

"Prosperity" (but for whom?)

Excerpts from the history of the
Strafford National Bank

by BOB COCHRAN

THE year 1877 found the Strafford National Bank, Dover, New Hampshire, in "a sound and prosperous condition." New items in the bank announced its success. The directors had voted to purchase the new carpet in the directors' room, along with new cushioned arm chairs the room contained. Indoor plumbing came to the bank, as the directors voted to allow the cashier a "water closet . . . at his own expense." In 1881 the directors voted to install telephones in the bank and in the cashier's house; this time the cashier was the beneficiary of the directors' largesse—the bank picked up the tab for his telephone. They also voted to install radiators to heat the bank building.



An obsolete note from the Strafford Bank signed by Cashier Asa A. Tufts.

The bank had enjoyed success since the days right after the Civil War. While the bank was prosperous, the same could not be said for the cashier, one Asa A. Tufts, during the same period. During the Civil War the cost of living had doubled. His salary had been raised in 1860, but only enough to pay for a clerk, whose salary came out of Tuft's own pocket. After the war, Tufts informed the directors, in a letter, that despite the boom in the local economy, his expenses still exceeded his salary. Tufts reminded the directors that everywhere else salaries were going up, "from the maid in your kitchen to the Minister in your pulpit." The directors voted to give Tufts a raise to \$2,000, of which \$500 Tufts was directed to pay to a clerk.

In 1868, Tufts was forced to offer a salary of \$600 in order to employ a clerk. He returned to the directors, asking for a salary of \$1,500 for himself and requested that the bank pay the clerk directly. The directors agreed to Tufts' request, and appointed a committee to hire a clerk. With consent from the committee, Tufts hired 21 year-old Elisha Rhodes Brown, at a salary of \$750 per year.

Although the bank now had a full-time clerk, the duties of running the bank on a daily basis still fell to Tufts. The president of the bank at this time was William Woodman, who was apparently not involved with the day-to-day activities of the

bank—his salary was \$50 per year. "Running the bank" also meant "running the building," as Tufts was ordered to evict the tenants from the third floor, buy a table and chairs for the "room back of the counter," and the 70 year-old cashier once performed what must have been an unpleasant task, unclogging the drain in the bank's cellar.

Asa Tufts had become the cashier of the Strafford Bank on October 17, 1846, when he was 47 years old; his trade before that time was that of a pharmacist. As a young man, he had been a clerk in the store of one John Wheeler. In 1822, Wheeler had taken Tufts as a partner. The next year Wheeler became president of the Strafford Bank, and in 1830 the partnership was dissolved. Tufts bought the store and stock of Wheeler, and continued the business until he became cashier of the bank.

John Wheeler deserves more than a mention in this story. An unsigned letter described him as "smooth talking." He was not a medical doctor, but people referred to him as "Dr. Wheeler," because of the "general assortment of drugs and medicines" that he carried in his store. He sold "a large supply of Wheaton's genuine patent jaundice bitters." He also carried "Wheaton's Patent Itch Ointment, the only medicine in the world which will certainly cure the ITCH, without having in it anything dangerous or disagreeable . . . one box cures a person . . ." (I'm not completely certain that I would like to know what "the ITCH" is). Wheeler also served as postmaster of Dover for 25 years.

Tufts resigned from the bank on December 31, 1875, after some 29 years service. He probably didn't resign entirely by choice; earlier in the year, the directors of the bank had voted that the combined salary of the cashier and the clerk be \$3,000, a reduction from the \$3,400 paid the two men the year before. Further, the \$3,000 was to be divided equally between the cashier and the clerk; this meant a raise to the clerk, E.R. Brown, of \$200, and a cut in pay to cashier Tufts of \$500! Tufts decided to retire from the bank on Christmas



Elisha Rhodes Brown, president
of the Strafford National Bank.



A first charter note from the Strafford National Bank with the signature of Asa A. Tufts.

Even, 1875. The directors wasted no time in electing Brown to the cashier's position, on December 27, 1875.

Tufts, who was 77 years old at this time, became an insurance agent. The bank apparently felt some remorse over their treat-

ment of him; nine years later they commissioned a portrait of him, and had it placed in the Directors' Room in the bank. Tufts lived to see this, and died 6 months later at the age of 86.

Brown, the new cashier, hired Charles S. Cartland, age 25, "as clerk to the cashier." Remember that Brown's starting salary as clerk had been \$750 per year; Cartland, nine years later, received \$700 per year. Although he was allowed a "water closet . . . at his own expense" in 1877, Brown persevered. He was elected president of the Strafford National Bank in 1897, and served in that office until 1922. He was followed by his former clerk, Cartland, who served as president from 1923 until 1938.

Asa A. Tuft's signature as cashier can be found on notes of The Strafford Bank and The Strafford National Bank.



The Strafford National Bank in Dover, NH ca. 1880.

REFERENCE

Our Little Bank Institution (1803-1978) . . . A history of Strafford National Bank . . . Dover, New Hampshire. Joanne Griffith Domingue. © 1978, Strafford National Bank, Dover, New Hampshire.

One More for New Jersey, One Less for Vermont

by DAVID D. GLADFELTER

THE recent discovery of an example of Wait 286 signed by Burlington, New Jersey merchant Thomas B. Woolman (see illustration) has generated speculation that a similar issue of Civil War scrip, listed by Coulter as belonging to Burlington, Vermont, may in fact be from New Jersey.

Coulter lists a 5-cent note of Samuel D. Burns as Burlington 18. The "5 cents" device and the "Five Cents" lettering on the Burns note are identical to the device and lettering on the Woolman note. The likely printer of both notes is Wm. F. Murphy & Sons, 339 Chestnut St., Philadelphia (compare Wait 695, which is signed).



Beyond the foregoing, evidence is sketchy. In his *History of Burlington County, New Jersey, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, published in 1883, Major E.M. Woodward lists a Samuel D. Burns as serving on the Burlington City Council in 1867 and 1869. No references to Burns have been found in business directories of the period, or in any other source.

Is there more evidence favoring Vermont?