

History of Counterfeiting

The counterfeiting of money is one of the oldest crimes in history. At some periods in early history, it was considered treasonous and was punishable by death.

During the American Revolution, the British counterfeited U.S. currency in such large amounts that the Continental currency soon became worthless. "Not worth a Continental" became a popular expression that is still heard today.

During the Civil War, one-third to one-half of the currency in circulation was counterfeit. At that time, approximately 1,600 state banks designed and printed their own bills. Each bill carried a different design, making it difficult to detect counterfeit bills from the 7,000 varieties of real bills.

A national currency was adopted in 1862 to resolve the counterfeiting problem. However, the national currency was soon counterfeited and circulated so extensively that it became necessary to take enforcement measures. Therefore, on July 5, 1865, the United States Secret Service was established to suppress the wide-spread counterfeiting of this nation's currency.

Although the counterfeiting of money was substantially suppressed after the establishment of the Secret Service, this crime still represents a potential danger to the Nation's economy.

Today, counterfeiting once again is on the rise. One reason for this is the ease and speed with which large quantities of counterfeit currency can be produced using modern photographic and printing equipment.

Prevention Measures

Financial Crimes Division:

The Secret Service investigates crimes associated with financial institutions. Today, this jurisdiction includes bank fraud, access device fraud involving credit and debit cards, telecommunications and computer crimes, fraudulent identification, fraudulent government and commercial securities, and electronic funds transfer fraud.

Mission Statement:

The Financial Crimes Division (FCD) plans, reviews, and coordinates criminal investigations involving Financial Systems Crimes, including bank fraud; access device fraud; telemarketing; telecommunications fraud (cellular and hard wire); computer fraud; automated payment systems and teller machines; direct deposit; investigations of forgery, uttering, alteration, false personation, or false claims involving U.S. Treasury Checks, U.S. Savings Bonds, U.S. Treasury Notes, bonds, and bills; electronic funds transfer (EFT) including Treasury disbursements and fraud within Treasury payment systems; fraud involving U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Coupons and Authority to Participate (ATP) cards; Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation investigations; Farm Credit Administration violations; fraud and related activity in connection with identification documents and fraudulent commercial, fictitious instruments, foreign securities. The Division also coordinates the activities of the U.S. Secret Service Organized Crimes Program, and oversees money laundering investigations.