

# Liberty Cap Outshines Fashion

*Paper money engravers represented Liberty as*

*a female figure wearing symbolic headgear.*

**T**WO THOUSAND years ago, the Romans dominated Phrygia, a region of central Asia Minor that now is part of Turkey. The Romans adopted the Phrygian's soft, conical cap (*pileus*) as headgear to be worn by slaves who had been given their freedom. The symbolic "Liberty cap" has been a design element in works of art and, not surprisingly, on coins and paper money.

Numerous countries have adopted this motif for coins, but fewer have placed it on paper currency. As part of the national arms, it is depicted on notes of Brazil, Czechoslovakia and Peru. One of my favorite images appears on paper money of France, where the Liberty figure is affectionately known as "Marianne." (See my column "Dulac's Marianne: Symbol of Liberty" in the December 2001 issue.)

Dated 1793-97, the first U.S. half cents feature a female image representing Liberty holding a pole with a Liberty cap perched on top. Patriot

Robert Morris referred to this motif as the lady holding the "stick with the nightcap on it." Some early U.S. large cents, and later silver and gold coins, bear a variety of images of Liberty wearing this cap.

Designers of U.S. federal paper money included a representational image of freedom on at least five denominations. Five engravers incorporated the Liberty cap in their designs.

The first portrayals of Liberty are found on interest-bearing Treasury notes for 1846 and 1847. A vignette entitled *The Apotheosis of Washington* consists of a Continental soldier and two Indians admiring a bust of Washington as Liberty stands in a protective position. Engraved by Louis Delnoce, this grouping also is found on

the \$100 interest-bearing Treasury note authorized by the Act of December 23, 1857. Only a few examples are known of this extremely rare note, including proofs.

The \$500 interest-bearing Treasury note authorized by the Act of March 3, 1863, carries an engraving by Charles Burt entitled *Liberty and Union*. It depicts a full figure of Liberty holding a Roman fasces, with an anchor in the foreground and an American flag in the background. No circulating notes bearing this motif have been reported; only one example is known as uniface face and back proofs. Series 1869 and 1875-80 \$100 United States notes feature the head of Liberty from Burt's engraving, in a small oval at the bottom center

► The \$500 interest-bearing Treasury note authorized by the Act of March 3, 1863 (top), features the vignette *Liberty and Union* by Charles Burt. Liberty is symbolized by a female figure wearing a Liberty cap and holding a fasces. In the foreground is an anchor, and in the background, an American flag. On the Series 1880 \$100 U.S. note (bottom), the head of Liberty from Burt's engraving appears within a small oval between a portrait of Abraham Lincoln and a vignette representing Reconstruction.





between a portrait of President Lincoln and an image symbolizing Reconstruction.

The \$1,000 one- and two-year interest-bearing Treasury notes issued in 1863 and 1861, respectively, feature complete figures of Liberty; consequently, their caps are small, but visible. The engraved image *America* on the two-year note is based on the central figure of Thomas Crawford's *Progress of Civilization*, the pediment above the Senate entrance of the U.S. Capitol. Crawford also created *Statue of Freedom* for the Capitol dome.

The same Crawford version of *America* ("Liberty") appears on the



▲ On the \$1,000 interest-bearing Treasury note of March 2, 1861, the central figure of Liberty is crowned with a Liberty cap.

Confederate States of America (CSA) \$1,000 note dated May 6, 1861. Because National Bank Note Company (NBNC) was located in New York City, this was the first and last series of notes it printed for the CSA.

representations of Liberty on paper money. Among them was a work that was sent back to the engraver along with a vivid description of what one of Liberty's hands resembled.

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NBNC also produced notes for the Stockholms Enskilda Bank of Sweden in 1872. The same rendering of *America* was altered for the 100-riksdaler note. *America* ("Liberty") became *Svea*, the female symbol of Sweden. The Liberty cap was removed from her head, and a lion (symbol of the Folkung dynasty) was added at her feet.

My next column will discuss more

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