

# ANACHRONISMS ON CONFEDERATE CURRENCY

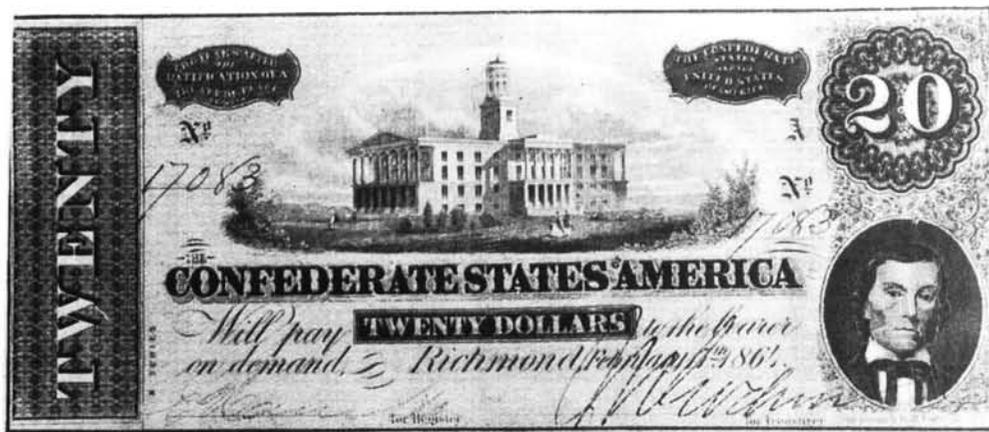
by EVERETT K. COOPER

**W**HO specified and who approved the designs, i.e., portraits, scenes, buildings, allegorical vignettes, etc., printed on the treasury notes of the Confederate states of America? The answer to this question, if recorded, is buried deep in the pages of history. A good guess would be that the Secretary of the Treasury, and possibly the President, played a significant role in that process and in the final decision. However, the historical relationship of some designs to the fortunes of the Confederacy, including the Davis administration, does not support such a presumption.

The central vignette design on notes of three different denominations, issued from December 1862 to the end of the Confederacy, was a Southern state capitol building. The three different state capitol buildings which appeared on the currency were Columbia, South Carolina, Nashville, Tennessee, and Richmond, Virginia. Eight other Confederate state capitol buildings were not chosen to appear on the currency including Montgomery, the seat of the first Confederate government.<sup>1</sup>

Although Nashville was a very important city, the Confederacy had made no aggressive effort to recapture this vital town until General Hood's ill-fated attempt in November 1864. Nashville became a major Union army supply center—commissary, ordnance, medical, and military railroad supplies were stored here in abundance to support the Union army in the western theater. The Military Governor of Tennessee, Andrew Johnson, made it imperative to Union army commanders that Nashville must continue to fly the stars and stripes. President Abraham Lincoln strongly supported Governor Johnson.

Both open and covert communications from Nashville citizens to the Confederate states should have made it obvious that recapture of the town was almost impossible. Why the Confederate Treasury Department would choose to honor a captured town instead of a capital still under their flag is not known.<sup>4</sup> The capitol building at Montgomery, the Cradle of the Confederacy, would have been more appropriate. Perhaps



The \$20 note dated February 17, 1864 with the State Capitol Building at Nashville and a portrait of Vice President A.H. Stevens.

This raises a bothersome question as to why the Tennessee capitol building at Nashville was selected for three different Treasury note issues from 1862 to 1865. The basic reason for raising this question is that Nashville was captured by the Federal army on February 24, 1862 and was occupied for the rest of the war.<sup>2</sup> This was over seven months prior to the legislation of October 13, 1862 authorizing the notes showing the lithographed date of December 2, 1862. This was the first use of the Tennessee capitol vignette. The Nashville capitol building vignette had not been used previously on Confederate currency and it required initial art work to be done, probably not earlier than October 1862.<sup>3</sup>

a simple answer may have been that the lithograph artist lacked a photograph or drawing of another capitol building to copy. Because the demand for currency from the presses remained so great and because it was necessary to standardize the currency designs, any major changes in design were not considered once the currency design was prepared. Also, most Confederate citizens handling the currency probably did not know that the building was the Tennessee state capitol.

Another example of questionable currency design is the use of the portrait of Robert M.T. Hunter of Virginia<sup>5</sup>. This Virginian was given a place of immortality in Confederate history by having his likeness appear on eight different Treasury notes.



The \$10 note dated February 17, 1864 with a portrait of Senator R.M.T. Hunter.

Secretary of the Treasury C.G. Memminger also appeared on eight different notes. President Jefferson Davis appeared on only six different notes.

Hunter entered the Provisional Confederate Congress when Virginia seceded to join the Confederacy. While serving in the Provisional Congress he was a strong supporter of the Davis administration. When Robert Toombs, the first Secretary of State of the Confederacy, submitted his resignation, Hunter was appointed on July 24, 1861 to fill the vacancy. Undoubtedly, the selection of R.M.T. Hunter was partly on the basis of giving Virginia a representative in the president's cabinet. Shortly after this appointment his portrait was first seen by the public on four different \$10 notes of the issue dated September 2, 1861. He appeared on every subsequent issue to the last and largest issue of February 17, 1864.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter (called "Run Mad Tom" by some) served as Secretary of State of the embryo nation for only eight months. He resigned on March 16, 1862 to take a seat representing Virginia as a senator in the regular Confederate Congress and served in that capacity until the demise of the Confederacy. Most of that time he served in the influential position of president pro-tem of the senate. While serving as a senator he vacillated on most of the significant issues and failed to provide the leadership expected. A most succinct critique of his leadership was that "Few individuals with so much inherent prestige did less to advance the cause of an expiring nation."<sup>7</sup> At one meeting Hunter had to listen to the President express verbal abuse of Virginia and Virginians. This greatly irritated Hunter, a member of the old Virginia aristocracy, and in December 1863 he joined the ranks of those hostile to the President.<sup>8</sup>

Why the portrait of Senator R.M.T. Hunter was the most frequently displayed portrait on Confederate currency is difficult to understand. His short term as an innocuous Secretary of State and a mediocre performance as a senator who did not support the administration did not justify the recognition he was given. Another factor favoring Hunter was that he occupied a position of influence by serving on the Finance Committee for all three sessions of Congress. Perhaps, as with the Nashville capitol building, the simple answer was that under the circumstances of the times it was expedient for the Treasury Department to not make a change once a design was made.

George Wythe Randolph became the fourth Confederate Secretary of War on March 17, 1862. Like R.M.T. Hunter, his

tenure of office was short. He resigned on November 16, 1862, eight months after his appointment. During the brief time that he was in the cabinet another general issue of currency was authorized by the Act of October 13, 1862. The Treasury notes of this issue carried the lithographed date of December 2, 1862. A portrait of Secretary of War Randolph appeared on the \$100 Treasury note of this December 2, 1862 issue. The same portrait appeared again on the \$100 note of the issues dated April 6, 1863 and February 17, 1864. Randolph had actually resigned prior to the December 2, 1862 issue, but in all probability it was too late for the currency printer to delete his portrait from the lithograph art. His resignation as Secretary of War had apparently been due to conflicts with President Jefferson Davis.

Randolph, another prominent Virginian, was the grandson of President Thomas Jefferson, and he was born at "Monticello." He had been serving in the Confederate Army and was promoted to Brigadier General only a month prior to becoming Secretary of War. After leaving the cabinet he became a Richmond city-councilman but ill-health forced him to resign from that post and from the Confederate Army. The continued appearance of his portrait on subsequent issues of Confederate currency seems to indicate that President Davis did not seek to retaliate in a vindictive manner toward those who did not serve him well. Both Hunter and Randolph were members of distinguished Virginia families, had broad public acceptance, had short terms in the presidential cabinet, and contributed minimally in leadership of the Southern Confederacy. However, their appearance on the circulating currency far outlived their usefulness to President Davis.

Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia served as the Confederacy's vice-president throughout the Civil War. He, his brother Linton Stephens, and Georgia's Governor Joseph E. Brown became the focal point of internal hostility to the Davis administration. Stephens' portrait appeared on five different Treasury notes and on several Confederate bonds.

The first appearance of the Clement C. Clay portrait on the \$1 Confederate note dated December 2, 1862 provokes some interesting thoughts on this Confederate personality. The appearance of this prominent Alabama politician is not, as were the preceding, an anachronism.<sup>9</sup> But it does raise the question as to why he was so honored. As with those previously discussed, once he appeared on a Treasury note the note design was frozen. He continued to appear on future issues of the same denomination. Thus, C.C. Clay appeared on the \$1 note



The \$100 note dated February 17, 1864 with portraits of Lucy Pickens, wife of South Carolina Governor F.W. Pickens, and Secretary of War G.W. Randolph.



The \$1 note dated February 17, 1864 with a portrait of Senator Clement C. Clay.

dated April 6, 1863 and the \$1 note dated February 17, 1864 and attained immortality in Confederate history.

Clement C. Clay was also the only living southern citizen appearing on Confederate currency who had not served in President Davis' cabinet. General T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson did appear on the \$500 February 17, 1864 note. The note was a tribute to this noble soldier but was issued after his death in May 1863.

Prior to the war Clay had represented Alabama in the U.S. Senate and was a very close friend of Mississippi's Senator Jefferson Davis. Clay was an ardent advocate and spokesman for the cause of secession. At the formation of the Provisional Confederate Government he was offered the post of Secretary of War but declined because of ill health. In November 1861 he was appointed to a two-year term as Alabama's senator in the Confederate Congress and was invariably an active administration supporter. Ironically, he was also a friend of Senators Wigfall and Yancey, bitter opponents of President Davis. In November 1863 Clay was not reelected to the senate. Shortly after, in April 1864, he was made a member of the Confederate mission in Canada.

Why Clement C. Clay was selected to appear on the Confederate currency has not been historically recorded. His close friendship with Jefferson Davis would seem to be the obvious

answer. Yet apparently Davis did not intervene in selecting currency designs. He made no effort to remove Vice-President Stephens, Secretary of War Randolph, or Senator Hunter from the currency when they were openly hostile to his administration. Other loyal cabinet members, such as Postmaster General John H. Reagan and Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory, the only cabinet members to hold the same position during the entire life of the government, were not accorded this special recognition.

One other factor to consider in these anachronisms is the printing of the Treasury notes under consideration, most of which was done by the firm of Keatinge & Ball. This firm first operated in Richmond, though later, at government request, they relocated to Columbia, South Carolina. Mr. Ball was a prominent Richmond banker and Mr. Keatinge was a bank note engraver from the north. It is possible that Mr. Ball financed this war-time firm and had the proper contacts with Confederate Government officials. It is also possible that, in an endeavor to curry favor, Mr. Ball made the decision on whose portrait would appear on the currency. This, of course, does not explain the continued appearance of the Tennessee capitol building at Nashville.

(Endnotes on page 148)



A large-size silver certificate, series 1923, might well have looked like this had the portrait of the First President of the United States appeared on it.

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## CONFEDERATE (Continued from page 141)

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Austin, Baton Rouge, Little Rock, Milledgeville, Raleigh, and Tallahassee. Three of these state capitol buildings appeared on the currency issued by their respective states. Alabama \$1—January 1, 1863; Louisiana \$100—March 10, 1863; North Carolina \$2 and \$10—January 1, 1863.
- 2 Thomas L. Connelly, *Civil War Tennessee*: Knoxville, 1979, University of Tennessee Press, p. 14. "In 1861 Nashville became the hub of warfare on the western front. No other western metropolis—even New Orleans—was so vital to the Southern war effort."
- 3 At the time of capture by the Union army construction of the state capitol building was not completed.
- 4 Connelly, p. 30. The state legislature adjourned hastily (when Nashville was captured) to reconvene in Memphis. Governor I. Harris proclaimed Memphis to be the state capital. The legislature adjourned on March 20 (1862) and state officials fled to Mississippi.
- 5 Philip H. Chase, *CSA Issues of 1861 in Panorama*: 1962, reprints from periodical *The Numismatist*, p. 17. Confederate \$10 Treasury note, dated September 2, 1861, Chase #123, Criswell #T-24, "The first Confederate Treasury note to bear the likeness of an official of the Government, R.M.T. Hunter, Secretary of State." First released to circulation February 20, 1862.
- 6 R.M.T. Hunter's portrait also appeared more times (7) on Confederate bonds than any other Confederate personality. President Davis appeared only four times.
- 7 Ezra J. Warner & W. Buck Years, *Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress*: 1975, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, p. 128.

8 Emory Thomas, *The Confederate State of Richmond*: 1971, Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 140.

9 Anachronism: A use of something out of date and therefore incongruous.

10 August Dietz, *The Postal Service of the Confederate States of America*: 1929, Richmond, The Dietz Printing Co., p. 267.

## BASICS (Continued from page 142)

a common practice among competitive banks at the time) risked damage to its reputation. Another advantage of this system to the "country" banks was that their notes enjoyed wider acceptance, and were not subject to discount.

But when a bank failed or did not redeem its notes in time, the Suffolk Bank stamped such notes with the statement, "BROKEN BANK." Over the years, this term was used widely in the banking business and general commerce, but not always correctly.

This term was also used by early paper money collectors, but again, not always correctly. The term "broken bank note" was used to describe ANY note that I discussed in the section, "What is an 'Obsolete Note'?" A "broken bank note" is an "obsolete note"; but because many "obsolete notes" were issued by banks which NEVER failed, it is technically incorrect to describe ANY "obsolete note" as a "broken bank note."