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**NEWS FROM THE NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Rare Revolutionary War-Era Printing Plate Returns to New Hampshire

CONCORD—It's great when things get back where they belong. A rare copper printing plate used to print currency during the American Revolution has been purchased at auction by the New Hampshire Historical Society. On this plate, the government printed the money that helped pay for New Hampshire share of the war's expenses, and its return to New Hampshire, after a century and half away from the state, has been a source of controversy and speculation for nearly a decade.

Engraved by Exeter metalsmith John Ward Gilman on June 9, 1775, in the opening months of the Revolutionary War, the plate has been in private hands, out of New Hampshire, for at least the past 150 years. Exactly how it went missing from the state is a mystery. There is speculation that in the 1850s a New Hampshire government official borrowed it from a vault in the state house and lent it to a collector in Baltimore, who wanted to use it to print commemorative copies of the currency, and never returned it.

Fast forward to 2010, when staff members at the New Hampshire Historical Society and the New Hampshire State Archives became aware the plate would be offered for sale by an auction house in the Midwest. The plate had apparently been bought at an estate sale in Minnesota by a private collector, who had then consigned it to the auctioneer. Since it was unclear how the plate, a significant piece of New Hampshire history, had ended up outside of the state, the New Hampshire attorney general's office got involved, asking the private owner to remove the artifact from the auction and negotiate its return to New Hampshire. The matter made front-page news in New Hampshire, with calls for the plate's return to the Granite State. When negotiations subsequently broke down, dueling lawsuits ensued. The plate was pulled from the auction sale, and eventually the lawsuits were dropped, but the plate's chain of title remained clouded. As a result, it was placed in a Minnesota bank vault.

Interest in the copper printing plate was high in New Hampshire because of its role in the state's history. It was commissioned by the New Hampshire Provisional Congress at the outset of the American Revolution, when New Hampshire was not yet a state but still a colony. The Continental Congress had authorized the colonies to print £10,500 in currency notes to help fund the war effort, and the plate was essential to New Hampshire's efforts to do so.

Exeter's John Ward Gilman was paid £13 to create the plate and print the money, which was a painstaking process that took nearly a month. Gilman was a patriot who played a prominent role in New Hampshire's early history, particularly as a signer of a protest to Great Britain of the Stamp Act, which sparked the colonial conflict that would end in revolution a decade later. After the war Gilman designed the state's seal in 1776 and several artifacts made by Gilman are in the New Hampshire Historical Society collections.

Last month the Gilman currency plate resurfaced in another auction catalog, again being offered for sale. After consultation with the New Hampshire State Archives, the New Hampshire Historical Society took the initiative in acquiring the object. With the

help of donations from several private individuals, the Society was high bidder, and the Gilman plate was on its way back home to New Hampshire. The Society took possession of the plate on September 27, and it will be preserved in the Society's permanent collections, available for study and viewing by future generations of Granite Staters.

Founded in 1823, the New Hampshire Historical Society is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to saving, preserving, and sharing New Hampshire history. Nowhere will you find a more extensive collection of objects and archives related to New Hampshire's history. The Society shares these vast collections through its research library, museum, website, publications, exhibitions, and youth and adult educational programs. The Society is not a state-funded agency. All of its programs and services are made possible by membership dues and contributions. For more information about the Society and the benefits of membership, visit nhhistory.org or call 603-228-6688.