

The Creation of the First Copper Penny

Appearing in the *Columbian Centinel* of June 20, 1792.

Abstract

On Page 1:

An Act to Provide For a Copper Coinage

"That the director of the mint...be authorized to contract for and purchase a quantity of copper, not exceeding one hundred and fifty tons...to be coined at the mint into cents and half-cents...and be paid into the treasury of the United States, thence to issue into circulation."

"The Act also stipulates that "no copper coins or pieces whatsoever except the said cents and half-cents, shall pass current as money, or shall be paid, or offered to be paid or received in payment for any debt, demand, claims, matter or thing whatsoever."

Click on the image to see an enlargement

The Act warns that all other copper coins used in payment will be forfeited, and those involved fined ten dollars.

The Act is signed in script type by G. Washington on May 8, 1792.

This legislation resulted in the birth of the copper penny, from which descends our present one cent piece — in all its various and sundry permutations over the course of 200 years.

Columbian Centinel.

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20, 1792.

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LAWs of the UNITED STATES.

PUBLISHED

By Authority.

CONGRESS of the UNITED STATES: AT THE FIRST SESSION.

Began and held at the City of Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania, on Monday the twenty-fourth of October, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two.

An ACT to provide for a COPPER COINAGE.

BE it enacted by the SENATE and HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Director of the mint, with the approbation of the President of the United States, be authorized to contract for and purchase a quantity of copper, not exceeding one hundred and fifty tons, and that the said Director, as soon as the needed preparations shall be made, cause the copper by him purchased to be coined at the mint into cents and half cents, pursuant to "the act establishing a mint, and regulating the coins of the United States;" and that the said cents and half cents, as they shall be coined, be paid into the treasury of the United States, thence to issue into circulation.

And be it further enacted, That after the expiration of six calendar months from the time when there shall have been paid into the treasury by the said Director, in cents and half cents, a sum not less than fifty thousand dollars, which time shall forthwith be announced by the Director in at least two gazettes or newspapers, published at the seat of the government of the United States, for the time being, no cop, or coins or pieces whatsoever, except the said cents and half cents, shall pass current as money, or shall be paid, or offered to be paid or received in payment for any debt, demand, claim, matter of thing whatsoever; and all copper coins or pieces, except the said cents and half cents, which shall be paid or offered to be paid or received in payment contrary to the prohibition aforesaid, shall be forfeited, and every person by whom any of them shall have been so paid or offered to be paid, or received in payment, shall also forfeit the sum of ten dollars, and the said forfeiture and penalty shall and may be recovered with costs of suit for the benefit of any person or persons by whom information of the incurring thereof shall have been given.

JONATHAN TRUMBULL, Speaker of the House of Representatives.
RICHARD HENRY LEE, President pro tempore of the Senate.
Approved, May eighth, 1792.

G. Washington,

President of the United States.

Deposited among the rolls in the office of the Secretary of State.

TH: JEFFERSON, Secretary of State.

An ACT to compensate the Services of the late Colonel GEORGE GIBSON.

BE it enacted by the SENATE and HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That there be allowed and paid to the executors or administrators of the late Colonel George Gibson or to their attorney or attorneys legally appointed and authorized to receive the same for the use and benefit of his heirs, the sum of one thousand dollars for extraordinary services by him rendered to the United States during the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-six.

JONATHAN TRUMBULL, Speaker of the House of Representatives.
RICHARD HENRY LEE, President

MISCELLANY.

For the COLUMBIAN CENTINEL, Mr. RUSSELL,

THE writer who signs himself a "Retailer of Wine" in the paper of Friday last, is more likely to be a "Breder of Wine" than a retailer; and to be more afraid of the Hydrometer than the Inspecting Officer. An honest man would not be unwilling to give information to the proper officer, of the quantity of any article, which the laws of his country should require to be known;—but a dishonest one, one who wished to monopolize an article, or to deceive his creditors, would wish to conceal his lack of property, even from that officer. We may therefore judge of the character of Mr. Worcester county Retailer.

As to the alarming consequences to trade—the infringement on liberty, &c. of which he so pathetically anticipates, an enlightened publick must laugh at such a nonfensical cant. All the law requires is a return of certain articles on hand, that they may be exempted from the additional duty—and the EXCISE LAW of Massachusetts, which took place in May, 1790, not only required such return, but that it should be on oath—and yet not one of those frightful spectacles, predicted by "The Retailer" appeared—and Liberty and honest trading were as secure as before.

AN EXCISE PAYER.

June 18, 1792.

MR. RUSSELL, THE writers of the piece in a late CENTINEL, signed "The Aggrieved," could not help noticing the avidity with which Capt. W. under the signature of "One of the (still named) Prussian Bluts," caught at an error of date, which escaped in copying that piece. The circumstance, in itself, was trivial, but the Captain, like a drowning man, was glad to catch at any thing.

Some severe things might be said of Capt. W's conduct, on several occasions—But severity is not the wish of the writers of this piece. Their object has been, and is, to acquaint their fellow-citizens of his publick conduct on the 14th of May—and they will not, unless impelled thereto by the Captain's abuse, trouble the publick more on the subject—but conclude with saying, that if ever Capt. W. can reconcile his conduct on that day, to his feelings or principles (if he has any) as an Officer or a Man, they must be more callous than they are generally supposed to be—and that is saying a great deal.

THE (anc) AGGRIEVED.

Foreign Intelligence.

SWEDEN.

STOCKHOLM, W^e have not yet seen APRIL 3. any authentic list of those who are taken up or supposed to be concerned in the plot of the late regicide; they are however, said to be 28 in number, four of whom the assassin himself owned as accomplices; eight lay under violent suspicion, but have not yet confessed anything; one, poisoned himself;—and, lastly, 14 were arraigned on suspicion, of whom five are since released.

The Queen of Sweden is very ill. The deceased King not long before his death desired that the conspirators might be pardoned, and the assassin himself be as mildly punished as the law would admit of.

It is said, that *Askerstrom* had attempted to starve himself to death, but that he had been forced to take nourishment.

All the inhabitants of Stockholm has been forbid to have any gunpowder in their houses, or to sell any.

Chancellor of State and of Court. I preferred addressing myself to him, because I was sure, by his means, of introducing whatever I chose to the knowledge of the Sovereign.

"I said every thing to the Vice-Chancellor which could produce a definitive explanation, such as you wished. I represented to him how much our uneasiness increased every day, upon observing the hostile preparations directed against us.

[M. Noailles, after some similar observations, concluded his address to Count Cobenzel by saying, that he had received orders to demand a declaration by which the Court of Vienna should renounce its armaments and coalition; and to announce, that, in default of this declaration, the French King will consider himself to be in a state of war with Austria, in which he would be supported by the whole nation, who wish only for an immediate decision.]

"Count Cobenzel undertook to justify his Court from the hostile views imputed to it, and contended, that the reinforcements sent to *Brissaw* were for the preservation of order. I observed, that so many precautions, after the concert that was known to us, justified our alarms. I insisted especially upon the conclusion of this concert to contrary to what we might expect from an ally.

"The reply of Count Cobenzel confirmed me in my former opinion, that his court did not wish to attack us, but would make requisitions, which it would be difficult to avoid without a war. He said, that the concert was no longer personally to the King of Hungary; that he could not withdraw himself, but with other courts; and that this concert would continue until what remained to be settled with France was brought to a conclusion. He specified to me three points.

1. "That satisfaction should be given to the Princes possessed in *Africa*.

2. "That satisfaction should be given to the Pope for the county of *Avignon*.

3. "That the neighbouring powers shall have no reason for the apprehensions, which arise from the present weakness of the internal government of France.

"I asked Count Cobenzel, if, for answer to the representations which I had made him, I might say, that his Court adhered to the official note of the 10th of March. The Minister, perceiving himself surrounded by the circle which I had drawn, said, that he would take directions of his Majesty, and inform me of what he should be ordered to say.

"M. de *Bischoffwerder* set out this day upon his return to *Berlin*. He would have begun his journey sooner, but that he waited for a circular letter, which will be addressed to the *catholick* Courts, and probably to the States of the Empire, as *Co-States*, demanding from each the assistance that they have proposed to give, either in money or men, in case of war.

"This, I am informed, was the motive of his delay, but I have no certainty upon the subject.

"M. de *Bischoffwerder* will stop at *Prague* to see the Prince of *Hohenlohe*, and agree with him upon the time and place for an interview between the Austrian General and the Duke of *Brunswick*.—This interview is expected to take place at *Leipzic*, in the course of a month. According to the opinion, the Court of Vienna has adopted a plan purely defensive, notwithstanding the endeavours of the Court of *Berlin* to suggest another."

SECOND LETTER of M. NOAILLES.

"I have waited, Sir, for the answer of the Count de Cobenzel. He has just informed me, on the part of the King of Hungary, that the note dated March 18 contains the answer to the demands which I had been charged to renew; and

On Friday his Majesty came to the Assembly, the Members of which rose and were uncovered as he entered, and took their seats when he had reached his place. The King then spoke as follows:

THE KING'S SPEECH.

"GENTLEMEN,

"I have come among you for an object of the highest importance in the present circumstances. My Minister of Foreign Affairs will read to you the report which he made to me in Council on our situation with regard to Germany."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs then went up, and standing by the King's side, read the report, which the King had notified to the Assembly.

MINUTE of the CABINET COUNCIL of FRANCE, addressed to the KING.

"SIR,

"When you took an oath of fidelity to the Constitution, you became the object of the hatred of the enemies of liberty. No natural tie could stop them, no motive of alliance, of neighbourhood, of propriety, could prevent their enmity. Your ancient allies erased your name out of the list of Despots, and from that moment they forgot your Majesty's fidelity. The emigrants, rebels to the laws of their country, are gone beyond the frontiers to prepare a guilty aggression against France. They wish to carry into its bosom fire and sword. Their rage would have been impotent if the Foreign Princes had not seconded and encouraged their criminal manoeuvres. The House of Austria has done every thing to encourage their audacity.—The House of Austria, who since the treaty of 1756 has found us good and faithful allies. This treaty, Sir, subjected us to the ambitious views of this House. She engaged us in all her wars, to which she called us her allies. We have been prodigal of our blood in the cruel tragedies of despotism. The infant that the House of Austria saw the could no longer govern us for her purposes, she became our enemy.

"It was Austria that had stirred up against France the restless Northern Potentate, whose tyrannical phrenzy had at last made him fall under the sword of an assassin. It was Austria, who in office, of which Europe shall judge, advised one party of Frenchmen to take up arms against the other. The note of the court of Vienna, of the 18th Feb. was in truth a declaration of war. M. Kaunitz there avows the league of the powers against France. The death of *Leopold*, ought to have made some change in this ambitious system, but we have seen the contrary.

"The note of the 18th of March is the ultimatum of the Court of Vienna.—This note is more provoking still than the former. The King of Hungary wishes we might submit our Constitution to his revision—and he does not dissemble the project of arming Frenchmen against Frenchmen.

"Sir," continues the Minister, "in charging me with the administration of Foreign Affairs you have imposed on me the telling you the truth: I proceed to tell you the truth—It results from this exposure, that the treaty of 1756 is broken, in fact, by the House of Austria; that the maintenance of a League of the Powers is an act of hostility against France, and that you ought this instant to order M. NOAILLES, your Ambassador, to quit the Court of Vienna without taking leave. Sir, the Austrian troops are on the march—the camps are marked out—fortresses are building.—The Nation, by its oath, on the 14th July, has declared that any man who shall accede to an unconstitutional negotiation is a traitor. The delay granted to Austria is expired—your honour is attacked—the nation is insulted—therefore there remains for you no other part to take but to make to the National Assembly the formal renunciation of