

ROOSEVELTS' BLUE BUZZARD

The National Recovery Administrations' Blue Eagle Logo

Purpose / Scope – This is a multi-frame display exhibit which will show many of the aspects of this iconic symbol from its' introduction on July 20, 1933 through May 28, 1935, when the U S Supreme Court ruled the NRA code unconstitutional. The Eagle symbol was chosen to enhance the call to patriotism in the fight against the great depression. It is the intention here to show how widespread the Eagle was in all aspects of business and public life. This exhibit is **not** intended to be a catalog of all types of the Eagle, only to show how varied it was.

Background – In 1933 when President Roosevelt took office, the world was mired in the “Great Depression”. He enacted the NRA by Presidential order, bypassing Congress. The NRA regulated working hours, minimum wages, child labor laws, and set industrial practices codes for each industry. The blue eagle symbol was modeled on the Native American Thunderbird and clutches a gear in one claw and lightning bolts in the other, symbolizing the energy and power of industry. The moto “We Do Our Part” is included. The “Blue Buzzard” term was coined by critics who objected to government interference into intra-state business practices.

Treatment/Organization – The exhibit will begin with passage of the (National) Industrial Recovery Act in June 1933 and Roosevelt's letter to all businesses requiring their participation along with copies of fair trade bulletins for each type of trade. In August 1933 the drive to sign up all businesses began, documentation of this is included. The exhibit then switches to show the various formats/styles of the Eagle that were used to demonstrate participation in the NRA. Included are usages on mailings, letterheads, invoices, advertising, and on products. The exhibit ends with a newspaper announcing the Supreme Court decision ruling the NRA unconstitutional. The material in the exhibit is not intended to be all inclusive, items were chosen to show how great the impact was on businesses and the public.

Importance – While the NRA was a major factor in getting the United States out of the world wide depression, its' greatest legacy was the changes it brought to labor laws. Minimum wages, child labor, working hours, fair labor practices all were adopted into Federal law after the NRA was defeated.

Challenge/Rarity – Very little study has been done on this Cinderella material so the true scarcity of the items shown here is difficult to judge, the NRA Eagle was only in use for 22 months so many of the items were produced in limited quantities and after 80+ years few remain. This is particularly true of product containers and labels, which were meant to be consumed and few remain. This exhibit is the result of nearly 10 years of collecting and research. While the U S government provided the design, it never printed any of the labels. Printing was done by small local companies and identifying them is nearly impossible. Varieties exist in uncounted numbers. With thousands of companies effected only an overview of the material can be shown here.

References:

The New Deal by S. Welles Utley, An Address to the 37th annual meeting of the National Founders Association, November 15, 1933

American Stamp Dealer, March 2011, page 56 The NRA Cigar Labels. A reprint of an article by Ron Leshner in the Tax Collector.