

## Myth #84: The Mysterious Origin of Nevada's Territorial Seal by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

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In comparing Iowa's state seal with Nevada's territorial seal, one is struck by the similarity. Is this just coincidence? Maybe. However, upon further investigation, circumstantial evidence suggests that Iowa's state seal was the model for Nevada's territorial seal.

The Iowa state seal, made official by Iowa's first state legislature in 1847, includes a soldier in the foreground, leaning on a rifle and standing in a field of wheat, holding an American flag. To the right of the soldier, in the background, smoke trails to the right from the chimney of a small cabin.



The Nevada territorial seal, made official by Nevada's first territorial legislature in 1861, includes, a miner in the foreground, leaning on a pick and standing on a mining claim, holding an American flag. To the right of the miner, in the background, smoke trails to the right from the chimney of a five-stamp quartz mill.

Orion Clemens, President Abraham Lincoln's appointee as Secretary of Nevada Territory, presented a design for a territorial seal to the first Legislature in Carson City on October 7, 1861. After some debate and much delay, the Council passed the House Territorial Seal Resolution on November 28, 1861. Councilman Ira Luther from Genoa noted that the Territorial Seal Committee's tardiness in reporting on the seal matter was related to an unsuccessful effort to generate an original idea other than what Clemens had proposed. Governor James Nye signed the bill the following day, the last day of the legislative session.

So what has Nevada's territorial seal to do with Iowa's state seal? Interestingly enough, Orion Clemens moved from Hannibal, Missouri, to Muscatine, Iowa, in September 1853 where he operated a small, commercial print shop and started the *Muscatine Journal*. On Dec. 19, 1854, Orion married "Molly" Stotts in her hometown of Keokuk, Iowa.

In June 1855, the couple moved to Keokuk where he bought the "Ben Franklin" Book and Job Office and employed his brother, Samuel (the future "Mark Twain"). Daughter Jennie was born on September 14.

Orion and his family left Iowa for Tennessee, Orion's birthplace, in the fall of 1857 only to return to live with his in-laws in Keokuk by 1859. In the meantime, Orion finished his law studies and became an attorney.

Despite having no documentary evidence that Clemens based the Nevada territorial seal design on Iowa's state seal, it is difficult to imagine that in all his time in Iowa as a newspaper publisher, printer, and attorney he was not familiar with the state seal. The similarity of the two seals suggests that Clemens consciously, or unconsciously, drew on the Iowa state seal as a model for Nevada's territorial seal.



Orion certainly took great pride in his creation. In a letter written by the Territorial Secretary on December 3, 1861, and kept in the Nevada State Archives, Clemens entrusted his seal design to an engraving firm. "I rely upon you to see that it is skillfully executed, both in design and engraving," wrote Orion. "It is a bantling [a very young child] of my own, and my pride will be to have the prettiest seal in the Union."

Orion and Mollie Clemens left Nevada in March 1866 (Jennie died in Carson City on February 1, 1864) and after a brief sojourn to California, returned to Iowa. Orion spent the greater part of his life there, dying in Keokuk on December 11, 1897.

In the end, maybe Orion Clemens' Iowa and Nevada connections have been forever sealed.

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