

The Genius of Benjamin Franklin

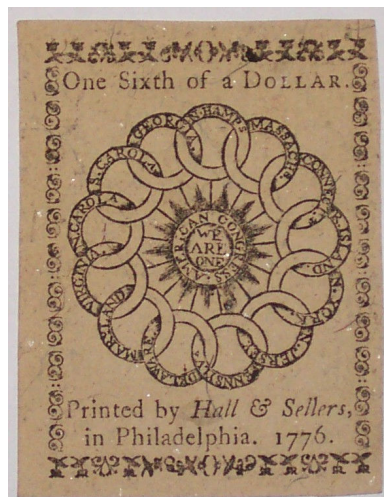
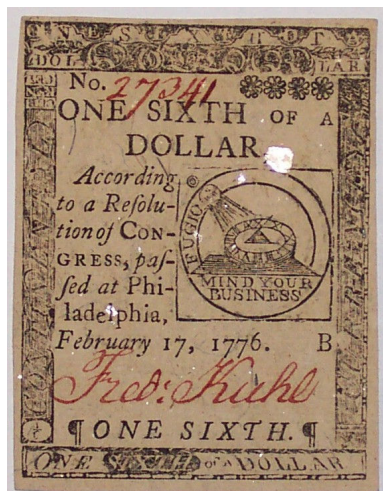
This year, the year when our nation celebrates the 300th anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin, we feel that it is appropriate to tell our members and the public about something little known outside of the world of Numismatics (the science of coins, medals and paper money). What follows are examples of the brilliant and inventive mind of Mr. Franklin.



The Fugio Cent and Benjamin Franklin

The 1787 cent pictured above is the oldest dated United States coin. It was struck under private contract by authority of the Congress of the United States, not a single state, and it was made for general circulation. This action was taken under the Articles of Confederation, before the present Constitution was ratified. The obverse, with its sundial and legends “Fugio”, (time flies) and “Mind Your Business” is credited to Benjamin Franklin. Because of Franklin’s connection to the coin, it is sometimes referred to as the Franklin Cent. It is believed that most of the copper used in this Fugio coinage came from the copper bands which held together the powder kegs sent to America by the French during the Revolutionary War.

Below is pictured the front and back of a choice new condition specimen of paper money issued by the Continental Congress. The linked chain design, with the names of the thirteen original colonies, is also credited to Benjamin Franklin.



Benjamin Franklin also invented an ingenious method of making the counterfeiting of colonial paper money more difficult. His method is referred to as nature printing. He took actual leaves from nature and made lead casts to be used in printing the backs of colonial period notes. He used his invention in printing notes for Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. With the exception of the fractional notes (\$1/6, \$1/3, \$1/2, \$2/3) of the February 17, 1776 issue, all of the paper money issued by the Continental Congress from 1775 through 1779 also used Benjamin Franklin's nature printing idea. In addition to the use of nature prints on the backs of the notes, mica flakes and silk fibers were placed in the rag content paper to also discourage counterfeiting. The mica flakes and silk fibers can be seen in the picture of the \$1/6 note.

Below can be seen the front and back of a rare Continental Currency note printed in York, Pennsylvania in 1778 when the Continental Congress met in that city. The back shows the leaf (nature) print. The April 11, 1778 Yorktown notes are very rare today, because congress had the notes recalled and destroyed, due to extensive counterfeiting of the issue.



THREE WILLOW LEAVES

One important goal of HMPF is to continually try to publish little known and interesting historical facts concerning our early local, state and national history. We hope that our readers see the effort that is devoted to our publications and that they find them interesting and of value.