

Pat Lyon at the Forge

by Terry A. Bryan

The blacksmith was an important member of every community from ancient times. Gods in many cultures were identified with forging, thunder, fire or lightning. Techniques used in iron foundry were derived from earlier copper, gold and bronze workings. There is evidence of iron forming back to 1500 B.C. The second most famous American blacksmith was Patrick Lyon (1769-1829). Admittedly, John Deere became more famous. Lyon's fame originated with riveting news of a huge bank robbery, then a landmark court case, and finally an admired oil portrait. Dramatization of his story appeared on stage in 1858. Lyon rose from ordinary workingman to wealthy Philadelphia businessman, but he never presumed to be a "gentleman". His outlook remained influenced by his humble beginning and by his ill-treatment by Philadelphia's upper crust.

Engraving companies and bankers sought images to grace their currency. Famous news items and paintings were rendered into engraved work for printing reproduction. Proudful representations of ships and railroads on local money would suggest the vigorous commerce of a town. Blacksmith images became one of the most common vignettes on United States Obsolete Currency. The smith was recognizable by all, and he represented business vitality, labor and craftsmanship. Many different engraved vignettes of blacksmiths and farriers are found.

Several engravers copied John B. Neagle's life-sized portrait of blacksmith Pat Lyon, and the image was variously re-worked or improved. There were many uses of this portrait on currency, scrip and checks from about 1832 onwards. Roger Durand attributes one Lyon vignette to the artist's son, engraver John B. Neagle, Junior.

The use of his image on currency is not the only connection Pat Lyon has to numismatics. People in his story figure into many aspects of money history.

Artist John Neagle (1796-1865) was born in Boston. Early talent was recognized, and he studied under several reputed artists of his time. Most of his life was spent as a portrait artist in Philadelphia. He married a (step-) daughter of portrait artist, Thomas Sully (1783-1872). [Prolific vignette designer Felix Octavius Carr Darley (1822-1888) married another of Sully's daughters.]

Neagle made two business trips with his friend, James Barton Longacre (1794-1869), also a portraitist and later chief engraver of the U.S. Mint for 23 years. Longacre designed several U.S. coins, among them the Indian Head Cent.

Neagle was gaining a reputation when businessman Pat Lyon commissioned a portrait in 1825. Lyon was emphatic in his requirements:

"I wish you, sir, to paint me at full length, the size of life, representing me at the smithery, with my bellows-blower, hammers, and all the et-ceteras of the shop around me. I have no desire to be represented in

the picture as a gentleman - to which character I have no pretension. I want you to paint me at work at my anvil, with my sleeves rolled up and a leather apron on." - Patrick Lyon



John Neagle's portrait *Pat Lyon at the Forge* gained national fame. Lyon sold this copy in Boston and had a second painted.

Presumably, Lyon also specified that his late-lamented apprentice appear in the picture. The site of Lyon's imprisonment in 1798 was also added to the composition. The instructions were so rigid that Neagle went to a blacksmith shop to measure the tools for accuracy. Lyon and the artist were so busy during this time, that Neagle had trouble scheduling sittings, and the job extended into January, 1827. The large portrait (93"x68") caused a sensation. Lyon's personal picture now resides at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts in Philadelphia, and he sold the earlier version, now at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The Boston painting is considered more finely painted, but the Philadelphia version has more detail and vividness.

The painting insured further lucrative commissions from substantial citizens, and Neagle achieved success. One aspect of public acclaim was the unique setting of a working man in ordinary

clothes. This is considered a first in American portraiture. People wealthy enough to afford a painter usually flaunted their success by their fine dress and surrounded by symbols of status. The laborer celebrated in a painting was a new concept for the time, and the public was astonished. The man and the picture somehow typified the American Work Ethic, such as earlier espoused by the likes of Ben Franklin.

Patrick Lyon was born in London about 1769 and immigrated about age 25 in 1793. He gained a reputation as a mature expert workman and within 5 years had a shop with four or five apprentices. It is known that he taught his helpers basic math and geometry, and apparently treated them well. The Philadelphia portrait includes a diagram of Pythagoras' Theorem, perhaps a reference to Masonic membership, perhaps to his reliance on science over the unpredictability of people, or to his teaching of apprentices. One apprentice appears prominently in Lyon's story.

Another major facet of the tale involves yellow fever. After coming to America, both Lyon's wife and a daughter died of the terrible infection. The periodic epidemics continued to influence Pat Lyon's life.

The Bank of Pennsylvania was founded in 1793, and closed during the Panic of 1857 due to gross mismanagement. Their first location was in a Masonic Hall, possibly a converted Philadelphia dwelling. Pat Lyon contracted to build iron doors for the "book vault". The bankers supplied locks that he found to be questionable. A few months later, someone attempted to break in. Doubts about the security of the location influenced the decision to seek better quarters. The next summer's fever season coincided with the Bank's move. A vacancy occurred at the more prestigious Carpenters' Hall, when the [First] Bank of the United States shifted to their new building in 1797.

Carpenters' Hall was built in 1775, and it is still in the hands of its original owners, the Carpenters Company of the City and County of Philadelphia. The



Philadelphia's Carpenters' Hall was the home of many distinguished tenants since 1774.

first Continental Congress met in the unfinished hall in 1774. The building was occupied by the British in 1777, and it served as a hospital for both sides during the Revolution. Ben Franklin's Library Company and the American

Philosophical Society were tenants. The Bank of North America and both the First and Second Banks of the United States rented there. It was briefly the U.S. Customs Office for Philadelphia. The new location suited the Bank of Pennsylvania better. However, the bankers were unwise to economize on security. They hired Pat Lyon to alter the old iron doors of the "book vault" to fit the cash vault of the new location. The bank's ledgers were kept in a book vault, mainly to guard against fire. Initially, cash was kept in an iron chest. One lock recycled on the old doors secured the street door of the first location. The other lock was similar to a brass latch on a ship's cabin. Lyon agreed to alter the doors, but again he warned the supervising bank carpenter that the locks were not adequate security for the money vault. Later, a witness testified that newer locks were obtained, but Pat warned that "any ironmonger" could supply keys for these cheap devices.

Lyon finished the doors in his shop while being urged to hurry the installation. This was August of 1798...prime Yellow Fever Season.

Yellow fever is caused by a virus spread largely by mosquitos. Today it is controlled by vaccination and by mosquito control measures. The disease is thought to have been brought from Africa by the slave trade. Outbreaks occurred in the 1600s. In 1793, it is estimated that 9-10% of Philadelphia's population died. Terrible fevers, headache and chills were followed by liver and kidney failure. Catastrophic bleeding was caused by deficiency of clotting factors. Primitive medical intervention, such as bloodletting, made it worse. It was truly horrible, and of course, not understood at the time. The outbreak in Philadelphia in 1798 killed an estimated 1,300 people. Summers in plague areas were the time when cities were deserted by those who could afford to leave.

Pat Lyon and his apprentice, James (Jamie)



McGinley, age 19, a "favorite of him" got the work done and sped to the docks to secure transport out of town. They sailed down the Delaware River on Wednesday, August 29, 1798. On Thursday, young Jamie complained of illness. The next day, he was so weak that he almost fell overboard. The sloop landed at the mouth of the Broadkill River

in Delaware on Friday. Pat Lyon took the boy to Cornelius Fleetwood's tavern a few miles inland and went the 7 miles to Lewestown [Lewes, Delaware] for help. He returned to find Jamie worse, and he died September 4 after two doctors had consulted. Lyon obtained a coffin and arranged to bury him in a nearby plantation graveyard. Lyon did not have enough cash on hand to pay the innkeeper and Jamie's expenses, so he left his watch as security. What little cash he had was used to pay for a room in Lewes. During the next week, Delaware River pilots and people fleeing Philadelphia brought news. Lyon learned of the huge robbery of the Bank of Philadelphia, and he was sought as a suspect.

[Lewes, Delaware has some numismatic connections. The iconic Cape Henlopen Lighthouse was featured on Pennsylvania Colonial Currency, on a bank note vignette, and on numerous medals. Two months before Lyon's adventure, the British brig-sloop HMS (De)Braak capsized off shore. Lyon met the British Captain whose ship was attempting salvage of the wreck. The rumor of great treasure persisted until 1986 when major salvage was accomplished. Quite a few coins were recovered, but no great gold fortune. Archaeological treasure was realized from the quantity of ordinary goods preserved. Director Peter Weir of the movie *Master and Commander* with Russell Crowe, insisted on absolute authenticity, and the DeBraak artifacts were examined for costuming and props.]

On September 1, 1798, the Bank of Pennsylvania was found to have been robbed overnight. Philadelphia and the nation were shocked by the amount taken, some \$162,821.61 in bank notes and specie. There was little damage done to doors and locks, and employees were immediately suspected. The Bank notified area banks and advertised a \$1,000 reward nationally.

The bank notes that were stolen were typical for the time. Contemporary counterfeits exist. Fancy engraved words were printed from copper plates. Any vignettes would have been only the simplest designs. Their appearance was elegant, but unadorned.

Pat Lyon detailed his actions in a biographical tract and in later court testimony. He was anxious to appear at home to answer any suspicions about his part in the robbery. Heading to Philadelphia by boat, on Thursday, September 20, he landed at the Brandywine River, found yellow fever active and liveries and inns closed. Boats were not moving north, and he had no alternative but to walk to Philadelphia. He made an

appointment to meet a magistrate the next day, September 21, 1798. Lyon's acquaintance, the Philadelphia alderman John C. Stocker was also a member of the Board of the Bank and a Pennsylvania legislator. Lyon related suspicions about the Bank's carpenter who had brought a stranger around to his shop during the door alterations. Next day, Stocker called in the Bank President and Cashier from their country places to the "sickly" town. He also lined up a Constable to arrest Lyon.

Lyon was taken immediately to Walnut Street Prison, a foul jail, locked into a solitary cell with no bed and with bars so close together that he could not receive food and water in the usual way. He was prohibited visits by friends, and he had no way to get money to better his situation in jail. While he was there many prisoners died of yellow fever. The death toll in Philadelphia in 1798 was almost as bad as in 1793.

Walnut Street Prison was built in 1773, and lasted for over 60 years at 6th and Walnut Streets in Philadelphia. A 1790 addition was the first penitentiary in the country. In 1793, the first manned balloon flight took off from the courtyard. In the large crowd were George Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe. The prison building was featured on the reverse of Pennsylvania Colonial Currency dated April 10, 1775.



Pennsylvania Colonial Notes of April 10, 1775 featured the Walnut Street Jail on the reverse.

The origin of the suspicion that fell on Lyon was his possession of the vault doors and locks. In November, another man was caught and confessed to the robbery. He had visited Lyon's shop while the iron doors were there, and he hung around the Bank with one of the porters. The Bank porter was an accomplice. The Bank was already shorthanded with the yellow fever death of another porter. With watchmen outside, the porter slept in the bank. Later testimony revealed that he periodically held the keys to the vault. He avoided capture and punishment by dying of yellow fever shortly after the robbery.

The bankers failed to question the trusted bank employee who had brought the stranger to Lyon's shop. The stranger and the deceased Bank porter were the robbers, but Lyon was still not let out of jail. The perps were discovered when one made large deposits in the three city banks, *including the Bank of Pennsylvania where the money was stolen*. This mastermind also lent out money in his mother's name. While his buddy was on his fever deathbed, the other Prince of Thieves took away his share. The Bank recovered \$161,979.53, including the mother's assets. With restitution and confession, the Governor pardoned the robber. The robbers never spent a day in jail, and Pat Lyon languished for a few more weeks before his bail was lowered enough for friends to pay it. Lyon's total jail time was a miserable 85 days in a solitary 4'x12' cell most of the time.

The Mayor's alderman's court heard the charges and failed to return an indictment for theft on January 7, 1799. Prosecutors spoke on abetting. The alderman again refused to indict. The third try was "accessory after the fact" which went to the Grand Inquest (Jury) with no findings. The bankers were determined to implicate Lyon, no matter what the evidence. Testimony reiterated at length the suspicions without evidence; this was all repeated in the subsequent lawsuit. Lyon's own coherent story, and the proceedings of his later lawsuit were widely distributed when published.

Pennsylvania Chief Justice Tilghman later spoke to the issues: "defendants had not shown probable cause, but alleged that they suspected Lyon for his ingenuity; which doctrine, if admitted in a court of law, would encourage stupidity and punish genius."

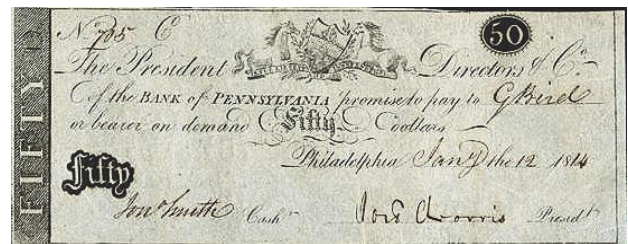
The Mayor's Court was a distinguished crew: Mayor Wharton (1757-1854) was a war veteran, and held the longest term ever as Mayor of Philadelphia. Alderman Michael Hillegas (1729-1804) was the first Treasurer of the United States, and a charter stockholder of the Bank of Pennsylvania. He is pictured on the 1907 and 1922 Ten Dollar Gold Certificates. Alderman/architect Gunning Bedford (1720-1802) had a son who signed the Constitution and signed Continental Currency in 1778.

Pat Lyon survived his ordeal, but his business and physique suffered greatly. Later testimony revealed that the Philadelphia Bank (1803—) decided not to hire him for vault work. Business was revived by manufacturing of elegant fire pumpers. Gangs of firemen could man the levers to send water three stories high. About 12 of Lyon's heavy fire wagons

still exist. He is credited with improvements in the mechanism. As he was picking up the pieces, he had time to write an account of his experience.

In March of 1801 Pat Lyon brought suit against the bankers and magistrates who engineered his arrest and poisoned his reputation. The suit alleged malicious prosecution, which was an unfamiliar issue in U.S. courts. Again, the players were among the elite class.

Samuel Mickle Fox (1763-1808) and Jonathan Smith were President and Cashier of the Bank of Pennsylvania. John C. Stocker, magistrate, Bank Board member, consigned Lyon to jail. He was a Pennsylvania Legislator at the time. John Haines was High Constable of the City. It was alleged that his interest in the arrest was the reward. These men insisted on Lyon's guilt in the face of all evidence to the contrary. Presumably, the bank notes that were stolen had Fox's and Smith's signatures.



Jonathan Smith was still cashier of the Bank of Pennsylvania when this later design was issued. Pictured is a contemporary counterfeit that typifies the plain style of early Obsolete Notes. (Image courtesy Heritage Auctions).

Defense lawyers were: Jared Ingersoll (1749-1822), ex-Continental Congress, a former Pennsylvania Attorney General, and he argued the first two cases ever to appear before the U.S. Supreme Court. William Lewis was one of the charter members of the 1802 Philadelphia Bar Association.

The Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania were distinguished senior men from backgrounds in British law. Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1748-1816) founded the University of Pittsburgh.

Patrick Lyon's attorneys were similarly qualified: Alexander James Dallas (1759-1817) had been Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, later was Madison's Secretary of the Treasury, created the Second Bank of the United States, and briefly held simultaneous offices of Secretary of State and War. Dallas' portrait appears on the \$1,000 U.S. Treasury Note of 1847. Joseph Hopkinson (1770-1842) was the son of signer of the Declaration and of Pennsylvania Colonial Currency. Hopkinson wrote "Hail

Columbia” and was in the U.S. Congress at the time of the trial. Jonathan W. Condry served on the Philadelphia Common Council with Hopkinson, was a Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives and the son of a famous nautical instrument maker.

Lyon’s all-star lawyer lineup eventually produced a large settlement from the defendants. \$9,000.00 was a huge amount, talked about across the country. It was the first litigation of its kind in United States courts.

Success returned to Lyon in the coming years. He married Catherine. Census figures show a number of step-children in a large household. Lyon owned income-producing properties in several wards of Philadelphia, and his manufacturing facilities turned out fire engines, machines and commissioned ironwork.

Late in life, he had the famous portrait painted, posing over a protracted period of time, due to his



Several versions of the popular image of Pat Lyon were used under the imprint of successive companies.

many business activities. It was hard to make him sit still. He died at age 60 in 1829 and is buried in Philadelphia. His portrait broke new ground in raising the workingman to a position of respect in the American consciousness. The bank note usages of Lyon’s portrait are many. The engraved dies were in the hands of several related companies. One vignette is much like the painting, but the view outside the shop is a board fence and a railroad viaduct. This view is found cropped into an oval and a rectangle. Another cropped picture is from a different die. A refinement of the first oval is found on later notes. [The Confederate #20 T-19 blacksmith vignette is sometimes mis-identified as Pat Lyon.] Numerous cartoonish lithographic reproductions were also done for scrip and checks.



The early engraved version of the famous painting expanded the scene at the sides. A board fence and elevated train replaced the Walnut St. Jail in the original.

Notes have been found with the following imprints: [all dates from Hessler]

Charles Toppan	
1829-1834 (portrait is on his ad sheet)	
Draper, Toppan, Longacre	1835-1839
Draper, Toppan	1839-1844
Draper, Underwood	1828-1833
Draper, Underwood, Spencer	1833-1835
Underwood, Bald, Spencer	1835-1837
Underwood, Bald, Spencer, Hufty	1837-1843
Danforth, Underwood	1839-1840
Danforth, Hufty	1847-1850

Bald, Spencer, Hufty, Danforth	1843-1844
Danforth, Spencer, Hufty	1845-1847
Danforth, Bald, Spencer, Hufty	1843-1844
Spencer, Hufty, Danforth	1844-1847
(Roger Durand attributed this engraving to John B. Neagle, Jr (1801-1866).	
Danforth, Bald	1850-1852
Toppan, Carpenter & Co.	1852-1858
(none found, but cited in print)	
American Bank Note Company	1858-present

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Announcing the H. G. "Bill" Corbin Silent Auction of Past issues of the SPMC journal, Paper Money

The Society of Paper Money has received a donation of back SPMC Journals. The donation was made by Sue Corbin, wife of Bill Corbin (1928-2011), SPMC Member#6. Mike Gibson, a former member of SPMC and lifelong friend of Bill and Sue Corbin was instrumental in contacting the SPMC and delivering this material. We are selling these via Silent Auction, by volume (year). This is a great opportunity for you to add to your library while benefitting the SPMC.

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