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# The Heraldic seal of the city of San Diego, California

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The City of San Diego, "the Birthplace of California," is preparing for 1969 the celebration of its 200th anniversary.<sup>1</sup> This justifies the evocation of the constituent elements of the City's official seal.

The discovery of the Coast of California and of San Diego is due to the Portuguese Juan Rodrigues Cabrillo at the service of Spain, on September 28, 1542. He had gone to Mexico with Narvaéz in 1520 and was with Pedro de Alvarado in the Conquest of Guatemala. Then he sailed in 1540 with Alvarado's fleet to explore the northwest coast. In June 1542, Cabrillo took over the command of two vessels and entered a bay named by him San Miguel, the San Diego Bay of today, which received its present name sixty years later, in November 1602, by Captain-General Sebastian Vizcaino, who rediscovered the place.

The City owes its foundation to Father Junipero Serra who arrived on July 1, 1769 to the Bay where he established the first Mission of California, on July 16. This Mission, on the actual site of Presidio Hill, gave birth to the City and to the so called "Camino Real," a still existing 600 miles long route with a chain of 21 missions.<sup>2</sup>

Under Mexican rule, San Diego received its *pueblo* status in 1835, and came under American sovereignty in 1848. It was incorporated as an American city on March 27, 1850, the year that California

became a State of the Union. The City's first Charter was adopted in 1852, and new ones in 1876, 1886 and 1889.<sup>3</sup> This latter has been amended 125 times between 1889 and 1931, and the 1931 one since then more than 150 times...

As far as the heraldic seal of the City of San Diego is concerned, the first Municipal Code provides that the seal "shall be circular, in diameter of a size appropriate for use on official City documents, and in the center any design adopted by the Council, and the following inscription surrounding the same: THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA."<sup>4</sup> A second legal provision concerns the seal in the Charter of 1931, stipulating that the City "... may use a corporate seal." (Art. I. sec. 1)<sup>5</sup>

In 1913, the City Council authorized the Clerk "to invite the submission of competitive designs for ... an official seal ..."<sup>6</sup> The design adopted by Resolution No. 17024 of April 15, 1914, was the work of Architect Carleton Monroe

<sup>3</sup> See: WILLIAM E. SMYTHE: *History of San Diego* 1542-1907, The History Company, San Diego, 1907, pp. 464 ss.

<sup>4</sup> San Diego Municipal Code, adopted by Ordinance No. 5046 (New Series), original codification filed as Official Document No. 443622. Compiled and codified by Jean F. Du Paul and Morey S. Levenson; amended 10-10-57 by Ordinance 7626 No. 5.

<sup>5</sup> San Diego Municipal Code, Chapter II. Government, Art. 1. — General Provisions, Section 20.01.

<sup>6</sup> The second *Whereas* of Resolution No. 12752 stated the reason behind this convocation: "In the opinion of this Common Council, the present seal of the City of San Diego is not in any way symbolic or representative of the municipality as it exists to-day" and, *Whereas*, "It is the desire of said Common Council to have a more appropriate seal designed for use as the official seal of said City."

<sup>1</sup> See EDWARD J. DAVIS: *Historical San Diego*. The Birthplace of California, San Diego, 1953; JAMES MILLS: *San Diego—Where California began*, San Diego Historical Society, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> At present the Highway 101.

Winslow.<sup>7</sup> Its heraldic description following the presentation quoted in document N<sup>o</sup>. 74869, is as follows (fig. 1) :

*Shield* or, a fess wavy, azure, in chief a Spanish caravel in full sail gules, pennons and flag of the same, in base an orange tree proper fruited and eradicated, between two winged wheels of the third;

*Crest*: A Carmelite Belfry, azure, having hung therein a bell, or;



Fig. 1. The seal of the City of San Diego, 1941.

*Supporters* The pillars of Hercules azure, entwined with ribands or, standing upon two dolphins vert, with eyes, fins and tail, gules, their tails linked together, or, beneath the shield;

*Motto* • SEMPER VIGILANS; around the whole : THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA.

The blue wavy band with a Spanish caravel under full sail represent the City's position on the sea, and the early Spanish seattlement. The orange tree indicates the citrus industry, and the winged wheels the manufacture and transportation, the three economic factors of the City's wealth.

For a crest a typical "Carmelite belfry" is used, which suggests the early christianization of San Diego by the "Mission Fathers" of Fray Junipero Serra. It should be stated however, that Fray Junipero was a Franciscan and not a Carmelite . . .

<sup>7</sup> Resolution No. 17024 is filed as Official Document No. 75410 in the City Clerk's Office, in Book 25, page 394, file 154.

The pillars of Hercules used as supporters recall the ancient jurisdiction of Spain, which marked the historical character of Southern California. They are taken from the royal coat of arms of Spain, together with the motto PLUS ULTRA. The dolphins are adopted from the coat of arms of the Panama-California Exposition, symbolizing the now inseparably united two Oceans and the take-off of San Diego based upon this event. The motto SEMPER VIGILANS was justified by the author of the adopted project as "peculiarly appropriate to the spirit of San Diego."

This seal dated 1914 will celebrate its 55th anniversary in 1969, coinciding with the 200th anniversary of the City's foundation.<sup>8</sup> Another commemorative seal was specially adopted for this solemn occasion, which reproduces the non-heraldic figures of a Franciscan friar holding the Cross and a Spanish conquistador with his hallebard (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The seal of San Diego 200th Anniversary, Inc.

It would be fortunate if the City's Council would use the good heraldic elements of the half-a-century old seal for the adoption of a municipal coat-of-arms which could be an additional sound tradition commemorating the two centuries existence of the City of San Diego.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The California Legislature passed a Resolution on January 3, 1967, called Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1 relative to the California Bicentennial Celebration. This Resolution is an eloquent reflex of the consciousness of the people of California of its history and traditions.

<sup>9</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges the valuable aid granted to him by the City Clerk of San Diego, Mr. John Lockwood, in order to research the full historical background of the seal of the City of San Diego, in February, 1968.