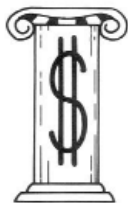




The National Currency Bank of New York



THE PAPER COLUMN

by Peter Huntoon

ONE OF THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER BANK NAMES ON A National Bank Note is The National Currency Bank. That particular name was used only by one bank, Charter #444 of New York City, and it only appeared on Original Series notes.

The first person to bring this bank to my attention was John Hickman decades ago. He was always hoping to handle one, claiming it to be the ultimate title on a National Bank Note.

Hickman wasn't the first to notice it for surely Albert Grinnell and every other serious collector of New York City banks had to have placed it at the top of their want lists, too. Certainly this was the case for Allen Mincho when he was chasing New York City notes many years ago before he left the law to become a full time currency dealer.

No notes have been reported from the bank.

I've been looking for decades for a proof from any plate used to print the notes for the bank. They don't exist in the holdings of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing certified proofs in the National Numismatic Collection at the Smithsonian. The Original Series plates used to print all the notes for the bank were made by the Continental and American Bank Note companies, not the BEP.

After chasing this phantom for years, I was more than willing to settle for a proof of one of the title blocks just to see what they looked like. I've looked in

vain in every title block specimen book I have ever run across, but admittedly, that number is small.

Discovery

I finally got lucky. Tom Conklin and I were visiting the Bureau of Engraving Historical Resource Center in December 2008, where his work was focused on U. S. Department of Agriculture food coupons and I was trying to run down anything I could find on the manufacture of Series of 1929 National Bank Note overprinting plates.

The woman assisting us provided an index that included some very early specimen books. A couple of them looked intriguing, and although being far from what I was looking for, I thought I had better have a look. One of the books turned out to be what looked like an early American Bank Note Company title block specimen book, probably turned over to the BEP by the company at the same time the national bank note dies and rolls were transferred to the BEP in 1875.

I hastily glanced through it and spotted a title block for The National Currency Bank. This totally unexpected find wasn't the usual \$5 Original title block that you occasionally see, but one used on the higher denomination plates. I couldn't believe my eyes! There was the first note-related object that I had ever seen from the bank other than entries in the National Currency and Bond Ledgers or other old records in the National Archives.

The \$50 Original Series specimen shown here is a mockup composed from that wonderful title block.

The National Currency Bank

The bank, organized in 1864, was a modest New York City firm located at 2 Wall Street on the corner of Broadway. It had resources that hovered about half a million dollars, and a circulation that held constant at \$90,000 until the bank was liquidated in 1876.

The bank was intimately allied with The First National Bank of the City of New York through interlocking ownership, with John Thompson and his sons Samuel and Frederick, being the principals.

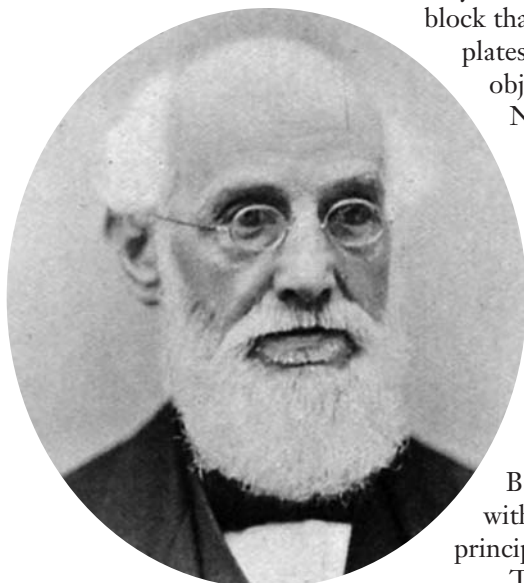
The primary objective for organizing the bank appears to have been to serve as an agency for the redemption of National Bank Notes. Consequently, the title of the bank reflected its business model.

The organizers were in the business of financing the organization of National Banks across the country in order to exploit the money that could be made from issuing National Bank Notes. This business was carried out primarily through The First National Bank of the City of New York.

The advertised businesses of the National Currency Bank included dealings in U. S. bonds, treasury notes, compounds, 3-percent certificates, specie, stamps, mutilated and broken currency, and exchange, besides the usual deposits and loans. It appears that the greatest source of revenue consisted of commissions earned from the spread in bonds and exchange, and the selling of U. S. revenue stamps which were handled for a modest premium. The tax stamps were those issued to raise money to pay down Civil War debt that were affixed to documents, including checks, deeds, etc.

The identity of The National Currency Bank was integrally tied to *Thompson's Bank Note and Commercial Reporter*, which among other things, listed counterfeits, quotes for specie, quotes for all sorts of domestic and international exchange, and quotes for bonds, etc. John Thompson began publishing the reporter in 1842, and it quickly achieved national status as the premier source for information on pre-Federal currency and counterfeits (Dillistin, 1949).

Various people were listed as publisher of the reporter over the years,



John Thompson was the founder of The First National Bank of the City of New York and The National Currency Bank of New York. He then went on to organize The Chase National Bank of the City of New York. His bank note reporter was the leading reporter of its era. Photo from Hardenbrook (1897).

some having an ownership interest in The National Currency Bank once it was organized. The quotes in the publication were those of the bank. The reporter sold for a dime in 1870, and ran to about 30 pages per issue. It seems to have been issued monthly at that time.

The National Currency Bank was liquidated in 1876, before any of the Original Series plates made for it were converted into Series of 1875 plates. Consequently it was only an Original Series issuer. The notes issued were from 5-5-5-5 and 10-10-20-50 sheets, it being one of only 17 banks in the country to use the latter.

One thousand of the high denomination sheets were sent to the bank between February 28, 1865, and January 20, 1866; 3,320 of the \$5s were sent between June 7, 1867, and March 24, 1875.

Only \$750 remained outstanding in 1910, from that \$156,400, according to the annual report of the Comptroller of the Currency for 1910. That was the last year the outstanding totals for the early liquidated banks were published.

Dillistin (1949, p. 92-93) researched the linkage between the organizers of The National Currency Bank and The First National Bank of the City of New York, and their later involvement in The Chase National Bank, which they chartered in 1877. The following is lifted directly from his work.

Shortly after the passage of The National Currency Act in 1863, The First National Bank of the City of New York (Charter No. 29) came into existence. While the name of John Thompson does not appear as one of the organizers, his two sons were original subscribers for a very substantial amount of the stock, and Samuel was its president for several years. Platt Adams, the publisher of Thompson's reporter for several years, and Charles Blondell, the publisher in 1867-1868, were also among the original subscribers to stock.

The National Currency Bank of New York was established in May, 1864, mainly as an agency for the redemption of National Bank Notes. While the name of John Thompson does not appear as one of the organizers, his two sons and his son in law, Francis G. Adams, were original subscribers for 97 per cent of the stock and Frederick F. Thompson was its president for several years.

In 1876, the Thompsons, having previously disposed of their interests in The First National Bank of the City of New York, decided to liquidate The National Currency Bank of New York, it not having been a profitable organization. In reporting this fact, a contemporary writer among other comments made the terse statement, "*Sic transit gloria* -- Thompson No. 2." This bit of sarcasm on the part of that writer was no doubt an inference that the "glory" of the Thompsons in the banking business was about to pass away forever, they having disposed of their interests in The First National Bank and being about to place The National Currency Bank in liquidation.

National Currency Bank,
No. 2 WALL STREET, Corner of Broadway,
NEW YORK.

DEPOSITS RECEIVED AND ACCOUNTS KEPT AS FAVORABLY
AS BY ANY OTHER BANK.

INTEREST ALLOWED ON BALANCES BY AGREEMENT.

COLLECTIONS ON ALL POINTS, WITH PROMPT RETURNS.

All kinds of First-class Securities Bought and Sold,
the same as by Private Bankers.

This Bank unites the advantages of the perfect SAFETY OF ITS FUNDS, enforced by the National Banking Law, and the facility of doing general business for its Customers, which is insured by the long experience of its officers as Private Bankers.

F. F. THOMPSON, President.
 (Formerly of THOMPSON BROTHERS, Bankers, New York.)

F. GRANGER ADAMS, Vice-President.
 (Formerly F. G. ADAMS, Banker, Chicago, Ill.)

J. H. L. MORFORD, Cashier.

PROMPT IN BUSINESS AND SAFE IN MANAGEMENT.

Display ad for The National Currency Bank of New York from *Homans' Merchants and Bankers Almanac* (1871).

This however, was not the case; the glory of the Thompsons did not pass. In September, 1877, John Thompson then seventy five years old, his son Samuel, his son in law Francis G. Adams, Lewis E. Ranson, a drug importer in New York City, and Isaac W. White, a dry goods merchant of Poughkeepsie, became the sole original shareholders and the first board of directors of The Chase National Bank of the City of New York. Samuel C. Thompson was that bank's first president and served in that capacity until his death in 1884, at which time his father, then about eighty one years old, succeeded him. John Thompson served as president about two years and returned to the vice presidency when Henry W. Cannon became president.

[Cannon had served as Comptroller of the Currency from May 12, 1884 to February 2, 1886; next as vice president of the National Bank of the Republic of New York; after which he and a group of financiers purchased control of The Chase National Bank] (Kane, 1922).

John Thompson died on April 19, 1891, at the age of eighty eight, after a varied and interesting career, his life having spanned a most important period in American history. He was an outstanding personality in his field and without doubt the most conservative and most prominent of all the publishers of bank note reporters. Hoyt Sherman, a contemporary of John Thompson and * * * a prominent banker in Iowa, cited Thompson's reporter as "the standard authority."

While John Thompson was at times subjected to a certain

We have a small order for suspended National Bank notes, and are paying 1½ per ct. premium for notes on the following banks;

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| First | National Bank, Attica N. Y. |
| First | " Medina, N. Y |
| First | Bethel, Conn. |
| First | N. Orleans, La |
| First | Selma, Ala. |
| First | Carondelet, Mo |
| First | Columbia, Mo |
| First | Keokuk, Iowa. |
| First | Rockford, Ill. |
| Venango | Franklin, Pa. |
| Tennessee | Memphis, Tenn. |
| Merchants' | Washington, D. C. |
| Croton | New York. |
| Farmers' | Waukesha, Wis |
| Farm. & Citizens' | Brooklyn, N Y. |
| National Unadilla Bank, | Unadilla, N.Y |
| Nat. Bank of Vicksburg, | Miss. |
| First Nat. Bk of Nevada, | Austin, Nev. |

Item from page 1 of the June 1, 1870, *Thompson's Bank Note Reporter* that reveals why notes from some of the earliest failed and liquidated national banks have never turned up or are exceedingly rare. A premium of 1.5% for a \$5 note was 7.5 cents. Finding a couple of them would buy a cashier a modest lunch in those days. Who was paying the premium for these redemptions is unknown because there was no provision for it in the National Banking Act.

amount of criticism, as were practically all such publishers, there were more favorable comments by contemporary writers with respect to him than of any other publisher. He was an American of the highest type, and his full and abundant life was one of outstanding service to the banking fraternity.

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