

# A Curious Pair of Wichita Nationals

— BY DAVE GRANT —

**I**N THE LATE 1970S, THE LAMPERT BROTHERS RAN A SERIES of television ads promoting their discount auto parts stores in the St. Louis, Missouri, area. Jack would start each ad by asking, "So what's the story, Larry?" Larry—who was remarkable both for his spherical profile and for being one of the loudest and fastest spokesmen on area television—would respond to the question by rapidly shouting the numerous bargains available at his stores that week.

I never got to meet Larry; he disappeared from St. Louis television a few years later (after a brief stint, appropriately enough, promoting the "Fat Man's Sub Shops"). Too bad for me, because maybe, just maybe, I could have asked Larry to tell me the story behind the survival of an interesting pair of Wichita Nationals in my collection.

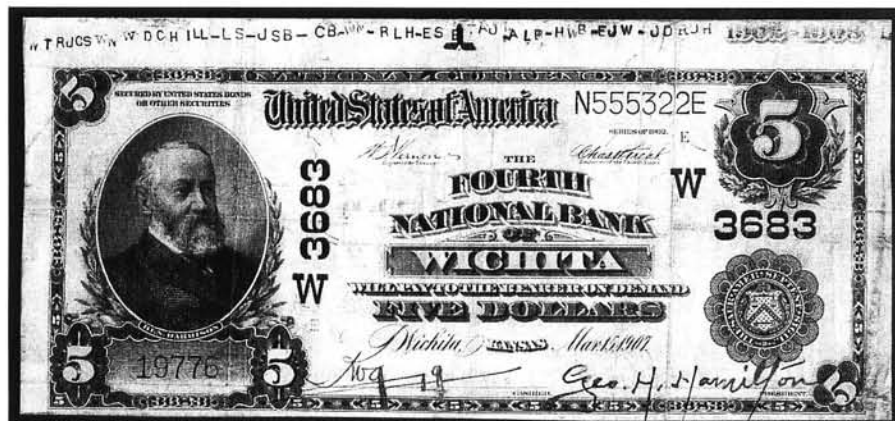
## Two \$5 Notes

I ENCOUNTERED THE FIRST OF THE TWO \$5 NATIONALS on a bright Saturday in June 1992. I'd been collecting St Louis Nationals for a couple of years and had already run out of the "easy" ones. It was several weeks since I had added anything to my collection, so I eagerly visited a local coin shop in hopes that something new had wandered in.

The dealer could offer nothing at all from St. Louis, but in his case was a low grade \$5 from the Fourth National Bank of Wichita, Kansas. It was clear that this note had been carried in someone's wallet for a long, long time. It was folded into eighths, and a quarter of the back was heavily wallet stained. And it was clear that the pressure and humidity in that back pocket had caused a portion of the design on the face of the note to transfer, which gave the impression of an offset.

Yet the note had a certain appeal—enhanced by the fact that there was really nothing else to buy. Although battered, the face was remarkably bright and fresh. Better still, the top full top sheet selvage had been retained with more than a dozen sets of initials, indicating that the plate had made several trips to the press. Further, although a plain back, the obligation on the note's face was that associated with date backs ("...or other securities") and the selvage had "1902-1908" at the top right, producing an interesting variety. Finally, there were very bold and intriguing signatures. That of the president, Geo. H. Hamilton,

The first Fourth National note I encountered. Position "E" with the full top selvage attached.



was easy enough, but the cashier's was a complete mystery. I was hooked, and the forlorn little note found a new home that day.

During the next few years, I discovered that the cashier was Kenneth V. Gragg and that the president, George Henry Hamilton, was associated with four, distinct banks during his career, three of which issued currency. In addition to finding examples of notes from these other banks to illustrate Hamilton's career, I hoped to locate another, higher grade Fourth National note.

No currency from Fourth National seemed to come to market, and I figured that any notes were being intercepted and held by Kansas collectors. I had heard about the existence of another, much higher grade \$5 with the Gragg/Hamilton signature combination, but the information seemed to be mistaken—the serial number was reported as being the same as on my note.

At the 1995 St. Louis PCDA show, I had a chance to look through some of the late Dale Lyon's great Kansas collection and was startled to discover that the report of a sheet-mate to my note hadn't been a mistake after all! Dale's collection contained a note from the bottom of the same sheet and, better yet, had the full bottom selvage intact!

In marked contrast to my earlier find, Dale's note showed no wear at all and had clearly never entered circulation. It had been folded in half at some point and carefully put away. There just had to be a great story here, and the chase was on!

### The First National Bank of Watseka

THE FIRST OF GEORGE HAMILTON'S BANKS was the First National Bank of Watseka, Illinois. The municipality of Watseka, Illinois, was incorporated in 1865 and named after Watch-e-kee, a heroic Indian woman who, according to legend, had inspired the Pottawattamie's resistance to the Iroquois some time in the distant past. From that time, the name had become an honorific, given to the most accomplished maiden from one generation to another. One of the

early settlers in the region married a young woman of that name to cement his good relations with the natives, who far outnumbered the settlers.

Witseka was the successor to South Middleport, which was established a few years earlier to take advantage of its proximity to the Peoria and Oquawka Railroad. Upon its incorporation, Watseka became the seat of Iroquois County and annexed the nearby community of Middleport, which had served as the county seat since 1839.



The second Fourth National note I encountered, from Dale Lyons' collection. Position "H" with the full bottom selvage of the sheet attached.

The First National Bank of Watseka was organized in September 1870 with an initial capitalization of \$50,000. The officers were Samuel Williams, president; David McGill, "active vice president"; and George C. Harrington, cashier. Williams was a prosperous farmer, but provided only "nominal" services to the bank, which was managed by Harrington and David McGill. Although both of the bank's active officers had some prior business experience, an early examination suggested that the "parties in charge are not men of much business capacity or experience, but seem inclined to do a legitimate and sound business as far as they know how." The bank prospered with relatively few criticisms in subsequent exams.

An interesting tidbit from the bank's early days is that Cashier Harrington wrote to the Comptroller in August 1876 asking whether the president and vice president could sign the bank's currency in his absence. He was seriously ill and had to go "north" to recover.

In 1890 McGill succeeded Williams as president and was replaced by John Hamilton as an inactive vice president. Despite the "inactive" description, an 1897 exam noted that Vice President Hamilton was in the bank every week. In addition, for much of the next decade, the daughters of John Hamilton and McGill—Edith and Minnie, respectively—served as the bank's bookkeepers and tellers. Harrington remained at the bank until his retirement on November 1, 1909, and was succeeded by H.T. Riddell. At the same time, Porter Martin, the bank's teller, succeeded Riddell as assistant cashier.

The bank building was partially destroyed by fire early on January 19, 1900. The fire started very early in the morning in the Masonic Hall, which occupied the second floor of the building. Nevertheless, by noon the bank was reopened for business in temporary quarters previously occupied by the Chicago Bargain Barn. The vault had cooled enough that it could be reentered. Fortunately, the building was insured, and the vault and its contents were undamaged. In fact, deposits on the day of the fire were said to have been greater than usual, and the next month the bank added a mortgage loan department. The Masons did not fare so well. Their "elegant" uniforms and recent renovations in preparation for a district inspection in late January were totally destroyed and were only partially insured. Nevertheless, the bank and Masons decided to rebuild on the same site and, despite some security concerns, the vault continued to be used during the reconstruction. In April 1900, the bank had assets totalling \$381,000, and \$50,000 of its National Bank notes were outstanding.

### Geo. H. Hamilton

GEORGE HENRY HAMILTON, THE SON OF JOHN AND ANN HAMILTON, was born near Wellington, Illinois, on April 4, 1875. His father was born in Armagh County, Ireland, on November 11, 1829, and emigrated in 1851, finding employment on a Jersey County, Illinois, farm as a common laborer. Carefully saving his earnings, John was soon able to make a down payment on the purchase of 160 acres. In 1861 he sold his holdings and moved to Iroquois County. When he died in May 1900, John Hamilton owned nearly 2,500 acres in the area and was heavily involved in cattle-raising in Texas, where he had accumulated another 17,000 acres.

In addition to cattle and farming, John Hamilton had interests in banking. John was elected director in 1879 and subsequently vice president of the First National Bank of Watseka; he also was president of the private bank of Hamilton & Cunningham at Hoopeston in the neighboring county. He won several local elective posts and represented his district in the Illinois General Assembly until his death. As a tribute, Watseka and Hoopeston businesses were closed during the morning of Hamilton's funeral, and his name continued to appear in bank advertising throughout the balance of 1900.

Young George graduated from Watseka High School in 1891. His summer vacations were spent at the First National Bank of Watseka with his friend Jerome Harrington, the son of the First National's cashier, where they each "received a complete and practical course in banking."

George Hamilton continued his education after high school, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in 1894 from Olivet College and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard in 1896. He spent the next two years as bookkeeper of the First National Bank (at an initial salary of just \$600) before attending Northwestern Law School between 1898 and the early 1901. He was admitted to the Illinois bar on his birthday in 1901 and set up a law practice in Watseka.



George H. Hamilton as a legislator in 1908.



The First National Bank of Watseka. Hamilton's signature as president should have appeared on the late issues of the 1882 and early issues of the 1902 date backs.

just \$300 short of that paid to president and cashier. About this time, he seems to have taken a more active role in the affairs of the bank, as President McGill was quite elderly and away from the bank a good deal of the time.

Following the death of David McGill, George Hamilton was elected First National's president on April 15, 1910. Hamilton and his wife, Anna, were by now the bank's largest shareholders, owning 250 of the 370 outstanding shares. In addition to inheriting his father's shares, he had purchased most of Harrington's stake when he retired in 1909. Hamilton's increased involvement with the bank proved beneficial. The February 12, 1912, examination noted that the bank had noticeably improved during the previous 3 years.

### Wichita

IN JANUARY 1912, THE *WATSEKA REPUBLIC* REPORTED that Hamilton had announced he would not stand for reelection to the legislature. This was a great surprise—many considered his reelection to be a sure thing. He was a successful and popular representative, had secured important chairmanships in the legislature, and had been discussed as a candidate for speaker despite his youth and relatively short tenure. Speculation that he might run for a loftier position, perhaps on a national level, was quickly debunked, with George proffering the excuse that his business interests required his full attention. Ironically, this was quite true—but not in the way the newspaper reported. Although he was very successful, Hamilton was looking for an arena larger than offered by the small community.

In 1905 his friend Jerome Harrington—who five years before was said to be studying the "Dramatic Arts" in New York City—had acquired an interest in the First National Bank of Watonga, Oklahoma, and soon became its president. Because of his family's cattle interests, Hamilton probably was aware of opportunities in the region and was drawn to Wichita. In February 1912, Hamilton and Harrington bought out J.S. Corley's interests in the State Savings Bank of Wichita. State Savings was founded on July 21, 1902, and was managed by Corley since 1905. Its deposits totaled \$450,000, and the two out-of-town "financiers" doubled its \$25,000 equity base some time after the sale.

The announcement of the sale suggested that the transaction was intended just to bring in some additional investors. Corley was to remain the bank's president, with Hamilton as an active vice president and Harrington as cashier. Both pledged to move to Wichita and to devote the greater part of their energies to the bank.

Harrington retained the presidency of the Watonga bank for another decade, but within a few months, Hamilton sold his interest in the First National Bank of Watseka, resigned as president and moved his family to Wichita. He was succeeded by Porter Martin, who was the bank's teller just three years before.

With his brothers—John L. and W.A. Hamilton—he continued his father's cattle business. George also followed his father's lead in winning a seat in the Illinois General Assembly in 1906.

John continued his involvement with the First National, being added to the board probably in 1903 and elected vice president a year later with a \$300 annual salary. Hamilton's salary soon was increased to \$1,200,



Shortly after the transaction, Corley seems to have retired. Hamilton became president, and Harrington assumed the role of vice president. Although the bank took a good deal of his attention, Hamilton followed the same pattern he formed in Watseka, becoming actively involved in civic matters: joining the Chamber of Commerce, serving on the Board of Regents of the University of Wichita and as Wichita's mayor in 1922.

The bank prospered and acquired the Mercantile Bank after World War I. By 1922 the bank known as the State Savings and Mercantile Bank was capitalized at \$200,000 and controlled assets in excess of \$2 million.

On June 13, 1922, the *Wichita Eagle's* headlines announced the consolidation of the Fourth National and State Savings. This was the second bank merger in the month that started with the Wichita State Bank acquiring the Ranchman's State Bank and the Sunflower State Bank. The new Fourth National had combined assets of \$15 million. A plan was announced to increase the bank's capital stock by 50% to \$1.5 million, putting the bank on a sound basis. Hamilton would be president, and his long-time friend and business associate, Jerome Harrington, vice president of the combined bank. Fourth's previous president, Dan Callahan, was named to the new post of chairman of the Executive Committee, permitting him to devote most of his attention to the Derby Oil and Refining Company and to completion of his \$90,000 mansion. All the deposits, employees and fixtures of the State were transferred to Fourth on the evening of the 12th, and the newly enlarged Fourth opened the next morning.

The Fourth National Bank of Wichita was chartered on March 14, 1887, and opened its doors on April 1 of that year. It was the successor to the Bank of Commerce and had hoped to participate in the boom times the city was enjoy. Wichita had become the center of economic activity in Kansas. Its population had grown eight-fold in the previous decade, largely propelled by real estate speculation and strong harvests in the region.

The bank loaned heavily to officers and directors, and within a year was so saddled with "slow" loans that it was compelled to charge off loans and cut its capital in half, to \$100,000. About the same time, the region's economy collapsed; crop prices fell as farms in other parts of the country recovered from the poor harvests of the mid-1880s; and the real estate boom promptly ended. Wichita's population dropped by more than half, and soon the local depression was exacerbated by the nationwide Panic of 1893. Although many positive changes were made at Fourth during this period, the impact of the economy could not be resisted. The bank suffered its first run in 1893, as did institutions elsewhere.

The bank survived, although it had been a near thing. It was again on a sound footing by the turn of the century. The region and the bank enjoyed another boom culminating at the end of World War I, fueled by wartime demand—and higher prices—for commodities that were abundant in the area: oil, cattle and wheat. At the end of the war, the world and Wichita economies entered a recession, commodity prices fell drastically, and the bank began to suffer again as well.

Publicly, it was announced that the "merger of these two old banks is the result of a mutual desire to give even better banking service to the public" while Callahan cited the need for Fourth to add "two additional men of sound banking experience." The merger also helped State Savings avoid the expense of erecting a new building. It had outgrown its existing facilities and was approaching the end of its lease.

Despite the postwar economic recession, the region's economy seemed promising: the president of Union National Bank just reported to the public that the outlook for Wichita's immediate future looked unusually bright and



The Fourth National Bank of Wichita, after 1916.

that he expected the oil business and the region's farmers to make strong recoveries from their recent reverses.

Nevertheless, the merger was a forced one, with the hope that new management and fresh capital could somehow overcome the mistakes made during the boom of the prior decade. Fourth National's loan policies had been more "liberal" than the postwar economy warranted. Despite the hopeful public announcements, the bank continued to struggle with problem loans, and no new capital was injected into the enterprise.

And, notwithstanding the rosy forecast by Union National's president, the economy remained weak. This weakness was reflected in the bank's profitability. During the next 18 months, the bank lost nearly a quarter of its deposits. The growing level of "slow" loans and repossessed real estate, combined with the cost of the renovated banking house (to accommodate State's business), created liquidity problems.

Dan Callahan and some other officers and directors had leveraged their oil interests when prices were high; losses were incurred when the price of oil dropped nearly 60% by 1923. Fourth's farm loans also were a source of serious concern. Following several years of severe drought, many farmers ironically were wiped out by heavy flooding in 1923. As a result, the bank was forced to charge off more than \$100,000 in loans, representing nearly 10% of its capital.

After the collapse of the American State Bank, Fourth suffered a slow but continuous loss of deposits during the entire second half of 1923, culminating in an actual run in November. During this period, Fourth was forced to rediscount over \$800,000 of loans with the Federal Reserve. While this provided much-needed liquidity, the loss of loans further impaired the bank's profitability. In this climate, management had no choice but to take a very defensive posture in the face of worsening business conditions and shunned new, potentially profitable, business opportunities. Fourth posted a loss for 1923 and suspended the dividend. It was clear the merger had come too late and, if the bank was to avoid the specter of insolvency, it seemed that another, well capitalized partner was needed.

Ben McLean, who was Fourth National's president during the good years between 1911-20, and who now owned the much smaller Fidelity State Bank, was approached and accepted the challenge. On January 31, 1924, a new bank was organized—the Fourth National Bank in Wichita, which consolidated the assets of both banks under a new national charter, number 12490. Shareholders of the old Fourth may have sustained substantial losses on their investment, but it was better than losing it all.

McLean personally purchased 1,000 shares of the new bank and became president. He was serving his second term as Wichita's mayor, but immediately resigned to avoid any sense of impropriety and to be able to devote his entire effort to the bank. The post of C.L. Davidson, chairman of Fourth, was

eliminated. He retired to devote his entire attention to the Wichita Joint Stock Land Bank (organized in 1922 under the Federal Farm Act to make long-term amortizing farm loans in Kansas and Oklahoma), which itself closed in March of the next year. Dan Callahan also seems to have left the Fourth about this time, although he was back in Wichita banking circles the following year with

A \$50 Federal Reserve Bank note from Kansas City, with Hamilton's signature as Governor.



the reorganization of the Central State Bank.

By the end of March 1924, the old Fourth National had been liquidated. Just one month later, the new National Bank informed the Comptroller of its desire not to issue any circulation and authorized the sale of the \$100,000 in government bonds it had on deposit for that purpose.

Hamilton was demoted to active vice president; Jerome Harrington became a director and vice president. The departure of Callahan and Davidson suggests that Hamilton had not had much of a free hand during his tenure as president, and he emerged as a leading influence in the new bank. After the reorganization, Fourth showed continued improvement until the onset of the depression at the end of the 1920s.

Ben McLean died on October 13, 1930, following a year's illness. Hamilton acted as president during much of this period and was immediately named to succeed McLean.

### K.V. Gragg

LESS INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ABOUT CASHIER GRAGG. Kenneth V. Gragg is identified in the 1915 edition of the *Wichita City Directory* as a stenographer employed by the Wichita United Terminal Railway; he was promoted to accountant in 1917. Gragg was secretary of the Federal Land Bank a year later and entered the employ of the Fourth National, most probably in 1919, as secretary to the vice president.

In early 1921, he became cashier of the Fourth National, a position he held until the bank was liquidated in 1924. He also was associated with Merchant's State Bank, a startup in 1923 in which he originally was cashier and a director, and he was a director in the Wichita Joint Stock Land Bank. After the 1924 merger, he does not appear to have remained with Fourth National. In 1925 Gragg was listed as vice president and cashier of the Merchant's State Bank. In 1926 he was listed with the firm of Steward and Gragg. In 1927 his occupation was listed as "oil," and he does not appear to have reentered banking, at least in Wichita.

### The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City

IN 1930 IT WAS RUMORED AROUND WICHITA that George Hamilton was being considered for the post of governor of the Federal Reserve Board in Washington, D.C. His association with the "old" Fourth had not tarnished his reputation, and he still was considered one of the preeminent bankers in the region. He remained active in both state and national banking associations and served as chairman of a committee to encourage the Kansas City Federal Reserve to establish a branch office in Wichita.

So it was no surprise that when W.J. Bailey announced his intention to retire as governor of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Hamilton immediately became the leading contender for the position. In November 1931, members of the Wichita Clearing House unanimously endorsed Hamilton for the position and sent it along to the search committee.

Hamilton was appointed governor of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City on January 7, 1932. His title changed to president of the Federal Reserve Board in February 29, 1936, and he served as such until February 28, 1941. During the entire period, his salary remained fixed at \$25,000, not bad considering the economic conditions of the country at the time.

Hamilton returned to Wichita after his retirement and again became a vice president of Fourth National. In 1942 he was appointed chief negotiator of the Midwest procurement district of the Army Air Force and served in this position until the end of the war. He died in Wichita on January 18, 1948 following a brief illness.



The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City during the late 1920s.

**Table 1**  
**Timeline for Sheet 19776**

Early 1921	K.V. Gragg becomes cashier of Fourth National
June 12, 1922	Fourth National - State Savings merger George Hamilton becomes president
January 22-26, 1923	Kansas National Livestock Exposition
January 24, 1923	4/\$5 Sheets 19776 to 19860 issued to Fourth
January 31, 1924	Fourth National of Wichita enters liquidation George Hamilton become vice president of Fourth National in Wichita

**Table 2**  
**Currency Issues of the Fourth National Bank of Wichita**

	# Sheets	# Notes	\$ Value
1882 Brown Backs			
4 x \$5	6,647	26,588	\$132,940
3 x \$10-\$20	5,110	20,440	255,500
			<hr/> 388,440
1902 Red Seals			
4 x \$5	2,000	8,000	40,000
3 x \$10-\$20	1,250	5,000	62,500
			<hr/> 102,500
1902 Date Backs			
4 x \$5	15,500	62,000	310,000
3 x \$10-\$20	11,500	46,000	575,000
			<hr/> 885,000
1902 Plain Backs			
4 x \$5	5,595	22,380	111,900
3 x \$10-\$20	3,765	15,060	188,250
			<hr/> 300,150
<b>Totals</b>	<b>51,367</b>	<b>205,468</b>	<b>\$1,676,090</b>

### So, What Is the Story?

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS, I STILL don't know why these two notes survived. The survival of these two notes from the same sheet is even more remarkable when you realize that Kelly indicates just 17 notes of all types have been reported out of more than 205,000 issued (of which more than 22,000 were plain-back \$5 notes). Maybe it was just an amazing coincidence, but the very different condition of the notes, combined with the fact that the top and bottom selvage was retained, suggests that something purposeful occurred here. Table 1 lists some likely events that may have caused someone to save the bank notes.

Bond and Currency records at the National Archives indicate that \$5 sheet 19776 was issued to the bank on Wednesday, January 24, 1923. That shipment consisted of sheets numbered 19776 to 19860 and was the first shipment of \$5 notes to the bank for two months. The note clearly was not the first signed by Gragg or Hamilton, since each had been in his respective office for more than a year by the time the sheet was issued to the bank. Perhaps the sheet was overlooked and held in the bank's vault until immediately prior to the bank's closure in January 1924, when it was signed as a souvenir. Frankly, that possibility seems remote. By the time of the bank's closing, an additional 1,235 sheets of \$5 notes were issued to the bank, ending with number 21095—that would have been a more appropriate souvenir for the officers.

In scanning the *Wichita Eagle* for late January and early February 1923, about the only significant event reported was the 7th Annual Kansas National Livestock Exposition, hosted by Wichita during the week of January 22-26. Each day the newspaper discussed the prior

day's happenings and upcoming events; several reports mention Hamilton's participation. Although there is no specific mention that he awarded prizes, given Hamilton's long family interest in cattle, it is fun to speculate that sheet was given as a prize or souvenir at or shortly after the Expo. There seems to be no way to prove it, and if this isn't it, then I'm at a dead end.

Well, Larry, I guess I'll have to wait to hear from you to find out the rest of the story. I don't think my effort was a failure. Much of the romance of



National Bank notes lies in the fact that they were associated with real places and real people. The magic in that forlorn-looking note I purchased seven summers ago motivated me to find out a little more about the interesting career of Geo. H. Hamilton and his banks, and breathed a little life into an otherwise inert signature on a piece of paper. And maybe *that* is the story. ❖

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Wayne DeCesar of the National Archives for invaluable assistance with the various Comptroller of the Currency records. I also appreciate the help provided by Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, The Iroquois County Historical Society and the Wichita Public Library, each of which provided material or other assistance; Bob Cochran, who helped with xeroxing the notes; and Louise Grant, for her assistance during research and helpful suggestions on the text.

### Bibliography

- Comptroller of the Currency, *Annual Reports of the Comptroller of the Currency*. Various dates, 1870 to 1924. Washington, DC.
- Iroquois County Democrat*. Various dates, to 1912.
- Kelly, D. *National Banknotes*, 3rd ed. Oxford, OH: The Paper Money Institute, 1979.
- Kern, J.W. *Past and Present of Iroquois County, Illinois*. Chicago: J. Clark, 1907.
- Organization, Correspondence, Examination and Liquidation Files of the Comptroller of the Currency (various dates 1870 to 1924). National Archives, Washington, DC.
- Polk, Rand McNally and other Banker's Directories. Various dates, 1905 to 1932.
- Rose, J.A. *Blue Book of the State of Illinois*. Danville, IL: Illinois Printing Company, 1909 & 1910.
- Thomas, J. "The Financial Center of Kansas": *A History of the Fourth National Bank and Trust Company*. Wichita, KS: The Center for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management of Wichita State University, 1980.
- Watseka Republican*. Various dates, 1900 to 1912.
- Wichita Eagle*. Various dates, 1912 to 1932.
- Wichita City Directory*. Various dates, 1915 to 1927.



## "Will You Take a Check?"

**I**N THE LATE 1960s, THE CHASE MANHATTAN BANK created a display of "odd-ball" checks as part of an exhibit touring its many branches. Here are some of the more unusual checks in the display:

### • Grumpy Showed Him the Door

A dispute over a \$30 loan created a most unusual "check." In 1891 Eben Grumpy borrowed \$30 from John Sputter. When Grumpy was late repaying the loan, Sputter threatened to sue.

Grumpy took a door off its hinges and painted a check on it. The next time Sputter came to collect, Grumpy dropped the door out of a third-story window, nearly striking Sputter.

An Iowa court ruled the door was legal payment. (Can any of our Iowa members provide more information? A reenactment of the event indicates that the "check" was drawn on The Fifth National Bank of Iowa.)

### • The Shirt Off His Back

In Elmira, New York, a woman became exasperated at the persistent calls of a bill collector. She contacted a local newspaper and arranged to have a reporter present when she literally took a shirt off her husband's back and wrote a check on it, payable to the bill collector. The bank honored the check.

### • A Check Settled a Beef

In England some years ago, Albert Haddock had a serious dispute with the local tax collector. Haddock finally whitewashed a check for 26 pounds, 10 shillings, on the side of one of his cows and took it to the tax collector's office for payment.

The tax collector sued Haddock, but after much litigation, a court ruled that the check was legal. My sources don't say if or how the check was canceled.

### • Top Banana

The late comedian Phil Silvers is best remembered by my generation for his TV comedy series, *Sergeant Bilko*. He also had quite a career on the stage. Once, while in Pittsburgh on tour with the play *Top Banana*, Silvers wrote a check on a banana as a publicity stunt. A local bank cashed it.

### • Right on Target

A steel check with lettering applied by an arc welder was chosen as the winner of a contest in Cleveland. The check was accepted by a local bank, which then arranged to have it canceled by one of the bank's guards—with a submachine gun! ❖