

**Identity Through Heraldry in a Non-Heraldic Culture:
The use of heraldry and quasi-heraldic devices by government,
business, institutions and associations in the United States of America**

by
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This paper had its origin in the observation that I was seeing more heraldry each day in the thirty minute commute from home to work in Dallas, Texas, than I had seen in three days as a visitor touring the streets of London, England. In other words, I was seeing a greater daily use of heraldry in what was, less than a hundred years ago, a small frontier town, than in the capital city of one of Europe's great nations; indeed, in a metropolis which is the home to one of the few living colleges of heralds in the world.



On automobiles, on trucks, on roadside signs, heraldry was being used to indicate identity literally in the streets of Dallas, and to a greater extent than I had seen in what many Americans take to be practically the home of heraldry, London, England. “How can this be? How can such a situation have come to pass?” I asked myself. This article is the result of those ruminations.

In the course of this presentation I will, with two exceptions, be discussing exclusively coats of arms and quasi-heraldic devices which are found on escutcheons or shield shaped fields. Had I included those heraldic-style and quasi-heraldic devices displayed on roundels or other shaped-fields, this article would certainly have far exceeded the limits established by this conference.

In 1776, the United States of America declared that they were, “and of right ought to be free and independent States.”¹ Specifically, this meant free and independent of Great Britain. Free from its taxes, free from its Parliament, free from its class system, and free from the trappings of nobility that had come to symbolize British rule. This attitude runs very deep in the American psyche.

It is said that in her first weeks as first lady, Martha Washington was begged by a trio of ornately dressed women to conduct her regular Friday afternoon receptions with more pomp and circumstance. Meeting the delegation in simple morning dress, her knitting needles ... in hand, she gracefully reminded the overdressed group that the very clothes they wore were what the Daughters of Liberty had forsworn.²

One of the trappings of nobility which the new nation forswore was the regulation of coats of arms. “The government of the United States of America and the several state governments in their early development elected to forego the responsibility of regulating armorial bearings within their jurisdiction.”³ “Many people imagine – and none are more loud in the assertion than Americans themselves – that in the great Western Republic the species of gentilitary registration denominated Heraldry is uncared for.”⁴

Still, not all Americans shared this attitude, and it certainly did not mean that in giving up the regulation of heraldry that Americans necessarily gave up the use of heraldry. Indeed, many of the states as well as the new nation devised arms for themselves. Further, a goodly number of the “founding fathers” of the young commonwealth bore arms, some legitimately granted, some simply assumed. Among those who bore arms was the first President of the new republic, George Washington. In addition to bearing the arms which have since become the symbol of the capital city named after him, Washington, D.C., he said:

It is far from my design to intimate an opinion, that Heraldry, Coat-Armor, etc. might not be rendered conducive to public and private use with us; or that they can have any tendency unfriendly to the purest spirit of republicanism. On the contrary, a different conclusion is deducible from the practice of Congress and the states; all of which have established some kind of Armorial devices, to authenticate their official instruments.⁵

So from the very beginnings of its nationhood, the United States of America and its people have had an attitude of ambivalence regarding the use of coats of arms. On the one hand, coats of arms are often seen as elitist or European (and hence not “egalitarian”, republican or American), and thus something to be avoided. As the American author of the book *Dame Heraldry* put it: “I asked the children what the little crowned hearts and diagonal bars, the golden *fleur-de-lys*, and the rampant lions meant. They studied the enigmatical mixture of lions and animals for some moments, and shook their heads, one young hopeful declaring that all they meant was that the people who had them thought they were better than the people who hadn’t. The big brother covered the humiliation of his ignorance by declaring that Americans ought not to know anything about such things; we were all equals, etc.”⁶

On the other hand, the use of coat armor is often viewed as something to which anyone may rightfully aspire. There is a widespread, though erroneous, belief that all, or almost all, Americans have a “family coat of arms” which they may rightfully bear. There are any number of businesses in the United States which help to foster this belief. As only one example, Halbert’s, a company “specializing in surname products”, in advertising sweatshirts with coats of arms printed on them, says: “Wear a Coat of Arms for your surname proudly, as knights of old did centuries ago!”⁷ (In addition to questioning the propriety of wearing anything printed with “a coat of arms for [my] surname”, I really have to wonder: Did “knights of old ... centuries ago” really wear sweatshirts with their arms on them?)

So, given all of this, you may well ask, since they have such an ambivalent attitude to the bearing of arms, just why do Americans use coats of arms? The underlying reasons are much the same as they are in other countries, and generally fall into just a few general categories.

First and foremost, not surprisingly, heraldic insignia are a way of creating a visual identity. They are employed as way of stating “I belong” or “This is who I am/we are”; “a means of identification and for esprit de corps.”⁸ In other words, heraldry is used to create an individual or group identity, a sense of “us”. This is most often found in the military, private schools, and sports, but is also seen in the use of arms in a wide variety of businesses, associations, and institutions as well as governmental units.

Related to that first category is the very elitism for which arms are sometimes criticized. The use of arms lends a mystique of class, of quality, of being somehow better. In other words, heraldry is used to create a higher class identity, as sense of “us” as opposed to “them”. As author George Orwell once put it, “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”⁹ The American who uses arms may consider himself to be “more equal” than those who do not.

Heraldry is also used for the evocation of an atmosphere which is considered “quaint” or “Old World” (that is to say, European, most often specifically reminiscent of the English countryside). Businesses trying to create an identity of this kind of a mood of “Old World countryside charm” will often choose as their logo a coat of arms whose charges and arrangement will suggest a “vine-covered country cottage”: roses, stag’s heads, and leaves are all common choices as charges in these cases.

Especially in business, the use of a coat of arms gives a firm or organization the impression of having established longevity and stability. There exists the perception, however true or false, that a firm or entity which has a coat of arms has been around for a longer time than one which does not, and thus is more likely to continue existence in the future.

Another usage of arms is based on the image of the medieval knight in full armor with his shield as his defense. The use of a coat of arms, with its distinctive shield shape, is associated with protection. This more or less unconscious association of the shield shape with safety makes its use very popular among insurance companies, police associations, lawyers, and home security systems.



So, all that said, who uses heraldry in the United States today?

Government

U.S. (Federal) Government

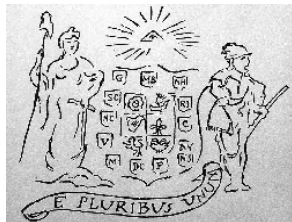
First, and probably best-known, of course, are the arms of the United States of America. How familiar are those arms? Well, they are found on the reverse of the most common denomination of paper currency, the one dollar bill.

These arms, adopted by Act of Congress on 20 June 1782, and confirmed by an act of 15 September 1789, are blazoned: *Paleways of 13 pieces, argent and gules; a chief, azure, the escutcheon on the breast of the*



American eagle displayed proper, holding in its dexter talon an olive branch, and in his sinister a bundle of 13 arrows, all proper, in his beak a scroll, inscribed with this motto: “E pluribus unum.” For the crest: Over the head of the eagle, which appears above the escutcheon, a glory, or, breaking through a cloud, proper, and surrounding 13 stars, forming a constellation argent on an azure field.

As complex as those arms may sound, an earlier proposal was even more complicated. On the tenth of August, 1776, a committee with Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson proposed the following as “a device for the seal of the United States of North America”¹⁰: “The shield has six Quarters.... The 1st Or, a Rose enamelled gules and argent for England: the 2nd Argent, a Thistle proper for Scotland: the 3^d Vert a Harp Or for Ireland: the 4th Azure a Flower de luce Or for France: the 5th Or the Imperial Eagle Sable for Germany: and the 6th Or the Belgic Lion Gules



for Holland, pointing out the countries from which these states have been peopled. The shield within a bordure Gules entwined of thirteen Scutcheons Argent linked together by a chain or, each charged with the initial letters Sable, as follows: 1st NH [for New Hampshire], 2nd MB [for Massachusetts Bay], 3^d RI [for Rhode Island], 4th C [Connecticut], 5th NY [New York], 6th NJ [New Jersey], 7th P [Pennsylvania], 8th DC [should be DE for Delaware], 9th M [Maryland], 10th V [Virginia], 11th NC [North Carolina], 12th SC [South Carolina], 13th G [Georgia], for each of the thirteen independent States of America. Supporters, Dexter the Goddess of Liberty in a corselet of Armour, alluding to the present times, holding in her right hand the Spear and Cap and with her left supporting the shield of the States; Sinister the Goddess of Justice bearing a sword in her right hand and in her left a Balance. Crest, The Eye of Providence in a radiant Triangle whose Glory extends over the shield and beyond the Figures. Motto: E Pluribus Unum.”

Additional federal arms are found on the front of the one dollar bill – the arms of the Department of the Treasury. These arms (*Or on a chevron between a hanging balance and a key fesswise Azure 13 mullets Argent*), designed in the 1780's, are found on all denominations of paper currency issued by the federal government. (I expect, however, that most Americans don't even look at their money closely enough to realize that they are emblazoned with a coat of arms.)

Arms which are undoubtedly more familiar, if only through seeing them in use in Presidential press conferences, speeches from the Rose Garden of the President's residence, the White House, and in movies in which the President's aircraft, Air Force One, plays a prominent role, are the arms of the President of the United States, embodied in his seal. That this seal, though always displayed on a roundel, is used in the same way and performs the same function as a coat of arms is demonstrated by the fact that it was placed on the exterior of the airplane with the express intent that only the President or individuals specifically authorized by the President could use the aircraft.¹¹ The seal of the President is also one of the few pieces of armory protected by federal law.¹² (The other armory protected by statute includes the great seal of the United States (which has the national arms on the reverse), the seal of the Vice President, the seal of the United States Senate, the symbol of the American National Red Cross, and, since September 1, 1948, the arms of the Swiss Confederation.)¹³



Many governmental subdivisions and departments use arms-like logos. Only one example is that of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, a division

of the Department of the Interior. The Service’s “mission, working with others, is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.”¹⁴ These purposes are exemplified on their logo by the use of a waterway in front of a mountain, with a flying duck and a leaping fish.

The branch of the federal government which is probably the greatest consumer of heraldry, however, is the military. From the primary branches of the armed forces, the Army, the Navy and the Marines, and the Air Force, through their various divisions and battalions, all use heraldry to serve as means of creating identity. In many cases the heraldry of a unit will incorporate design elements or charges from the heraldry of the larger unit of which it is a part, much in the way cadency is used to differentiate cadet branches of the larger family from which they sprang.



State Governments

As recounted earlier, George Washington noted that “the states ... have [all] established some kind of Armorial Devices, to authenticate their official instruments.”¹⁵ The majority of states have created seals rather than true coats of arms as their insignia, though many of these seals bear similarities to the armorial landscapes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Those states which have devised coats of arms have done so, of course, with varying degrees of success insofar as design and aesthetics are concerned. At one end of the artistic spectrum there is Maryland, which adopted the arms of its founder, Cecil Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, *Quarterly, Calvert [paly of six Or and Sable a bend counterchanged] and Crossland [quarterly Argent and Gules a cross bottony counterchanged]*. Crossland was the family of the mother of George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore. The arms of Maryland currently appear on every automobile license plate issued by the State, as well as appearing in a full achievement of arms on the reverse of the State’s Great Seal and comprising the state flag.



The District of Columbia, more familiar as Washington, D.C., has adopted the arms used by George Washington: *Argent two bars and in chief three mullets Gules*. These arms appear as the District’s flag and in modified form on the automobile license plates issued by the District. The arms are revised by being placed on the white background of the license plates rather than in an escutcheon.

The State of New Jersey has a remarkably simple coat, bearing *Azure in pale three plows Or bladed Argent*.



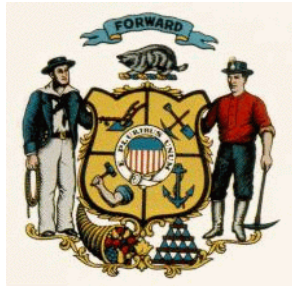
The State of Connecticut bears the very uncomplicated coat of *Argent, three grapevines Proper*.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has for many years used one or another artistic variant of *Azure an American Indian dressed in buckskins holding a bow in*

one hand and an arrow in the other all Proper and in canton a mullet Argent. (I realize that under the English system of cadency, this would appear to make the Commonwealth of Massachusetts the third son of, presumably, an American Indian. I do not believe that such was the intent of this design.)

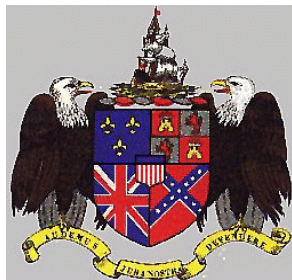


Stepping down a bit from the purity of such simple arms, we have the example of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which uses *Per fess Azure and Vert on a fess Or between a three-masted schooner in full sail upon water Proper and three garbs of wheat Or a plow Proper.*



The arms of the State of Wisconsin are an interestingly complex design of *Or a fillet cross Sable between a plow, a pick and shovel in saltire, an arm wielding a hammer, and an anchor fouled, all Proper, on an inescutcheon paly Gules and Argent a chief Azure mullety Argent, the inescutcheon surrounded by a belt or garter Argent charged with the words "E Pluribus Unum" Sable.* Sometimes the arms are shown with a fillet saltire rather than a fillet cross. The supporters are a sailor and a miner, both proper, and the crest is a beast common to the area, a badger. The motto, which appears on a blue banner above the crest, is "Forward".

The arms of a number of states are landscapes of one form or another, usually showing a typical or representative scene. The State of Maine has a moose lying under a tree by a river. The arms of New York State have the sun rising over the hills of its major waterway, the Hudson River. Michigan, a state consisting of two large peninsulas surrounded by the waters of Lakes Superior, Michigan, and Huron, show a human figure on a spit of land surrounded on three sides by water, with the sun rising in the background. The arms of the desert State of Arizona show the mountains and irrigated fields of that state, with the figure of a gold miner overlooking it all and the bright desert sun overhead.



The State of Alabama has opted for what I call the "résumé school of heraldic design," choosing to place on its arms the symbols of every nation to which the region has been subject in its history. The arms, designed in 1923 and adopted 14 March 1939, may be blazoned *Quarterly: 1, France modern; 2, Quarterly Castile and León (for Spain); 3, Great Britain's Union Flag (for England); and 4, Gules on a saltire Azure 13 mullets Argent (for the Confederate States of America); on an inescutcheon, Paly of 13 Gules and Argent a chief Azure (for the United States of America).*

One of the more unusual governmental uses of a form of escutcheon is the round American Indian design shield found on the flag and automobile license plates of the State of Oklahoma.



Businesses

Businesses of all kinds in the United States use a wide variety of both arms and quasi-heraldry to create an identity for themselves in the minds of consumers. These businesses range from those involved in manufacturing (including such diverse goods as automobiles, paper goods, hats, plastic cups, movies, and beverages both alcoholic and non-alcoholic) to those in involved in shipping and transportation, to retailers of many kinds, restaurants, and even used car dealers.

Prominent among businesses that use armorial devices are those which use devices that imitate the arms of the United States. Examples include the logos used by the Union Pacific Railroad, the National Football League, the United States Cycling Federation, and the Presidio Golf Club, which uses golf symbols marshaled with the U.S. arms to sinister.



Other trademarks echo some of the quasi-heraldry used by the federal government. For example, AutoNation USA, a used car dealer, and Internet America, a company which furnishes computer access to the “Information Superhighway”, use shields which simulate those of the U.S. Interstate Highway System. The shield of gasoline company Phillips 66 is modeled on that of the older U.S. Highway system.

Among the arms most commonly seen on U.S. streets and highways are several automakers, who place these arms on their cars and trucks as a means of creating a visual identity for their products. Buick uses not one but three escutcheons as its logo (Gules, Gray, and Azure, each charged with a *bend Argent*), placed on the front grill and often the trunk of every one of its automobiles. This emblem also is prominent in Buick’s advertising.



Another major automaker to use armory has adopted for its trademark a real coat of arms, those of its namesake, Le Sieur Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac (*Quarterly, 1 and 4, Or a fess between three swans naiant Sable, 2 and 3, Quarterly Gules and Argent a fess Azure*). Cadillac was once governor of Mississippi and founded the city of Detroit, Michigan, the self-styled “Car Capitol” of the United States, where, with other brands, Cadillac automobiles are made.

A third automaker which uses an arms-like logo is Dodge: *Sable a ram’s head cabossed silver in chief the word “Dodge” Gules* or, sometimes, *Silver a ram’s head cabossed and in chief the word “Dodge” Gules*. One or the other of these logos is found on the front of all of their automobiles and pickup trucks, and also plays a prominent role in their television advertising.

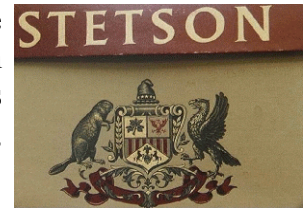


Other “arms” used by businesses in the U.S. range from relatively straightforward and comparatively simple arms, to very complex arms, to arms-like logos placed on an escutcheon.



England Transportation, a nationwide trucking firm, uses a logo which duplicates the English arms of Erdington, *Azure three lions passant in pale Or.*

The Stetson Hat Company (whose products are now an heraldic charge in arms granted by the Canadian Heraldic Authority, blazoned simply as “a Stetson”) uses a very complex coat of arms, complete with crest (a hat, of course) and supporters.



The Carthage Cup Company embosses its logo on every plastic cup it manufactures. (Why they chose a ship I cannot say. Longview, Texas, where the company is located, is a long way from sufficiently navigable waters.)

The Falstaff Beer Company’s distinctive arms (*Per bend Or and Sable on a bend sinister Argent the word “Falstaff” Gules*) may be found wherever their beer is sold.



The arms-like logo of soft drink manufacturer Canada Dry Corporation is a shield charged with a map of Canada, complete with Mercator lines.



Seagram’s, which makes both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, uses a rounded shield Gules charged with an “S” Argent, supported by two horses.

Film studio Warner Brothers has two different designs it uses, each a shield of a field Azure charged with their initials, “WB”, and a bordure either Or or Argent.



The Olmsted-Kirk Paper Company’s logo, boldly displayed on the sides of their trucks, consists of an argent escutcheon with the word “Paper” in blue, and where a chief would normally be the letters “O-K” in red fimbriated in white.

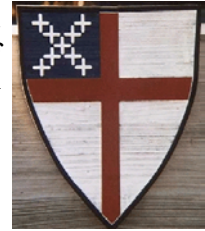
Shipping company United Parcel Service’s interestingly conceived “arms” consist of their initials on an escutcheon and a “wrapped parcel” for a separated chief.



One of my personal favorites as an example of an inventive use of an arms-like logo is that of the “House of Hair”, a hair styling salon in Lubbock, a small city in western Texas. The House of Hair uses a white pair of scissors bendwise sinister on a blue field, the round handles of which form the symbols for Venus and Mars (or, woman and man).

Institutions

Among institutions, ecclesiastical heraldry is very frequently found throughout the United States. The arms most commonly seen are probably those of the Episcopal Church in America, whose arms (*Argent a cross Gules the first quarter Azure charged with thirteen crosses in saltire Argent*) are found on signs identifying their buildings throughout the country. Each Episcopal diocese generally also has its own arms, and these sometimes appear as well.



Other churches may use arms or arms-like logos, such as the Assembly of God, with an inverted, couped chevron and the letters “AG” in white outlined in black on a gold shield.

And individual congregations of many denominations may adopt a shield, often with a cross on it, as an emblem.



The Trinity Broadcasting Network, an evangelical Christian television network, has adopted an entire achievement of arms, complete with supporters of *a lion Or* and *a horse Argent* and a crown as a crest. The arms themselves, *Gules, a Celtic cross Or overall a dove descending Argent*, are comparatively simple and distinctive.

No doubt because of their very visible presence in disaster relief and during their fund-raising efforts at the Christmas holiday season, the Salvation Army’s shield-shaped logo is recognized throughout the United States.



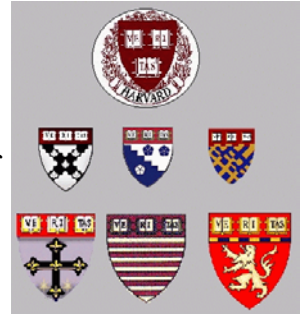
Colleges and universities have been using arms from colonial days, though the only arms actually granted by the English Kings of Arms to an American institution of higher learning before the War for American Independence was to the College of William and Mary in 1694.

Since that time, a number of American universities have sought the conferral of “Honorary Armorial Bearings” from the College of Arms in England. As recently as May of last year, George Washington University received a conferral of arms whose design is loosely based on the arms borne by its namesake. The arms have been blazoned: *Or two bars wavy each composed of two troughs and one wave the wave invected of one point on the upper edge and engrailed of one point on the lower edge between three mullets in pale Azure*. I must say as a personal note, however, that I am not sure why they spent the money on such a conferral, since they do not appear to be actually using the arms as a means of establishing their identity. For example, the arms appear nowhere on their web site.



Another school which does not appear to be using the arms it has adopted is Yale University. Almost nowhere was I able to find a representation of their arms, except as part of the banner for their daily newspaper.

Yale’s arch-rival, Harvard University, however, has taken the opposite approach. Not only does one see Harvard’s arms on nearly everything that the university mails out and on every one of the pages at its web site, but Harvard’s various colleges, schools and other subdivisions each have their own prominently displayed arms. Though almost all of these subsidiary arms are in their fundamental design very different from the university’s arms, they confirm their relationship to the parent school by the use of a “chief of Harvard” (*Gules three open books Argent charged with the letters VE RI TAS Sable*).



Some institutions of higher learning adopt arms containing symbols of the state in which they are located. A good example of this is Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, which has incorporated the arms of Maryland (discussed above), adding to those arms a chief charged with a globe between two books. The University of Texas system has adopted as its primary charge the white star that is the premier emblem of Texas, the Lone Star State.

Private schools, too, often adopt and display arms as a way of creating an identity within the communities where they are located. Some, such as the 1996 design adopted by The Albany Academy in New York state, incorporate historical elements from their community. The Albany Academy’s arms, *Per pale Gules and Sable two chevronels interlaced the dexter Azure the sinister Tenné both fimbriated Or in chief a Cross Moline Argent*, borrows the cross moline from the local van Rensselaer family, and the blue and orange from the colors of the City of Albany. (The chevronels, of course, are reminiscent of the school’s initials, AA.)



As another example, John Carroll High School combines elements of its Roman Catholic roots with symbols of the State of Florida, in which tropical and marine area it is located.

St. Mark’s School of Texas combines a lion wielding a sword (for St. Mark) with a cross (for its religious nature) and a single mullet, as before, the predominant symbol of the State of Texas.

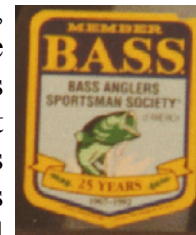


Other schools opt to reduce the number of symbols, but also to add their name on a shield, as is done in the example of *Or a Latin cross enfiled with a crown between the words in chief and in arch “Christ the King” and in base “Catholic School” and “Dallas, Texas” Gules*.

Associations

A number of professional sports associations and teams have adopted arms or arms-like logos as their primary symbol. In addition to the National Football League, mentioned above as having adopted a logo based on the arms of the United States, the National Hockey League uses a shield-shaped emblem, as does at least one of its member teams, the New York Rangers.

One of the most visible associations with an arms-like logo is B.A.S.S., Inc., the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society. Founded in 1967, this association has more than half a million members in the United States and 56 other countries, publishes three magazines and its own newspaper, produces two television series about fishing, has its own environmental division, and sponsors fishing tournaments throughout the United States. As a result of all this, its shield with a leaping fish is a familiar one to many Americans, even those who don't have much personal interest in fishing.



Another wildlife association with a commonly seen coat of arms as its primary identifier to the public is Ducks Unlimited, an international group dedicated to creating and maintaining habitat for ducks and other waterfowl in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Its shield is often seen on members' automobiles: *Azure a duck rising wings elevated and addorsed within a bordure Argent charged in chief with the words "Ducks Unlimited" Sable, and in chief the flags of Canada, the United States, and Mexico.*

Most college fraternities and sororities, while usually more familiar to the public by their Greek letters, also have a coat of arms as a means of identifying themselves. These arms are often designed with emphasis on choosing tinctures and charges which have specific meanings for the individual organization and which are to remind members of the higher goals and responsibilities of the group. These arms are often found in tie or lapel pins, as well as decorating members' automobiles and stationery.

The Regulation of Heraldry in the U.S.

As noted earlier, "[t]he government of the United States of America and the several state governments in their early development elected to forego the responsibility of regulating armorial bearings within their jurisdiction."¹⁶ Even today, and in spite of calls for the establishment of some sort of heraldic regulation in the U.S. during the late 19th Century¹⁷, there is one, and only one, body which can possibly be considered to be an "official" heraldic regulatory agency: the U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry.

The Institute of Heraldry was established only in 1960, and took over the heraldic functions formerly performed by the Office of the Quartermaster General (which had been given the formal responsibility for military designs in 1924). "The mission of The Institute of Heraldry is to furnish heraldic services to the Armed Forces and other United States government organizations, including the Executive Office of the President. The activities of the Institute encompass research, design, development, standardization, quality control, and other services relating to official symbolic items. The Institute also provides information services concerning official symbolic items to the general public."¹⁸ Part of the Army Institute of Heraldry's extended mandate is found in U.S. federal law, whereby the Institute is empowered, under the authority of the Secretary of the Army, to "design flags, insignia, badges, medals, seals, decorations, guidons, streamers, finial pieces for flagstaves, buttons, buckles, awards, trophies, marks, emblems, rosettes, scrolls, braids, ribbons, knots, tabs, cords, and similar items" for other military departments of the United States armed forces.¹⁹

There are, to be sure, additional bodies which seek to be institutes for the design, registration and publication of coats of arms for individuals and organizations. However, none of these bodies (besides the U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry) has the official support of any governmental bureau or agency.

First among these other registry organizations is The American College of Heraldry, founded in 1972 with the avowed purpose of bringing “some semblance of order into the American heraldic arena and to begin to meeting the quite pressing heraldic needs of the public in this country.”²⁰ The College does this through its educational efforts and through the registration of recognized arms (those granted or registered by an office of arms of some nation), unrecognized (assumed) arms, and arms designed under the auspices of the American College of Heraldry.



In addition, the Committee on Heraldry of the New England Genealogical Society for some years issued rolls of arms registered with that Society. Arms were enrolled by the Society once the Committee had investigated and was satisfied that the family was entitled to use them. I understand that in some cases, the Society devised arms as well.²¹

There are also smaller, regional groups which feature heraldry as a greater or lesser part of their functions. One such is the Heraldic Court of South Osage, a group based in Oklahoma which has an interest in nobility, with the use and registration (with the Heraldic Court) of heraldry as an adjunct to that interest.

There are in addition a number of re-creationist and live action role-playing groups active in the United States which study heraldry as a part of their activities, and which register arms within the organization for use by their participants. Probably the largest and best known of these is the Society for Creative Anachronism, based in California but with branches throughout the United States, as well as Canada, the Pacific, and Europe. Other similar organizations are Amtgard; ARCH, the Association for the Reenactment of Combat and Heraldry; and NERO International. Each has its own peculiar outlook on and use of heraldry, and different emphases in its attitudes towards heraldry. While none of these groups can be considered to be at all in the “mainstream” of modern American life, they do have the effect of raising the consciousness of their participants to heraldry and at least some of its basic principles.

Conclusion

Owing to the constraints of time and space, all of the foregoing is, of course, but a brief overview of some of the ways heraldry is used today in a nation which has no real heraldic tradition of its own and no true regulatory body or central registry for the heraldry it uses. I have tried, however, to present at least some of the many ways -- serious and whimsical, aesthetically good, bad, and indifferent -- in which coats of arms and quasi-heraldic devices are used to create and establish identity in an otherwise non-heraldic society, the United States of America.

Endnotes

1. The Declaration of Independence, July 2, 1776.
2. Anne L. Macdonald, *No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting*, p. 40.
3. "An Introduction to The American College of Heraldry", p. 1.
4. John E. Cussans, *The Handbook of Heraldry*, 2nd ed., 1868, p. 304
5. Quoted in *Crozier's General Armory*, William Armstrong Crozier, reprinted 1989, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., Baltimore, p. vi.
6. F.S.W., *Dame Heraldry*, 1886, D. Lothrop and Company, Boston, Massachusetts, pp. 2-3
7. http://www.cuc.com/ctg/cgi-bin/Halberts/heraldry_products/00028423.0000.0079
8. William M. Russell, "A Guide to Air Force Heraldry", Chapter 1, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/afhra>
9. George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 1945, ch. 10.
10. Quoting Eugene Zieber's *Heraldry in America*, Philadelphia, 1895 (reprint 1984), in "Official Heraldry of the United States" at <http://www.heraldica.org/topics/usa/usheroff.htm>
11. "Air Force One", a production of The History Channel, broadcast in the United States on 3 August 1997.
12. 18 U.S.C. §713.
13. 18 U.S.C. §§706, 708, and 713.
14. United States Fish & Wildlife Service, <http://www.fws.gov/index.html>
15. Quoted by Francois Velde, "Coats of Arms of Famous Americans", <http://www.heraldica.org/topics/usa/usfamous.htm>
16. "An Introduction to The American College of Heraldry", p. 1.
17. "Already an attempt has been made in America to restrain in some measure the indiscriminate bearing of Arms. The question has been raised in Congress, whether it would not be advisable to compel all those who use Arms to register them in the United States Court, and to pay an annual tax for the same, as in England. It is also proposed to inscribe at the bottom of the shield the date when such Arms were first granted or assumed; any infraction of the law to be punished by a fine. Wholesome as this regulation would be in restraining the too general use of Arms, it falls short of what it should be; for, according to the proposed law, any one will be at liberty to adopt whatever Arms he may please, provided he pay his ten or twenty dollars a year. No provision is made for new grants, or for examining the authenticity of alleged claims; it is

simply a device to increase the revenue of the country. Nevertheless, it is calculated to be productive of much good, and is probably but the precursor of a legally established College of Heralds.” John E. Cussans, *Handbook of Heraldry*, Third Edition, 1882, p. 323.

18. *Heraldic Services Handbook*, The Institute of Heraldry, p. 2.

19. 18 U.S.C. §4594. [United States Code, Title 10, Subtitle B. (Army), Part IV (Service, Supply and Procurement), Chapter 437 (Utilities and services).]

20. “An Introduction to The American College of Heraldry”, p. 2.

21. L.G. Pine, *Heraldry, Ancestry and Titles: Questions and Answers*, 1965, p. 42.