



PRECURSORS OF THE MOTTO "IN GOD WE TRUST" ON U.S. PAPER MONEY and Design Background for Related Notes

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In late 1977, we heard the first rumblings of a movement to discontinue the use of the motto "In God We Trust" on U.S. coins and paper currency.

I prefer not to expound the constitutional legality of such use of this motto—we all have our opinions for or against, or perhaps claiming indifference. I can't resist repeating something I once read: after a lengthy argument between a believer and a non-believer, over the existence of non-existence of God, the latter concluded by exclaiming, "I'm an atheist, thank God." I will say no more, except to add that according to Voltaire, "If there was no God, it would be necessary to invent Him."

The precursor of the motto "In God We Trust" appeared on U.S. paper money one year before its first use on a U.S. coin—the two-cent piece dated 1864—bore this motto, and 88 years before the Act of July 11, 1955, required the motto to appear on all our coins and currency. The 1955 act came about through the efforts of Matthew H. Rothert, former president of the ANA; Secretary of the Treasury Humphrey, Senator Fulbright of Arkansas and Congressmen Bennett of Florida and Harris of Arkansas. However, there is a record of a John H. Shenkel writing to

President Eisenhower in July, 1953, about the same proposal.

In November, 1861, the Reverend N.R. Watkinson of Ridleyville, Pa., grieving over the Civil War, wrote to Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury. "You are probably a Christian. What if our Republic were now shattered beyond reconstruction? Would not the antiquaries of succeeding centuries rightly reason from our past that we were a heathen nation?" Rev. Watkinson's suggestion for a motto was, "God, Liberty, Law."

Communications between Secretary Chase and James Pollock, U.S. Mint Director, reveal that four mottos were under consideration: "Our Country, Our God," "God, Our Trust," "Our God, and Our Country" and "In God We Trust," the latter proposed by Secretary Chase.

If one looks at the \$20 Interest-bearing Notes of 1863 and the Compound Interest Treasury Notes of 1864, it would appear that these notes were testing vehicles for a motto yet to be approved. The one-year \$20, \$100 and \$1,000 Interest-bearing Notes issued under the Act of March 3, 1863, were the first to carry mottos which can be



Both the \$20 one-year Interest-bearing Notes and the three-year Compound Interest Notes bear the mottos, "God And Our Right" and "In God Is Our Trust"

considered forerunners of the motto seen on the money we handle each day.

The \$20 note actually bears two mottos, "God And Our Right" and "In God Is Our Trust." The latter phrase can be traced to the fourth stanza of the "Star Spangled Banner,"* written in 1814:

Then conquer we must, for our cause is just
And this be our motto, In God is our Trust.

Francis Scott Key's declaration was used on the \$100 and \$1,000 denominations, although the original model for the \$1,000 note called for the motto, "God And Our Right". A letter dated August 29, 1863, from S.M. Clark, Director of the National Currency Bureau to W.D. Wilson, President of the Continental Bank Note Company, reveals the Director's desire to change the motto to "In God Is Our Trust". It is interesting to note that the \$100 Compound Interest Treasury Note, which is almost identical to the Interest-bearing note design, with an overprint, does not bear the motto "In God Is Our Trust".

Approximately 20 years later, the motto we are most familiar with, "In God We Trust,"** made its debut on the \$5 Silver Certificates of 1886. The beautiful backs for these notes bear the rendition of five silver dollars. These cartwheels, designed by George T. Morgan, were first issued in 1878. With the depiction of four silver dollar reverses, one can claim the \$5 Silver Certificates of 1886 are the only notes to have the motto "In God We Trust" four times thereon.

*The melody of "Anacreon in Heaven", borrowed by Key has finally been attributed to John Stafford Smith. *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, October 30, 1977.

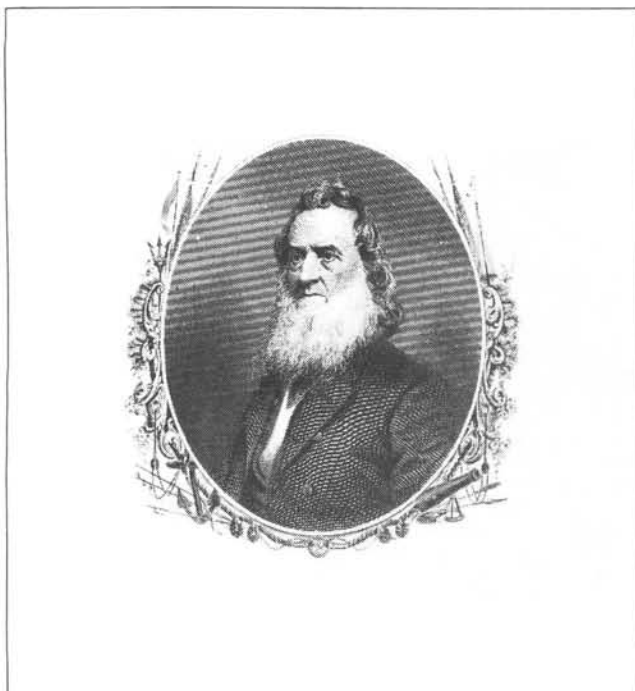
**This is also the motto for the state of Florida, and is therefore found on the rare first charter notes of this state. Prior to 1868, the motto was "In God Is Our Trust".

Design Background For The \$20, \$100 & \$1,000 One-Year Interest-Bearing Notes

Unfortunately all the U.S. paper money models referred to in the following letters found in the National Archives, are unknown; nevertheless it is interesting to observe how the recommendations of S.M. Clark, Director of the National Currency Bureau, were followed and applied to the accepted designs. On occasion his recommendations were ignored.

The earliest letter to be found, which relates to the designs for the one-year Interest-bearing Notes was an invitation to Fitch Shepard, President of the National Bank Note Company, to submit models for the \$20 and \$500 denominations. In his letter of July 20, 1863, S.P. Chase made it clear that only new work would be acceptable when he said, "... all the work must be new or not have been before used ..." In the amazingly brief span of only 19 days, on August 8, S.M. Clark wrote to Mr. Shepard requesting that the head of President Lincoln be substituted for the Secretary of the Navy on the \$20 Interest-bearing Note model, submitted by the National Bank Note Co.

Gideon Welles served as Secretary of the Navy under Presidents Lincoln and Johnson; Welles held this cabinet position from 1861 to 1869. Welles built a navy which began with a few American ships scattered around the world's oceans. Welles had many critics; nevertheless, to quote C.A. Dana, "There was nothing decorative about him; there was no noise in the street when he went along; but he understood his duty, and did it efficiently, continually, and unvaryingly." With the long conflict between North and South grinding to a halt, it was probably prudent to portray the president on a new \$20 note rather than honor a cabinet member with no charisma.



The portrait of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy was on the original model for the \$20 Interest-bearing Note.

basis, with the following alteration: The Interest tablet at the right hand upper portion and the 'Fifty' tablet in the right hand lower corner to be omitted.

Place the figure of *Washington* in the center (from end to end) of the Note. Move the sitting figure of *Justice* to the left hand end and engrave upon the shield the words 'God and our Right' and put [indecipherable], a little larger, in its place. There is no suitable vignette for the purpose on the models submitted; but Mr. [Lorenzo] Hatch has exhibited to the Comptroller of the Currency the proof of an engraving of 'America grasping the lightning' which is suitable both in size and workmanship. I respectfully recommend its acceptance for the purpose.

The lettering to be entirely remodelled, the words 'Fifty dollars' are comparatively insignificant, but should be very prominent and the place for the seal should be nearer the right hand portion of the Note. Three years after date to be altered to one year after date and the end of the Note to be like the coupon model.

If green tint is to be used on the face, there is not enough of it nor is it rightly placed. But, I do not think its additional security at all commensurate with its additional cost.

One of the numbers should be on the upper right hand end of the Note, the other on the lower left hand end.

The Note should express upon its face in the central

The American Bank Note Company submitted models for the one-year \$100 Interest-bearing Note. A letter dated July 17, 1863, addressed to S.P. Chase tells us of the recommendations of Mr. Clark.

"For the \$100 I respectfully recommend the non-coupon model submitted for the \$50 Note as a



The \$100 Compound Interest Note does not bear "In God Is Our Trust" on the shield of "The Guardian," as seen motto "E Pluribus Unum" on the shield.

Clark's recommendation for the placement of "Justice" and the motto "God And Our Right" was not accepted.
(Courtesy of Amon Carter, Jr.)





The \$1,000 one-year Interest-bearing Note with the motto "In God Is Our Trust" originally was to have "God And Our Right." (Courtesy of J. Roy Pennell)

portion of the upper border that it is a legal tender for \$100 and should also carry the date of the Act authorizing the issue. The date of the Note to be fixed by the Secretary." [F193, H1339]

The accepted design, which is illustrated, does not reflect all of Mr. Clark's recommendations. Additional correspondence, perhaps since lost, might have enlightened us about the design.

A model for the \$1,000 Interest-bearing Note was submitted by the Continental Bank Note Company and subsequently prepared with the changes recommended by S.M. Clark in a letter dated July 17, 1863, to Secretary Chase. "That the two designs of 'Justice' on the \$20 model and of 'America' on the \$500 model be adapted for the \$1,000." [F201, H1393a]

Design Background For The \$10, \$50 & \$500 One-Year Interest-Bearing Notes

The inter-departmental letter of July 17, 1863, addressed to Secretary Chase from Director S.M. Clark also refers to the \$10 and \$50 one-year Interest-bearing Notes.

"For the \$10's I recommend as a basis the model of the \$10 non-coupon, substituting the head of the present Secretary on the \$100 non-coupon model for that of Hamilton (Hamilton being on the \$20), and placing it nearer the left hand end.

Omit the Interest tablet and put in its place and move

"America Grasping the Lightning" by Lorenzo Hatch, was S.M. Clark's suggestion for the right side of the \$100 Interest-bearing Note. Unused on the note just mentioned, it was later placed on the \$10 National Currency Note of the First and Second Charter periods.

to the left the eagle from the \$50 coupon model.

Remove the counter and vignette from the right hand end and substitute therefore the full length female figure of which a proof has been submitted to the Secretary, with a proper counter above it.

The lettering to be varied accordingly. The seal to be near the right hand and the numbers at top and bottom same as the other notes. For the ends of the \$10 I recommend the ends of the \$10 coupon model.*

The main lines of lettering on all the models are objectionable, chiefly because they are similar to those





*The \$5,000 Interest-bearing Note on which this vignette appears is unknown.
The vignette without the misspelled title is somewhat more feminine, especially the left hand
which S.M. Clark described as looking like "an animal's paw"*

already in use. I respectfully recommend that they be of new design. [F196, H496]

For the \$50 I respectfully recommend similar changes in the legends to those of the \$100s.

Taking the coupon model of \$20* as a basis, I respectfully recommend that the end of the Note be as those modelled (omitting coupons) but that the right hand counter be removed to the top of the Note and changed for the pattern of counter on the \$500 coupon model and the date of the Act removed.

The left hand vignette to be removed and the left vignette of the \$1,000 coupon model be substituted therefore with the date of the Act above it and a narrow oblong counter beneath it.

The seal to be placed near the right hand end of the Note, omitting the ornamental work and the numbers to be placed at right hand top and left hand bottom." [F198, H945]

In the letters dated July 17 and August 8, 1863, Clark recommends changes in the \$5,000 Interest-bearing Note. Referring to the \$1,000 and \$5,000 Interest-bearing Notes, Clark writes:

"That the models submitted, from paucity of material and haste of making up, afford a narrow image for selection, and only enable me to specifically report in part, and make suggestions for the remainder.

I respectfully recommend that the vignette of 'Wealth offering her jewels on the Country's altar' [sic] on the

**It would appear that three-year Interest-bearing Notes of less than \$50 were considered; only three-year notes bore coupons. The Act of March 3, 1863, stated that notes of "... not less than \$10 ..." were to be "... payable ... at such times not exceeding three years from date ..."*

\$100 model be adopted for the \$5,000 Notes." [F202, H1435a]

This vignette is more often referred to as "The Altar of Liberty." In a later letter, dated August 29, 1863, S.M. Clark makes the following observation to W.D. Wilson, President of the Continental Bank Note Company, the company which ultimately prepared the accepted version: "If you can remedy the ludicrously awkward appearance of the left hand of the figure of Wealth in the vignette, it will very much improve it, and save it from some mortifying criticism. It looks more like an animal's paw than a female hand."

Clark's observation was quite descriptive as one can see in the illustrated vignette. A second version presents Wealth with a somewhat more feminine left hand and the facial features in general.

Although the law providing for the inclusion of "In God We Trust" on all U.S. coins and currency was passed in 1955; most, if not all collectors are aware that it was not until 1957 that our national motto was first added to small size U.S. currency. The Bureau was in the process of changing to high-speed presses at this time. Some 1935G \$1 Silver Certificates were printed after this date and therefore are found with and without the motto. "Beginning with September 15, 1961, all \$1 notes have been printed with 'In God We Trust' "*.

To reiterate in closing, illustrations of all the original models mentioned would give us a better picture of the changes and recommendations referred to in the foregoing letters. It is unlikely however, that the original designs are still in existence. Notwithstanding, we now have more insight as to how these designs came to fruition under the guidance of S.M. Clark, Director of the National Currency Bureau and Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury.