

# New Jersey Notes With A Story



## By Ray Williams

Those of you that know me also know that my numismatic interests are colonial type coins, specializing in NJ Coppers by die variety. Several years ago, I was at a friend's house in Mantoloking, NJ and admired a framed picture that was surrounded by a colonial bill from each of the 13 colonies. I then set a long-term goal of obtaining one bill from each of

the colonies, and finally succeeded.

I don't consider myself a paper money collector but the thought is not unappealing for future consideration. In the process of obtaining bills, I learned as much as possible about them. Communications with Eric Newman, David Gladfelter, Erik Goldstein, David Hart and others, have greatly enhanced

my enjoyment of the paper money in my collection, and provided important information and assistance for writing this article. The first three names are familiar to most of us, but David Hart is one new to most numismatists. The two bills I'll be talking about both have the signature of John Hart, and David is a descendant from that family. David has done much research into his family history and his assistance with this article added immensely and is greatly appreciated.

Unlike coins, colonial bills were each hand signed by authorized individuals. All of the signers must have been well respected in their

communities and/or held positions of authority in each state. The first bill pictured (Fig. 1) is valued at Eighteen Pence; printed by Isaac Collins in Burlington, NJ in 1776; signed by Robert Smith, John Hart and John Stevens Jr. Although all three signers have a story to tell, it is John Hart that I'll be talking about.

John Hart, the man that placed a quill pen and ink to this bill, is most famous for being a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The signatures on the Declaration were all considered an act of treason to the Crown and had the Revolution been unsuccessful, they would have been signing their death warrants. Ben Franklin is quoted as saying, "We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." The same man who had the conviction to sign that most important document was the same person to sign my bill!

Early biographers have long clung to the belief that John Hart was born in Stonington, CT in 1711 and moved with his family, at an early age, to Hopewell, NJ.<sup>1</sup> However, more recent scholarship—owing to the discovery of his parent's 1712 marriage record in the Presbyterian Church at Newton, Long Island; and further supported by John Hart's Baptism recorded at the Presbyterian Church in Maidenhead (Lawrenceville, NJ) suggests John Hart may have actually been born in Hopewell in 1713. He was named after his grandfather, who died about this time.<sup>2</sup>

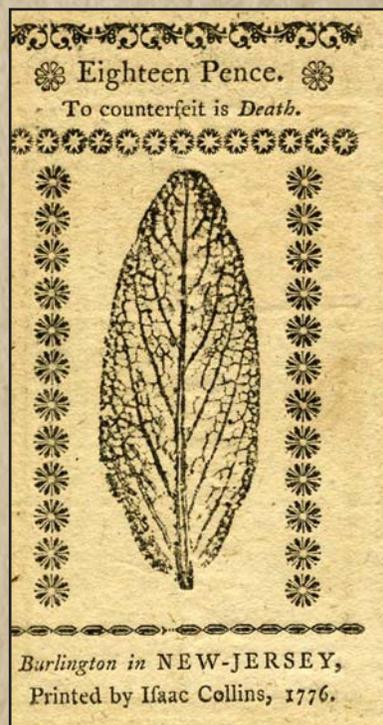
His father Edward was a farmer, a Justice of the Peace and a soldier at one point. Captain Edward Hart recruited a contingent of local volunteers to join the New Jersey Blues (militia).<sup>3</sup> John Hart also owned a farm, two mills and racehorses.<sup>2</sup> He married Deborah Scudder in 1739. 1750 found him elected to the position of County Freeholder and he became a Justice of the Peace in 1755. In 1761, he was elected to the NJ Provincial Assembly and held that position until he decided not to run again in 1772. Samuel Tucker was elected to the position in 1772, and we'll talk about him

later. In 1774, Hart was elected to the NJ Provincial Congress, where he served on several important committees.<sup>1</sup>

In 1776, Hart was appointed as one of nineteen individuals commissioned to sign the NJ bills which were authorized in February and March of 1776.<sup>4</sup> For signing almost 15,600 bills, he was



Fig. 1



paid a sum of £12 10s & 10d—a considerable amount at the time.<sup>1</sup> On July 4th 1776, Hart was one of five NJ Delegates to the Continental Congress to sign the Declaration of independence.

As with many of the Signers, Hart's life became a major hardship after the Declaration was signed. His wife died in October of 1776. When Washington's troops crossed the Delaware into Pennsylvania to escape the advancing British, Hart was forced into exile. To avoid the British who placed a price on his head and were searching for him, he hid out in the harsh winter terrain of the Sourland Mountains. His children were forced to take refuge with friends and family. Once the British retreated from the area following the Battles of Trenton and Princeton, Hart became actively involved in government affairs once again. During his absence his

land and property were confiscated and destroyed by the Hessian troops. The extent of the losses is unknown and may have been "enhanced" through local legend. However, the Continental Army, camping on Hart's farm at the patriot's invitation in June 1778 (just before the Battle of Monmouth), also did much damage. Washington's soldiers

ripped up fencing to build campfires and their horses “drank his pond dry.”<sup>2</sup>

Also of great importance is that Hart was elected to be the first Speaker of the New Jersey State Assembly, a position second only to the Governor. On May 11, 1779, John Hart left this world. There is a monument to this man interred in the First Baptist Church Cemetery in Hopewell, NJ—and there is a little piece of John Hart’s history in my collection of paper money. I think of the man every time I look at that bill.

Now, back to a name I mentioned earlier...Samuel Tucker. He was another of the nineteen authorized to sign NJ bills. I don’t yet have an example with his signature, but the bill in Fig. 2 was in his possession at some point. You will notice that this bill is valued at 15 Shillings and was also printed by Isaac Collins in Burlington, NJ. But if you look closely, there are only two signatures, those of John Hart and Samuel How. Three signatures were required for the bill to be official. I purchased this bill in a recent Stack’s auction<sup>5</sup> because Hart’s signature was one of the two. David Hart pointed out to me that the person placing the first signature on the bill seems to also have been responsible to place the serial number. This is an astute observation that I still need to look into further.<sup>6</sup>

Living in Trenton, I found that this bill has local historical significance for me. Less than two miles down the road from my house is the John Abbott House, which is now restored and run by the Hamilton Township Historical Society. It was at this house that the British captured NJ bills on December 9, 1776—and this bill appears to be one of them. The story of Sam Tucker and the capture of the bills could make a good soap opera!

My researching has found that Tucker was holding the position of High Sheriff of Hunterdon County before becoming a member of the Provincial Congress in 1769. In October 1775, he was elected president of the Provincial Congress after previously being the Vice President. On July 2,

1776, Tucker signed the NJ State Constitution.<sup>7</sup>

In November of 1776, with the British Army marching toward Trenton, Tucker met with John Abbott in a tavern in Trenton and asked if he could hide the State Treasury and important documents at Abbott’s farm. Abbott agreed. Unknown to the men, Mary Pointing (Poynton), an accused Tory, overheard the conversation. When the British arrived in Trenton on December 8, 1776, she promptly informed the commanding officer of the overheard conversation. The State Treasury consisted of both signed and partially signed bills.

The signed bills were hidden in the bottom of tubs filled with broken pottery and kitchen utensils in the basement. The partially signed bills were hidden in a trunk in the attic.<sup>8</sup>

On December 9th, 1776, Lt. Thomas Hawkshaw, under the command of Lt. Col. Robert Abercromby, took 20 troops to the home of John Abbott and searched

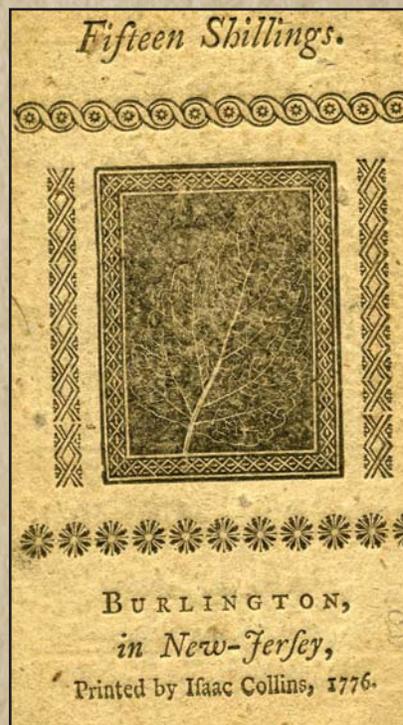
the farmhouse.<sup>9</sup> They found the trunk in the attic with the partially signed bills, but did not find the fully signed bills in the basement. It should be noted that a British document of Protection for John Abbott was issued on December 9th.<sup>10</sup> I’d need to assume that Abbott made some type of loyalty statement to the British after the documents were found in his residence that day. Tucker was captured on December 14th, applied for and was granted British Protection by Col. Rall on December 17th.<sup>7</sup> It was eight days later that Washington led his army in a wonderfully successful surprise attack on the Hessians stationed in Trenton.

The following article was found in the “NJ Archives, Second Series Vol. 1; Newspaper Extracts Vol. I, 1776-1777,” pages 295-296:

“The PUBLIC are hereby cautioned not to receive any of the Paper Bills emitted by the Convention of the State of New-Jersey, dated the 20th of February, 1776, unless they have three signers names thereto; as a quantity of those Bills were plundered by the enemy



Fig. 2



from one of the person's appointed by the said Convention to sign them, before he had put his name to the same; some of which have been since circulated through New-Jersey and Pennsylvania. As they are not perfect, and of consequence not a legal tender, and being the property of the State of New-Jersey, the public are requested to stop such as are offered in payment.

N.B. The names of the two persons who have signed the said Bills, are JOHN HART and SAMUEL HOW."

—The Pennsylvania Journal, February 26, 1777.

Tucker spent the rest of his life defending his actions and always had the shadow of his British Protection hanging over him. His wife was British and longed to return to England and Tucker changed his loyalties twice during the Revolutionary War. He was accused publicly of charging excessive fees for his services and may have bribed some church officials to get the winning edge in a close election.

Tucker served simultaneously as President of the NJ Provincial Congress *and* under Governor William Franklin in the old NJ Colonial Assembly—talk about conflict of interest! As President of the NJ Provincial Congress he insisted that a clause be added to the NJ Constitution that the document would become 'null and void' if there was reconciliation with England. This was an obvious attempt to straddle the fence between British and American loyalty. Tucker died in 1789 and is buried with his wife in the old Hopewell Episcopal Church on the grounds of the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital.

This story is the "Reader's Digest" version and as accurate as I can determine. There are different accounts that vary in the details, but the general storyline is the same. My two John Hart bills have given me so much fun in hours of research and I hope you've enjoyed what I've shared here.

I'd like to acknowledge the Hamilton Township Historical Society for their kindness and assistance. Everyone was so nice that I decided to apply for membership. Lastly, I'd like to thank Roger Siboni, who made the State Archives of newspaper articles available to me, along with his comments and encouragement.



The author is currently the president of the Colonial Coin Collectors Club (C4) [www.colonialcoins.org](http://www.colonialcoins.org) and 2nd vice president of the Garden State Numismatic Association (GSNA) [www.GSNA.org](http://www.GSNA.org) This article was originally published in the current C4 Newsletter.

#### End Notes:

- 1 Biography of John Hart: [www.barefootsworld.net/johnhart.html](http://www.barefootsworld.net/johnhart.html)
- 2 Email Communication with Dave Hart 9/8/08
- 3 Email Communication with Erik Goldstein 9/16/08
- 4 "Early Paper Money of America," Eric Newman, Krause Publications 1997
- 5 Stack's Minot Sale, NYC, May 21-22, 2008 Lot 3370
- 6 Email Communication with Dave Hart 5/19/08
- 7 "A History of Trenton," Trenton Historical Society 1679-1929, 1929
- 8 "The Hiding of the State Treasury," Hamilton Township Historical Society
- 9 Email communications with Erik Goldstein parts of which follows:  
Lt. Col. Robert Abercromby, of the 37th Regt. commanded the 1st Battalion of Light Infantry, composed of the Light companies of the 4th, 5th, 10th, 17th, 22nd, 23rd 27th, 35th and 38th Regiments. He was wounded at Monmouth in 1778 and made Brigadier General. Lt. Thomas Hawkshaw, of the 5th Regt., was commissioned to that rank on 28 November