The 1901 $10 "Bison Note": America's Most Beautiful Paper Money




UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES NOTE
UNITED STATES NOTE
10
TEN
DOLLARS
UNITED STATES NOTE



Among all pieces of American paper money, few are as admired as the **1901 $10 Legal Tender Note**, better known as the **Bison Note**. Collectors often rank it among the most beautiful bank notes ever produced by the United States, thanks to its dramatic design, rich symbolism, and rarity. Today, an original example is considered a centerpiece in nearly any advanced U.S. paper money collection.

A New Design for a New Century

The note was introduced in **1901**, at the beginning of the 20th century. It was issued as a **Legal Tender Note**, commonly called a **United States Note**, identified by its distinctive red Treasury seal and red serial numbers. Unlike Gold Certificates or Silver Certificates, Legal Tender Notes were backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government rather than precious metals.

At the time, $10 represented a significant amount of money—often more than a week's wages for many American workers—so these notes were commonly used in larger transactions rather than everyday purchases.

Why Is It Called the Bison Note?

The nickname comes from the enormous American bison engraved across the center of the note. Unlike earlier currency that featured presidents or statesmen prominently in the center, this note celebrated an iconic symbol of the American West.

Flanking the bison are portraits of the famous explorers:

- Meriwether Lewis

- William Clark

Together they represent exploration, expansion, and the frontier spirit that shaped the United States.

The Famous Bison

One of the most common myths is that the animal shown is **Black Diamond**, the famous bison associated with the Buffalo nickel.

Modern research indicates that this is almost certainly incorrect. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing used a mounted bison specimen and other references available in Washington, D.C., rather than Black Diamond, which did not become famous until years later.

The Reverse Design

The back of the note is equally artistic. It features the allegorical figure **Columbia**, a traditional female personification of America, standing proudly between columns.

Her classical appearance reflects the artistic style popular on American currency during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Large-Size Currency

The Bison Note belongs to the era of **large-size U.S. currency**, often nicknamed "horse blankets" by collectors because they measure roughly **7⅜ by 3⅛ inches**, much larger than today's paper money.

The United States reduced the size of all currency beginning in 1929 to lower printing costs and improve efficiency.

Why Collectors Love It

The Bison Note is prized because of its:

- Spectacular engraving
- Large central wildlife portrait
- Lewis and Clark connection
- Large-size format
- Historical importance
- Limited surviving population

It is consistently ranked among the finest examples of American currency design.

Rarity

Although many were printed, relatively few survive today. Experts estimate that only a few thousand genuine examples remain across all grades.

Values vary tremendously depending on condition:

- Well-worn examples often sell for hundreds to over a thousand dollars.
- Attractive mid-grade notes frequently command several thousand dollars.
- High-grade certified examples can bring tens of thousands of dollars at auction.

Detecting Counterfeits

Because of its popularity and value, the Bison Note has been widely reproduced.

Collectors should watch for:

- Missing red Treasury seal
- Incorrect paper texture
- Modern printing instead of engraved lines
- "COPY" printed somewhere on the note
- Blurry engraving

When buying, purchasing certified examples from major grading services or reputable dealers is the safest approach.

Lasting Legacy

More than 125 years after its introduction, the 1901 $10 Bison Note remains one of the defining masterpieces of American paper money. Its bold depiction of the American bison, paired with the explorers Lewis and Clark, captures the nation's frontier heritage in a way few other bank notes have achieved.

Whether admired for its artistry, historical significance, or rarity, the Bison Note continues to be one of the most sought-after treasures in U.S. numismatics, and it is often considered the crown jewel of large-size American currency.