

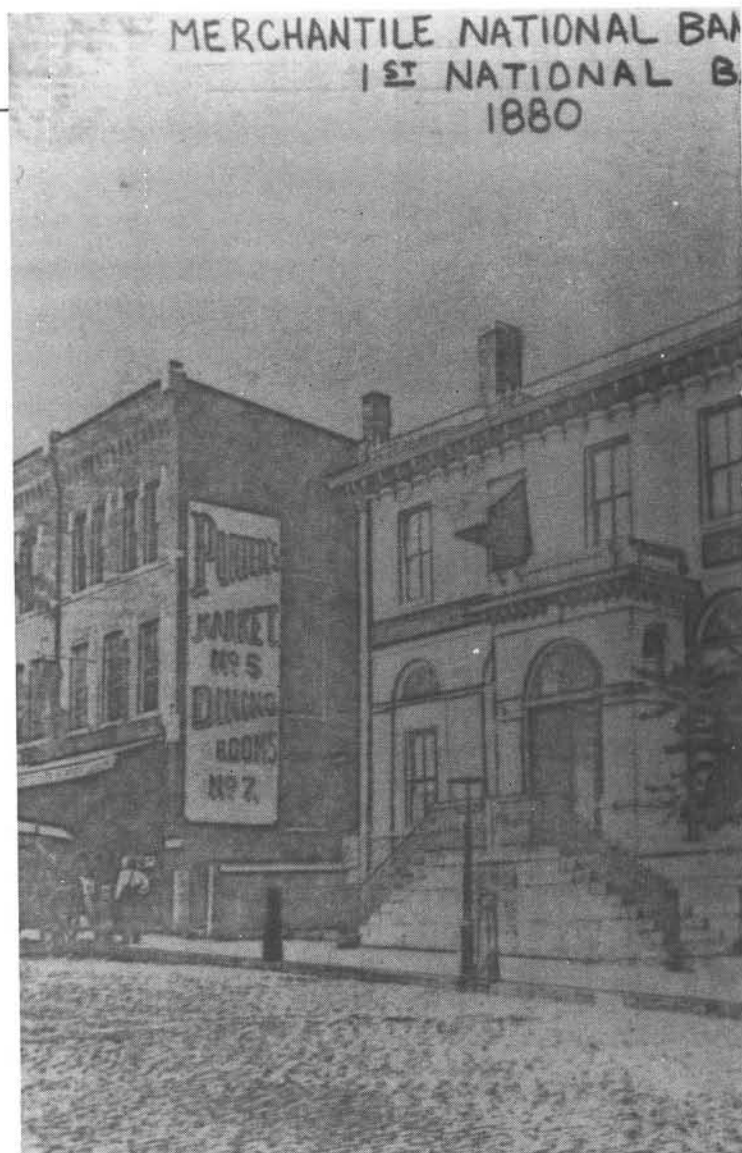
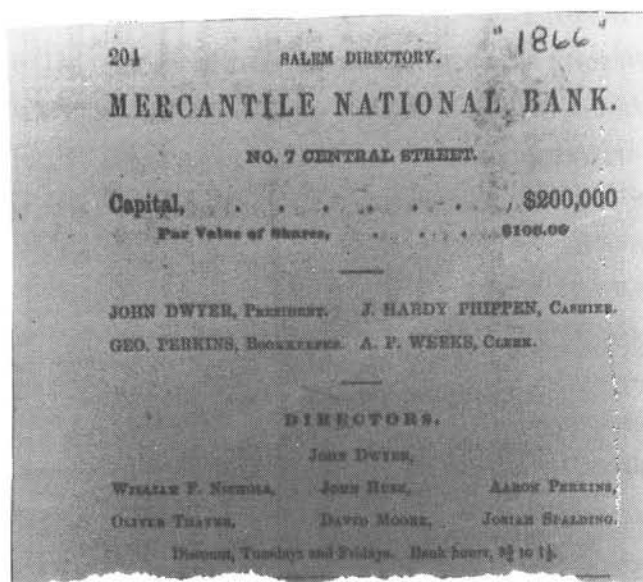
by Terry F. Vavra

Collecting bank notes of the U.S. has for quite some time been my number one pleasure in the syngraphic field. Not being overly interested in rarity value, I have found more enjoyment in collecting notes from interestingly named towns or towns of historical significance.

Recently I was able to acquire a note that seems to fit into my area of interest quite nicely. The note acquired is an 1875, 1st Charter "Lazy Deuce" on The Mercantile National Bank of Salem, Mass., dated Jan. 17, 1865 and assigned Charter #691. As far back as I can remember, just the mention of this town has stirred visioins of witchcraft, witch-hunting, superstition and other great historical events: in short, the epitome, to me, of early American antiquity.

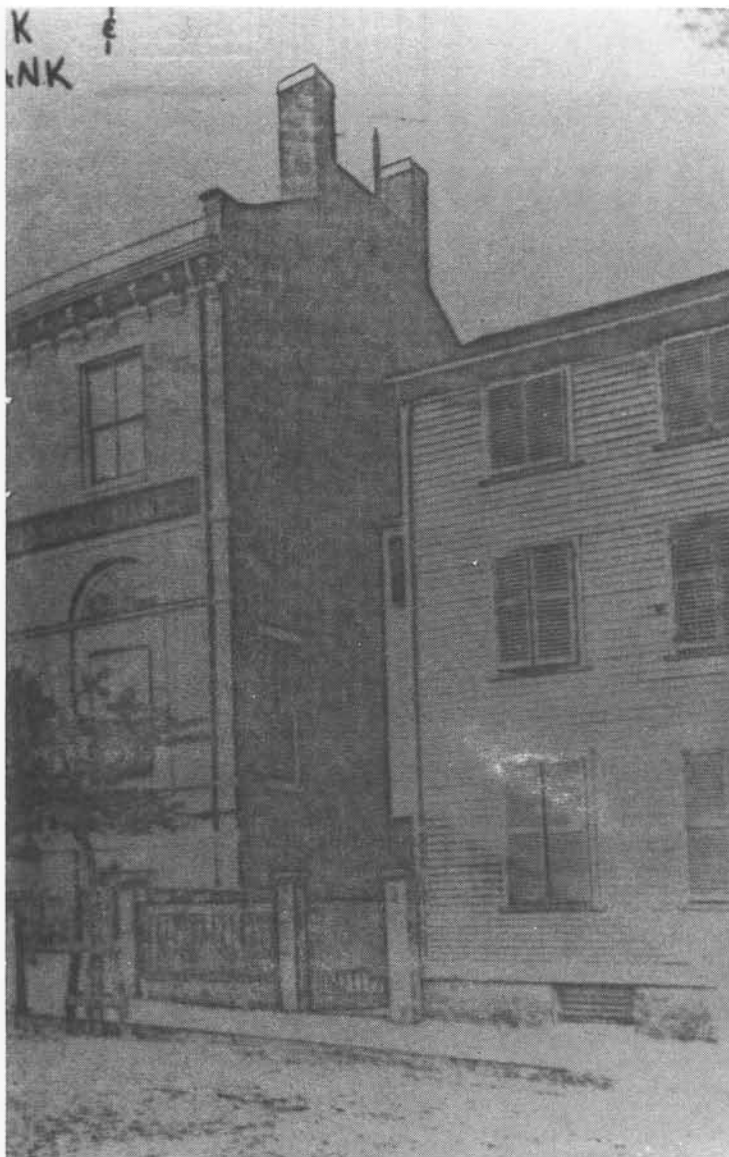
Wanting to find out something about the bank itself, I decided to do a little research on it. Not too much information was available on the bank of its' officers, and I didn't find out anything extraordinarily fascinating. However, I did find something somewhat unusual about the facility in which the bank was housed.

The bank building was designed by Charles Bulfinch and built for the Essex Bank of Salem in 1811 (the first bank in Salem and Essex County, which began business on July 2, 1792 in a wooden building on the same site). The Essex Bank used the building until 1819 when the Commercial (later changed to the First National Bank of Salem) took over. In 1826, an odd thing happened. The bank building, for a now unknown reason, was subdivided. The Commercial Bank operated in one half of the building and the Mercantile National Bank occupied and operated the other half. Both banks shared a common address on Central



TWO BANKS UND





ER ONE ROOF?



Street and the building became known as the Central Street Bank Building.

The Commercial Bank was organized on April 19, 1819, with a capital of \$300,000. This was reduced to \$200,000 in 1830 and restored back to \$300,000 in 1851. It entered the National Banking System as the First National Bank in June of 1864 and was assigned Charter #407. The bank was liquidated on Feb. 24, 1903.

The Mercantile National Bank was organized on May 8, 1826 with a capital of \$200,000, which never changed. The bank entered the National Banking System on Jan. 10, 1865, and was assigned Charter #691. It was liquidated on May 21, 1914.

During the course of the two banks' affiliation in the same building, the Commercial Bank had three presidents, and the Mercantile Bank had six. Not very much can be found about these officers, or their families. When the "Lazy Deuce" was issued, Charles Harrington was Mercantile Bank president. His picture is illustrated here. At first, his photograph could not be authenticated. Fortunately, he had signed and dated the reverse of the photograph, and by comparing this signature with the signature on the note itself, a conclusion can be drawn that this is the same Chas. Harrington.

Chas. Harrington became vice-president of the Mercantile National Bank in 1878 after serving for several years on the board of directors. After a short vice-presidency, he became president in 1879. Before his affiliation with the bank, he was a local businessman dealing in leather goods, and continued to operate as such during and after his tenure as president. He died in 1895.

I find it quite unusual that two "competitors" could share the same place of business day in and day out for over 75 years, without one of them "running" the other out of business. Evidently there was some sort of mutual understanding and probably even respect for one another.

In 1899, an organization called the Salem Fraternity purchased the Central Street Bank Building. After the Commercial Bank's liquidation in 1903, the Salem Fraternity utilized that half of the building and the Mercantile Bank the other. After the Mercantile Bank's liquidation in 1914, the Salem Fraternity took over the entire building, where it has resided up until the present time.

REFERENCES

- Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.
- Salem Directory, 1866
- Sketch of Salem, Osgood and Batchelder
- Report of the Building Committee of the Salem Fraternity, April 9, 1900