



# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF HERALDRY

A Chartered Non-Profit Body Established 1972  
1643B SAVANNAH HIGHWAY, SUITE 396, CHARLESTON, SC 29407  
[www.americancollegeofheraldry.org](http://www.americancollegeofheraldry.org)



## INTRODUCTION

**H**eraldry is at once both an art and a science. Its origins are rooted in the social and political structure which existed in Europe and the British Isles from about the year 1100 A.D. However, far from being an obsolete relic of a bygone era, heraldry has rather emerged as a vibrant and growing cultural form. Legitimate coats of arms are more widely used throughout the world today than ever before in history.

A large and rapidly growing number of Americans rightfully bear coats of arms. Many of these were granted, certified, registered or otherwise recognized by armorial authorities abroad, and a sizable number of these have been registered by their owners with The American College of Heraldry. In addition, the College has assisted many persons in designing a new coat of arms for their use which is then properly registered and published. An increasing number of corporate bodies have also acquired coats of arms which they display on armorial flags and in place of the less distinctive logo which is so rapidly outdated in terms of artistic style and structure.

While Americans are usually fascinated by the beauty of heraldry, they are rarely familiar with its meaning and traditions and, therefore, often misunderstand and even abuse this rich cultural heritage. They seldom understand that a coat of arms is usually granted, certified, registered or otherwise recognized as belonging to one individual alone, and that only his direct descendants with proven lineage can be recognized as eligible to inherit the arms. Exceptions to this rule are rare. It is highly inappropriate for one to locate the arms of another person sharing the same surname, and to simply adopt and use these arms as one's own. In order to properly claim the right to existing arms, one should approach an office of arms offering genealogical proof of proper kinship, and to receive confirmation of the right to bear the arms and thus to be recognized by the heraldic community as legitimately bearing the arms.

The notorious "Find Your Name Here/Coat of arms for the Name of Jones, Smith, or whatever," purchasable by mail order, online, or in one's local shopping mall, represents no more than improper and illegitimate armorial bearings. To buy and bear these commercially produced arms is to claim for oneself a direct kinship which has only the most remote possibility of validity, and is thereby to deny one's own legitimate and rightful line of descent. Such infraction of armorial regulation and custom constitutes a flagrant abuse of arms which no knowledgeable and honorable person would intentionally commit.

Sadly, most of the heraldic abuse in this country is done by honest, well-meaning persons. They greatly admire the heraldic tradition, but in their desire to participate in that tradition they inadvertently abuse heraldic arms due to their lack of familiarity with heraldic regulations and customs. While such armorial abuse does not apparently violate state or federal statute in this country at this time, still to usurp the use of another person's coat of arms is highly improper and is a dishonest practice. Such conduct disregards the regulations of all recognized heraldry and violates the rights of the legitimate owners of the arms.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COLLEGE

**A** few of the persons associated with the early development of this country who bore arms were Christopher Columbus, Sir Francis Drake, Lord Baltimore, Sir Walter Raleigh, Captain John Smith and William Penn. It should also be noted that George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and a host of other Federal and State leaders bore heraldic arms in the early period of nationhood. More recently, arms have been borne by such notable persons as Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Ronald W. Reagan. Heraldic arms have also been assigned to the Federal Government and to many of its departments, to several State Governments, to leading universities, military units, societies, fraternal bodies and outstanding business corporations. The evidence strongly supports the man who said "bearing heraldic arms is as American as apple pie."

The government of the United States of America and the several state governments in their early development elected to forgo the responsibility of regulating armorial bearings within their jurisdiction. These decisions unfortunately resulted in considerable abuse to heraldry in this country and delay in the development of American heraldic traditions.

Several private heraldic societies were organized through the years in this country, but none were sufficiently strong enough to survive. It was in response to this heraldic vacuum that the College was established. The College's intent was to bring some semblance of order into the American heraldic arena and to begin meeting the quite pressing heraldic needs of the public in this country. The first few years of the College were marked by creative experimentation and modification in heraldic modes. In time, experience led the way toward a more conservative standardized approach, compatible with heraldry existing in other nations.

The American College of Heraldry was founded in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1972 and was later reorganized and chartered as a non-profit corporate body by the State of Alabama. The College is directed by a Board of Governors which elects Administrative Officers and an Advisory Board.

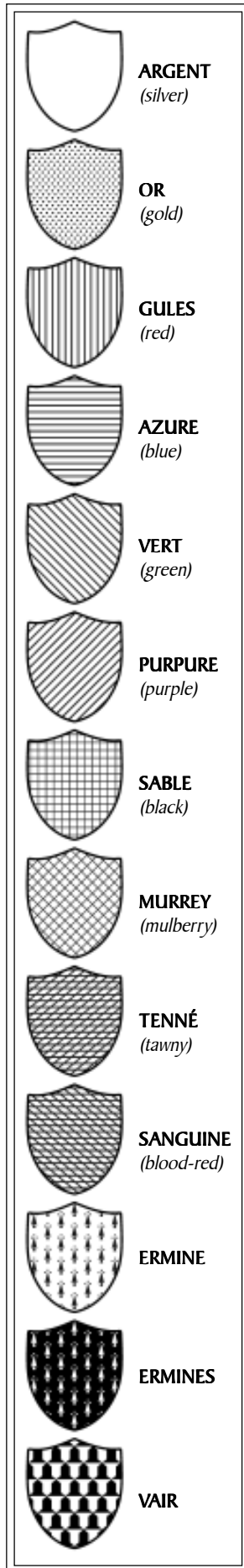
There are several types of membership in the College, including

- Distinguished Fellows, recognized for their eminent standing, particularly in the field of heraldry;
- Fellows, who are so recognized because of their faithful service to the College and to the cause of Heraldry;
- Members, who are persons with an interest in heraldry; and
- Associate Members, who are less than 18 years of age.

The College's membership is composed of persons having a serious interest in heraldry and includes individuals from across the United States and from throughout the world.

## PURPOSES

**T**he College's general goal is to identify and Register legitimate coats of arms being legitimately borne in America in order to leave a cultural and historical record of armory in this country for future historians, genealogists and scholars in various academic fields.



The corporate purposes of the College are:

- a) to educate the public regarding the history and meaning of heraldry;
- b) to initiate, promote, support and engage in scholarly, educational and informational endeavors in heraldic art and science and related fields;
- c) to stimulate, collect, preserve and disseminate knowledge regarding heraldic arms;
- d) to act as a resource center for those seeking learned opinions on heraldic questions;
- e) to promote the rightful and proper use and display of heraldic arms according to the customs of heraldic art and science;
- f) to collect, accurately document, preserve and disseminate information regarding both ancient and modern armorial bearings, especially those in current use and most especially those borne in this country;
- g) to lend expert advice, counseling and design expertise to those desiring to establish an armorial tradition in their own families, to assist them in acquiring the proper public recognition for the design through registration of the arms with the College and publication of said arms by the College. Persons desiring to acquire new coats of arms from official offices of arms abroad are also gladly extended consultation and support in their undertaking.

#### SERVICES

The College is quite flexible in its attempt to serve the heraldic needs of the public. One may become a member and also register a coat of arms. Or, one may elect to become a member without registering a coat of arms, or indeed without even having one. Or, one may register a coat of arms without ever becoming a member. While the College's primary focus is naturally on the heraldry of America, nevertheless, the College's membership and interests are international in scope and the College continues to welcome the membership of persons residing abroad and to welcome the registration of their arms. *The Armiger's News* is a quarterly newsletter published by the college. It is received without cost

by the membership and is available by subscription to other individuals, institutions and libraries. Those coats of arms Registered by the College are also published in both its aforementioned journal and in its roll of arms, a publication appearing in book form.

Those Registering arms with the College receive the following services:

- 1) A handsome Registration of Arms document suitable for display in one's home or office, containing the details of the Registration, the blazon or technical description of the arms, and a rendering of the coat of arms in full color.
- 2) A line drawing of the arms suitable for use on armorial stationery and the like.
- 3) Publication of the arms and brief information regarding the armiger in *The Armiger's News*, the quarterly journal.
- 4) Publication of the arms and biographical information regarding the armiger and the family in **The Heraldic Register of America**, a roll of arms of which several volumes have already been published.
- 5) Both the journal and roll of arms are placed on microfiche and deposited in the heraldic collections of a great many major city and university libraries throughout the nation.
- 6) The right to request that later descendants be added as inheritors of the arms in the three publication formats previously mentioned (this being done at a very minimal cost).
- 7) Deposit of one's arms and all appropriate forms and papers in the College's archives.
- 8) The right to request that the armorial document be executed for replacement should one be defaced or destroyed, or for descendants who years later are recognized in their armorial rights and wish a heraldic document (all these being available at a very modest cost).
- 9) Those persons Registering arms which have already been granted, matriculated, or otherwise recognized in an official office of arms abroad benefit by the heraldic community in America coming to know of these official arms and of the specifics of their right to bear the arms.

#### REGISTRATION OF RECOGNIZED ARMS

The College registers and publishes coats of arms which have been rightfully granted, certified, registered or otherwise recognized by an office of arms. Proof of such recognition and proof that the individual is personally eligible to bear the arms must accompany the application. The College has registered very ancient arms of this type as well as some which were more recently created. These arms originated in, or, have been recognized by most of the major offices of arms abroad.

#### REGISTRATION OF UNRECOGNIZED ARMS

The College also registers and publishes arms of persons who have borne unregistered or unregulated arms in their family for some extended period. The College further registers and publishes the arms of those who have personally assumed arms of recent origin and now desire to have them duly registered and recognized by the heraldic community. The College will seldom register unrecognized arms for persons residing abroad.

#### REGISTRATION OF NEW ARMS

Numerous individuals have no coat of arms of their own and desire the College's assistance in the creation of a pleasing and meaningful design which is technically correct. Following one's application, the College's President assigns a representative to

work with the applicant to develop a coat of arms. When the design has been completed and agreed upon, the applicant assumes the arms for his own use and for the use of his descendants. Then the College duly registers his coat of arms and announces the registration in its publication - *The Armiger's News*.

The assumption and registration of arms thus described is a most ancient, honorable and legitimate practice. The earliest recorded heraldic arms were assumed during the Medieval period. Later when offices of arms were created, these arms were duly recognized and recorded. New coats of arms continue to be legitimately created by registration, grant, and certification, both by ancient and modern offices of arms throughout the nations of the Western World. In fact, more new coats of arms are rightfully registered, granted and certified today than at any previous period in history.

The College is willing to Register new arms to the person requesting the Registration, or to a paternal ancestor no more than one generation beyond a living person in the line. Therefore, one may elect to have the arms Registered:

- a) to one's self;
- b) to one's father and his descendants;
- c) and if the father is yet living, then one may have the arms Registered to his paternal grandfather and his descendants;
- d) and occasionally, when a grandfather is yet living, one may request that the arms be Registered to the paternal great-grandfather and his descendants.

The method depends on the applicant's preference. There is no extra charge for adding one or many descendants at the time of the initial Registration.

One's arms descend to all of one's children, male and female equally. They may descend through the male lines to their children as well, generation after generation. However, females do not transmit their arms to their children since their paternal line and (almost always) surname changes. A situation in which persons with many different surnames bore identical arms would quickly lead to massive confusion, thus frustrating the original purpose of arms as a means of identification. In addition, such a practice would conflict with nearly a thousand years of heraldic practice and tradition.

Arms Registered initially to a female may descend to her children according to the aforementioned mode.

The College does not involve itself with the marshalling or quartering of arms.

### REGISTRATION OF IMPERSONAL ARMS

Corporate bodies such as schools, colleges, cities, branches of government, businesses, industries, professional and fraternal organizations and the like may also register coats of arms. They may register recognized arms, unrecognized arms, or new arms under very similar conditions to that of individuals.

### TREATMENT OF ARMS ESTABLISHED ABROAD

Those persons having arms established abroad are invited to proudly identify their rightful claim for the American heraldic community by registering their arms with the College. In this type of registration, the College recognizes the arms as remaining within the Jurisdiction and abiding within the traditions and customs of its own origin. When registered and published, the origin of the arms will be identified. The College will recognize only those rights and armorial descendants authorized within the armorial recognition of the original grant unless superseded by other official authorizations which will also be specified in a Registration.

## THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF HERALDRY ENDOWMENT FUND

The American College of Heraldry is embarking on its most ambitious enterprise to date – The American College of Heraldry Endowment Fund.

For over 30 years, the College has survived solely as a result of the expert and devoted leadership of the late Dr. David Pittman Johnson, with assistance from a literal handful of individuals who have donated their time and talents to the continuation of this worthwhile cause. We've been diligent in our efforts to date to get the maximum benefit out of minimum resources.



The College has grown from a small, obscure group with a simple, basic publication, to an internationally-recognized heraldic entity with numerous publications and a strong internet presence. Since its inception, we have registered over 2,500 Armorial Bearings.

However, in order to survive and flourish in the years ahead, the College sorely needs to expand its scope, and resources. With a core working group of a mere handful of individuals to run the College, we need to broaden our personnel base, infusing new artists and experts in the field of heraldry into the College's staff. We have been asked to expand our services through outreach to various educational institutions nationwide. We have the potential to develop the College far beyond its current successful, but limited, levels.

The goals of The American College of Heraldry Endowment Fund include:

- Outreach to colleges and universities, government entities, and businesses, to include registration of their current armorial bearings, or development of new arms;
- Regional Heraldry Seminars and Conferences hosted by the College;
- Annual Meetings of the College, to include domestic and international guest lecturers from all fields of heraldic expertise;
- Expanded publishing of "The Armiger's News" in a full or partial color format; "The Heraldic Register of America"; and continuing releases of additional volumes of "American Heraldry in Color" CDs;
- Membership Recruitment;
- Children's Outreach Program, to include development of syllabi for elementary education in the field of heraldry and heraldic principles;
- Study plans for Colleges, Art Schools, Universities.

The Fund intends on soliciting resources from various private foundations. The College is currently working with a professional grant writer to develop the best strategies for procuring resources for the Fund. During the coming months the Fund will be working with numerous personal and private foundations to solidify ongoing financial support for the College.

We encourage College members to take an active role in this process.

If you have established a personal/family foundation, know of someone who has established such a foundation, or have contact with members of private foundations or individuals with a philanthropic streak and would be interested in seeing the College grow, we would encourage you to contact us. Even if you don't have such contacts, but would like to find out what more you can do to help the College grow into the future, we ask that you contact us.

Through our combined efforts, we can truly make The American College of Heraldry a world-renowned and respected heraldic organization for generations to come.

## THE MEANING AND INFLUENCE OF ARMS

For nearly 1000 years the Western World has evidenced increasing interest in and use of armorial bearings. Many are surprised to learn that coats of arms are more widely used today, and that more new arms are designed and recognized today than at any previous time in history. The ancient armorial tradition would certainly have become extinct long ago were it not based in more than the early utilitarian purposes of medieval warfare and the sealing of documents. The bearing of heraldic arms suggests philosophical undergirdings related to the influence of arms upon the solidarity within the family, the sense of place and belonging they offer the individual, and upon the encouragement of a lifestyle based on honor and the recognition of the responsibility for service to others.

Since a coat of arms is a graphic means of identification, the arms represent the individual or family. The degree of honor and respect accorded to the arms depends upon the behavior and contributions to the community or society of those who bear them. Through industry, responsibility, integrity, charity, honor, and leadership, one may heap such honor upon the arms that descendants eagerly register to personally take up and bear the ancestral arms.

Such arms serve as a subtle but constant reminder to descendants who bear them of their continuing responsibility to lead lives of honor and service and thereby to bring even greater honor and recognition to the family arms. The coat of arms proudly represents an active and present relationship between members of a family, and a

visible linkage between past, present and future generations. The arms then represent continuance and endurance and provide a strong and lasting symbol for family unity. Arms serve to encourage a sense of interdependence which strengthens the family structure. The arms shared by members of a family are a heritage of "belongingness," promoting the ideal of a family joined together and inseparable in spirit.

Armorial bearings contain a quality of intangibility which is most significant to the family. Lands, monies and properties may be lost because of economic changes, wars, and other disasters, leaving ensuing generations without inheritance. However, a coat of arms is a recorded design of identification which is fully able to survive change and loss. It can even endure a dormant period only to be reclaimed by rightful descendants at a later time. At the armiger's demise, he leaves an armorial estate to his descendants throughout all future generations. It is a legacy which can never be depleted, devalued, lost or stolen; rather, the arms of just and honorable persons singularly increase in their meaning, significance and value as they are taken up and borne by those descendants in each generation who proudly claim their birthright by registering to bear the ancestral arms.

Those persons holding these ideals and values to be precious and who wish to establish a rightful and recognized heraldic tradition for themselves and their descendants are invited to apply for membership in the College and to register the arms which will represent their family through the generations.



### THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF HERALDRY

1643B Savannah Highway  
Suite 396  
Charleston, SC 29407  
USA