

History of the University Seal

University of Notre Dame du Lac

A University Seal is used to stamp official documents and is affixed to diplomas when degrees are granted. In 1854 the “new” University Seal was authorized and over the years it has evolved to its present form, prominently displaying iconic images of the University. The Office of the Registrar is the official keeper of that seal. This brochure provides the history of the University Seal based on seals used on diplomas and other official records.



1854

The University Seal was first authorized in a university document titled Minor Chapter March 22, 1847 to June 12, 1854. In the minutes of this book is shown the beginning of the University Seal. “A.D. 1854 on the 5th of June the usual meeting took place . . . a new seal for the University was approved with this form University of Notre Dame du Lac, St. Joseph’s County Ind. E. Sorin”

This first seal (c. 1854 - 1871) is oval and appears like an ink rubber stamp put onto a red paper foil and then adhered to the diploma. It reads, in English, across the middle: **UNIVERSITY**; then across the top, in French: **NOTRE DAME DU LAC**, which translates to “Our Lady of the Lake”; and then across the bottom, in English: **St Jos Co la** (note: at that time “la” was the abbreviation for Indiana).

Interesting fact about this seal:

- The seal shown is affixed on a diploma dated June 1871. To date, this is the oldest diploma found and is located in the University Archives.
- On the diploma itself the seal is referred to as the “Corporate Seal of the Institution.”



Circa 1876

The second University Seal (c. 1876 - 1901) is circular, with three rings making the shape of the seal and a shield at its center. The outer ring of the circle depicts a cord design, which in the Bible is a symbol for unity. In the middle ring, the name of the school appears (in English and French) * **UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME DU LAC.** * **IND.** A star appears in both the space at the beginning and at the end of the name of the University. The star is often a symbol associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. The third ring depicts a ring of pearls. In Christian recordings, the pearl is used to symbolize humility, purity, harmony, and sometimes heaven. A shield is located in the middle of the circle and contains the following three elements: at the top are twelve stars which form a crown. *"And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Apocalypse 12:1)"* This crown of twelve stars is also applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary, for whom the University is named, being crowned as the Queen of Heaven. Interlocking letters **A** and **M**, referring to "Ave Maria", are in the middle. The third element is the words **AVE MARIA** which translates to "Hail Mary".

Interesting fact about this seal:

- The name University of Notre Dame du Lac translates to "University of Our Lady of the Lake". The "Our Lady" refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Circa 1903

The third University Seal (c. 1903 - 1930) is circular, with two outer rings and a design in the center. The exterior ring of the circle defines the shape of the seal. The interior ring contains the name of the school. The text reads, in Latin, **SIGILLUM UNIVERSITATIS NOSTRAE DOMINAE A LACU**, which translates to "The Seal of the University of Notre Dame du Lac". A star appears at the bottom center portion of this ring. The design in the center of the seal has the following elements: at the top is a crown of twelve stars. "And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Apocalypse 12:1)" This crown of twelve stars is also applied to the crowning of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for whom the University is named, as the Queen of Heaven. The middle portion of the design depicts two doves holding a banner with the words **CRUX**, **SPES**, and **UINICA**. This translates to "The Cross, our only hope", motto of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the order which founded the University. The last element is the shield, placed between the two doves, depicts a cross before interlocking anchors representing the Congregation of Holy Cross.

Interesting facts about this seal:

- There are two other versions of the center's design which can be found on some Bulletins of Information and in drawings. In place of the doves, these other versions feature birds of prey.
- On all diplomas the degree is conferred: "In testimony whereof we subscribe our names and affix the seal of the University . . ."
- The year this seal was adopted closely coincides with historic events of the Congregation of Holy Cross. In 1901 France passed the "Law of Associations" which suppressed nearly all of the religious orders and confiscated their properties. In 1903 the Congregation of Holy Cross was expelled from France, the country in which it was founded.



1931 – Present

The fourth, and current University Seal, was designed in 1931. The outer ring contains the words **SIGILLUM UNIVERSITATIS DOMINAE NOSTRAE A LACU**, which translates to “The Seal of the University of Notre Dame du Lac”. At the shield’s base are two wavy lines, indicating the *a Lacu*, or “of the Lake”, portion of the University’s official title, and above them to the left is the “Star of the Sea”, another emblem of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The cross represents the Congregation of Holy Cross, which founded Notre Dame. That Notre Dame is an educational institution is denoted by the open book. On the pages of the book are the words **VITA, DULCEDO, SPES**, from the ancient prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the *Salve Regina*, which celebrates her as “life, sweetness, and hope.”

Interesting facts about this seal:

- The seal has become a popular image on campus and can be found in both English and Latin versions. While the English version is regularly used, the Latin version is considered the official seal of the University.
- Colors for the armorial seal should consist of a shield with a clear blue field and a cross of gold. The heraldic colors, “or” and “azure” (gold and blue), are symbolic of the Mother of God, to whom Father Edward Sorin dedicated the University of Notre Dame. The two wavy lines and the “Star of the Sea” should be presented in silver.
- On all diplomas the degree is conferred: “In testimony whereof we subscribe our names and affix the seal of the University . . .”
- As the keeper of the University Seal, the Office of the Registrar has used images of the seal to play a prominent role in the theming throughout their new office space.

Source of the information and seals contained in this booklet:
University of Notre Dame Office of the Registrar
Lora Spaulding, Assistant Registrar
University of Notre Dame Archives
Peter Lysy, Senior Archivist
Father Robert Austgen, C.S.C.
Louis Jordan, III, Librarian

Printed: February 2011