depicts Lady Justice holding the scales and a sword. Scales represent the weighing of evidence and dates back to Egyptian hieroglyphs. The sword represents power and that justice can be swift and final. Thirteen stars represent the thirteen original colonies, and the crescent moon represents a new beginning, which is appropriate for the newly admitted state of Illinois. The date "August 26, 1818" was the date that the first Illinois Constitution went into effect, establishing the Illinois Supreme Court and the entire judicial branch.



The second seal can be found on court documents as early as the 1830s, but the exact date it went into effect is not known. The seal for the State of Illinois was recast in the 1830s as well, and it is likely that the two seals took effect at approximately the same time because of the similarity in design. The second Supreme Court seal features Lady Justice holding scales and a sword while resting on a rock, which demonstrates the solid foundation of the law. This seal was in use until the late 1860s.



The current seal was in use as early as the 1840s and overlaps

usage with the second seal. However, the current seal was in use exclusively after 1870. Several features on the third seal were retained, particularly Lady Justice holding scales and the sword while resting on a rock. The imagery only seems to differ with changes in the flowing robe and that Justice gazes downward rather than directly forward. One added feature is the circle of bees on outside of the seal. Bees are traditionally symbols of people working together and harmony.



Alexandra Kozar, a summer intern for the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission, sketched the Court's first two seals from Illinois Supreme Court documents housed at the Illinois State Archives.