

# A Guide to the Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money"), 1861

Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money") 1861

1861



A Collection in the Thomas Balch Library SC 0034

Thomas Balch Library

2006

**Author:** Matthew Exline

## History

**Processed by:** Matthew Exline

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money"), 1861

**Subtitle:** Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money")

**Collection:** SC 0034

**Author:** Matthew Exline

## Publication Statement

**Date:** © 2006 By Thomas Balch Library. All rights reserved.

**Publisher:** Thomas Balch Library

[Conditions of Use](#)

## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Beth Schuster, 11 April 2008

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Revision Description

**2013-11-21** Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

## Descriptive Summary

**Collection number**

SC 0034

**Language**

English

**Abstract**

This collection consists of a brief typewritten historical summary and Leesburg municipal currency notes in the following denominations: one \$1 note, one 50¢ note, two 25¢ notes, and one 12 1/2¢ note.

**Creator**

Town of Leesburg, Virginia

**Extent**

5 items

**Repository**

Thomas Balch Library

## Administrative Information

**Access Restrictions**

Collection open for research

**Use Restrictions**

No physical characteristics affect the use of this material.

**Acquisition Information**

Town of Leesburg, Virginia

**Processing Information**

Processed by Matthew Exline, 11 March 2008

**Preferred Citation**

*Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money")* (SC 0034), Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, VA.

## Accruals

2007.0142

## Alternative Form Available

None

## Adjunct Descriptive Data

## Related Material

None

## Bibliography

Political Science Quarterly Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money") The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865: A Financial and Industrial History of the South During the Civil War. Four Years Under Marse Robert. Town of Leesburg Archives, Record Group 1. Council Minute Book, 1858-1874. Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, VA. Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1861-2, in the Eighty-Sixth Year of the Commonwealth.

## Other Finding Aid

None

## Technical Requirements

None

# Historical Information

During the Civil War, the Town of Leesburg successfully issued its own municipal currency in small denominations. This collection consists of five examples of this paper money, issued in 1861. The currency was known locally as "Dog Money" because it had a picture of a dog on it. At that time banks were prohibited from issuing banknotes in denominations of five dollars or less, and silver coins were apparently becoming scarce in northern Virginia. On 31 May, 1861, the Leesburg Town Council adopted the following ordinance: "Whereas there is an almost total absence in this place of an amount [of money] small enough for change and there is a public necessity for some measure to supply said want therefore It is enacted that the mayor be and hereby is authorized and instructed to issue small notes of the Corporation [i.e. the Town]...said notes to be...made payable to the bearer...from us on presentation...in sums of five dollars." The Town Council authorized an initial printing of \$18,500 in denominations of \$1, 50¢, 25¢, and 12 1/2¢. By December, 1862, the Town Council authorized four additional issues, bringing the total amount authorized during the war to about \$93,500 (although it is unknown how much was circulating at any given time). Initially the Mayor, John M. Orr (8 Feb 1820-11 Jan 1905) was to sign all notes; later the Town Treasurer, James H. Chamblin (1810-1883) and the acting mayor were also authorized to sign the notes. The *Washingtonian*, a local newspaper, printed the notes.

The money the Town received in exchange for the notes was retained against the redemption of the notes, held at least partly in the form of Loudoun County and Confederate bonds. The town did redeem at least some of the notes. On 31 Dec 1861, the Town Council created a committee to oversee the process; and on 25 March 1862, the Council passed an ordinance authorizing redemption in exchange "for Confederate and other Southern Bank money in sums [of] not more than ten Dollars to citizens and none others."

Technically, the notes were illegal. The Virginia General Assembly eventually authorized Leesburg (as well as all Virginia cities, towns with a population of two thousand or more, and Lewisburg and Warrenton) to issue notes in denominations of one dollar or less, but this act was not passed until 29 March 1862, almost a year after Leesburg began issuing its money. Furthermore, the notes were unconstitutional under the Federal and Confederate Constitutions, both of which prohibit states from printing paper money. It should be noted, however, that when the Town Council authorized the first issue of currency, Virginia had just seceded and had not yet officially joined the Confederacy, so as far as the Virginians were concerned, no higher constitution applied. Even after Virginia joined the Confederacy, the Confederate Government did nothing to repress state or municipal currency.

Leesburg's municipal currency was apparently well-received locally. At a Town Council meeting on 12 July 1861, it was reported that much of the first issue was already in circulation, and there was still a demand for more; and after the war, a soldier who was stationed in the area wrote that, "no one, so far as I know, ever questioned the validity of Leesburg's fiat money; certainly we...experienced no difficulty whatever in getting rid of all we could get our hands upon" (Stiles, 63). The Leesburg Town Council saw the lack of small change in the community, and despite the chaotic times acted decisively to provide a remedy. Overall, the Leesburg municipal currency seems to have successfully accomplished its objective of allowing the citizens of Leesburg to come closer to carrying on business as usual.

## Scope and Content

This collection consists of a brief typewritten historical summary and Leesburg municipal currency notes in the following denominations: one \$1 note, one 50¢ note, two 25¢ notes, and one 12 1/2¢ note. The Town of Leesburg mounted these examples on paperboard, and kept them framed for many years (the notes are only printed on one side). All the notes have the same basic design except for the numbers and text specifying the denomination. On the left side of the note is a portrait of George Washington with the caption "*Washingtonian, Print.*" At the top center is a picture of a large, shaggy dog lying in front of a chest, with a large key under his left front leg. On the right side is a picture of Lady Justice with a sword and scales (but not blindfolded). Below the dog are places for the serial number and date, and the following text: "The Town of Leesburg, in Virginia, Promises to pay to the Bearer x Cents [or "One Dollar"] in Current Funds, on presentation of these Notes at the Mayor's Office, in sums of FIVE DOLLARS." At the bottom is a place for the Mayor's signature. Four examples are signed by Mayor Orr and the fifth is signed by Joseph Birkby (abt. 1811-24 Sept 1868), the Town Recorder.

## Contents List

### Folder 1: Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money") 1861

#### Scope and Content

Leesburg Municipal Currency ("Dog Money") in denominations of \$1, 50¢, 25¢, 12 1/2¢; a brief typewritten

historical summary.

Thomas Balch Library