

THE SECOND NATIONAL BANK OF CHESTERTOWN, MD., CHARTER #4327

by J. Fred Maples

The bank was chartered in May 1890 with James A. Pearce, president, and W. Bradford Copper, cashier. While another national bank existed in Chestertown at that time, it was simply called The National Bank of Chestertown, not First National. So despite there being no First National, founders of this bank felt the name Second National was appropriate. This bank opened as a tenant in the town's Masonic Temple, before erecting its own High Street building early in 1891. This bank initially deposited \$12,500 in bonds, and issued 90% of those bonds in \$50 and \$100 national currency Brown Backs. Several years later the bank purchased additional bonds and increased its circulation to \$50,000.

This bank prospered and as featured in the *Chestertown Transcript* in 1891: "The Second National Bank of Chestertown has entered upon its second year. The first year has been a most successful and satisfactory one, and the bank today is in a more flourishing condition than at any time since its organization one year ago, its discounts amounting to \$125,000 and deposits \$122,454." The bank's success was largely based on its officers and directors. President Pearce, son of a U.S. senator, was a respected lawyer, state's attorney, appeals court judge, church law authority, school board commissioner, and college teacher. Copper, son of a farmer and overseer of the poor, was a state senator, school board commissioner, orphan's court judge, county political leader, and former store clerk.

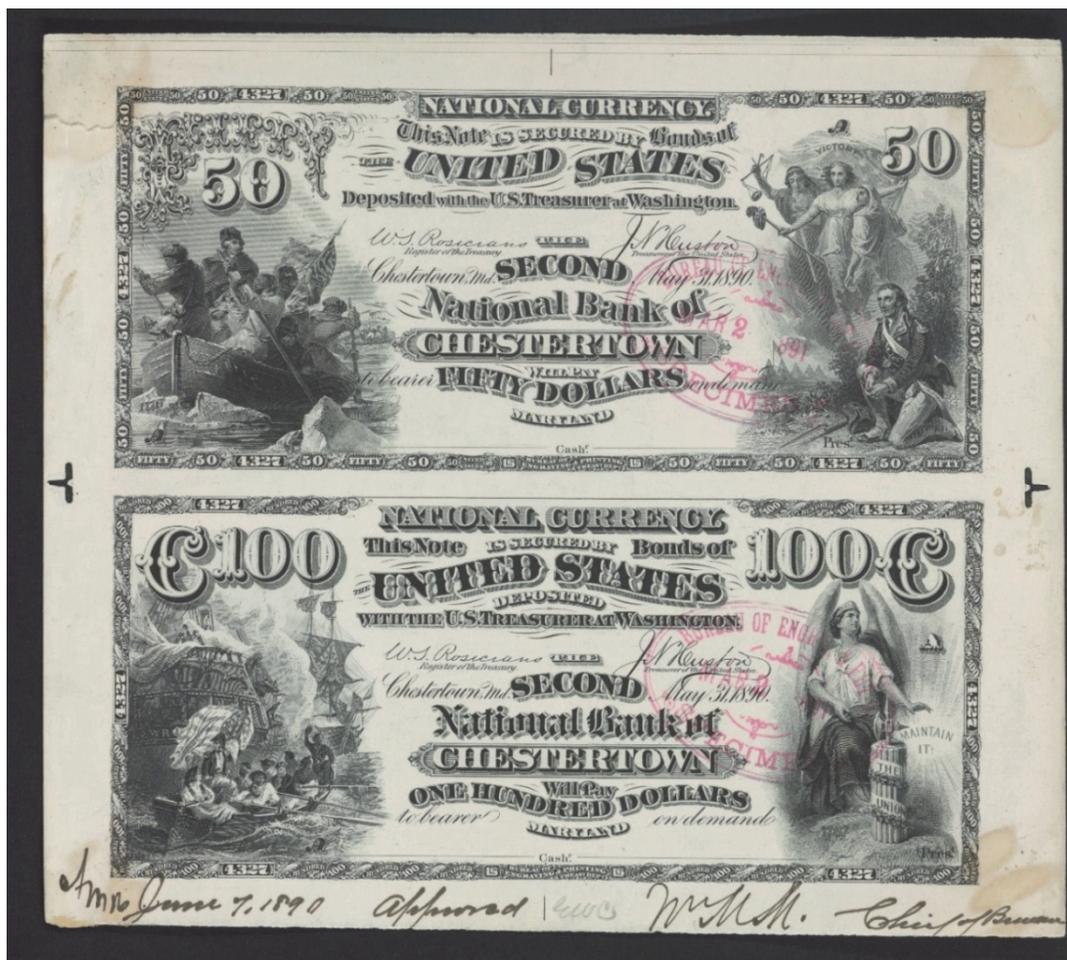


Figure 1: \$50 and \$100 1882 Brown Back proof, approved June 7, 1890. The Second National Bank of Chestertown, Md. operated from 1890 to 1910. This bank issued 914 sheets of \$50 and \$100 1882 Brown Backs between 1890 and 1909. Later this bank issued 264 sheets of \$50 and \$100 1882 Date Backs.

Oddly the bank's directors let its charter expire in 1910, and it was immediately succeeded as The Third National Bank (#9744) with the same officers. Chestertown finally got its out-of-order "First National" in 1933 when the Third National was succeeded by The First National Bank (#13798).

Proof Sheet

While there are no known surviving notes from this bank, Figure 1 shows a wonderful \$50 and \$100 1882 Brown Back proof from the Smithsonian National Numismatic Collection. The layouts of \$50 and \$100 1882 Brown Backs are stunning in every way. Sheets from this plate included just two notes -- a single \$50 and a \$100. The \$50 includes a beautiful vignette on its left called "Washington Crossing the Delaware", engraved by Alfred Jones after the 1851 painting by Emmanuel Leutze. This Revolutionary War scene shows Washington and his men, late in 1776, while crossing the dangerous Delaware River through drifting ice to reach the New Jersey shore. The \$50's right side shows "Washington at Prayer", with three goddesses and a banner inscribed VICTORY above them, which was engraved by Luigi Delnoce, who reportedly used his three daughters as models.

The \$100 features an equally stunning vignette named "Commodore Perry's Victory on Lake Champlain", which depicts Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry leaving his flagship, the *Lawrence*, during the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813. On the \$100's right is an angelic depiction of Liberty, seated by a bundle of rods representing the union of states, along with the message "MAINTAIN IT!" burst in sunlight. Finally note the handwritten notations in the bottom selva, which defines the plate's certification on June 7, 1890 by William M. Meredith, initialed as "Wm M M", as chief of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

Bureau Chief

William Morton Meredith was born in 1835 in Centreville, Indiana, the son of Samuel C. Meredith and his wife Margaret. Meredith attended a year in college, but left school to work in his father's printing office. Meredith later worked at the *Indianapolis Journal* newspaper. Meredith served in the Union Army during the Civil War under the command of future president Benjamin Harrison, and as Indiana's state commissary-general -- a military post. After the war, Meredith worked as a printer in several cities, becoming foreman at newspapers in Indianapolis and St. Louis. He later worked at the Western Bank Note Company in Chicago as superintendent of plate printing. Meredith was appointed Chief of the Bureau in 1889 largely through his past association with Harrison. After leaving the Bureau in 1893, he returned to the Western Bank Note Company. In 1900 Meredith was reappointed Chief of the Bureau -- this time by President McKinley -- which made him the only person to hold the top position twice. He left the Bureau in 1906, assuming another position within the Treasury Department, where he remained until he died of pneumonia in 1917.

Chestertown History

This bank operated in Chestertown, Md., which is a historic town on the Chester River, in Kent County. Chestertown took its name from the river, which took its name from the walled cathedral city of Chester, England. Chestertown was established as a colonial port in 1706 under the British Act for the Advancement of Trade and the Erection of Ports and Towns. The Act spurred town growth and diversification by exempting skilled craftsmen from taxes for four years if they moved into the town. By the mid-18th century Chestertown was Maryland's second leading port, only trailing Annapolis. A growing merchant class brought riches to the town, which was reflected in the many brick mansions and townhouses that rose along the waterfront. During the Revolutionary War period, the most traveled highway between the north and south went through Chestertown, with George Washington making eight known visits between 1756 and 1793. Interestingly from the 1790 census, Chestertown was the geographical center of population of the United States. Chestertown is second to Annapolis in its number of 18th century homes, and known for the Chestertown Tea Party Festival, which celebrates its colonial heritage with a re-enactment of the legendary protest of May 1774.