

Document A

Who is the author of this letter?

William Freeman

When was it written?

July 11, 1794

What is the author warning about?

Freeman has discovered that notes from banks in Baltimore and Charleston have been forged. Freeman cannot tell the forged notes on his own and will be in a difficult position when it comes time to exchange them, since he may hand out large-value bills in return for useless paper by accident.

What does the author recommend be done?

Freeman hopes that that money can be obtained from the two banks by bills of exchange—a promissory note that cannot be forged in the same way—to avoid the problems.

Document B

Who is the author of this letter?

Elbridge Gerry, the early American politician whose salamander-shaped district in Essex County, Massachusetts, gave us the term “Gerrymander”

When was it written?

March 16, 1785

What is the author warning about?

Gerry has included a list of remittances and is worried that not all of them are genuine.

What does the author recommend be done?

He asks Samuel Hodgdon of the Quartermasters Office, to verify that they are genuine. Hodgdon notes that one of the certificates for \$400 (a substantial sum of money in 1785) is indeed a forgery.

Document C

Who is the author of this letter?

James Howell

When was it written?

June 28, 1786

What is the author warning about?

Howell notifies the recipient that several certificates of payment were brought to them at the War Office. Howell and Samuel Hodgdon examined the certificates and found them all to be counterfeit.

What does the author recommend be done?

Howell proposed to keep the certificates as evidence. Hodgdon assured him that he knew the person who had received them and that no damage would come to the United States if they were returned. (Presumably Hodgdon knew that the recipient would not try to pass off the forged certificates to some unsuspecting neighbor.)

Document D

Who is the author of this letter?

William Pierce

When was it written?

October 30, 1786

What is the author warning about?

Pierce writes a “circular,” a letter that is to be copied and sent to several recipients, to the loan officers of several states. (New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and New York are visible at the bottom of the circular.)

He notes that a forger named “John Phelon” has passed off counterfeit notes and that Phelon has learned to copy Pierce’s signature so closely that it is nearly impossible to spot them.

What does the author recommend be done?

Pierce urges anyone who accepts a note to check the back to see if Phelon has numbered the certificate in his own handwriting. (Phelon must have been a very organized forger.) If so, Pierce writes that it is nearly certain to be a fake and that the recipient should attempt to determine who has passed on the note—likely so they can try to catch the culprit and his confederates.