



Yale Art Gallery's

EDUCATIONAL
SERIES
PROOFS & PROGRESSIVES

Fatal flaws in the designs of 19th-century U.S. bank notes featuring world-class artistry caused their premature demise.

IN EARLY 2019, the Numismatics Department at the Yale University Art Gallery was able to accession a wonderful group of Educational Series notes and related material (2019.25.2-20)¹ using the Susan G. and John W. Jackson, B.A. 1967, Endowment Fund for Numismatics. These Silver Certificates, first issued in 1896, are regarded as the most beautiful and elaborate designs ever produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP). The Educational Series is marred with controversy and conflict and represents a spectacular failure of the primary requisites for security engraving. The culmination of these aspects led to the abandonment of the notes after just a few years, replaced by the very ordinary designs of the 1899 series of Silver Certificates.

A significant collection of Educational Series material was made available at public auction on October 25, 2018, by Stack's Bowers Galleries. Charles Anderson formed the collection of federal proofs and essays (dubbed the Caine Collection), which realized \$1,086,336 for 113 lots. A total of 36 lots of Educational Series material was offered in Part I of the Caine Collection, of which 19 are now housed at Yale. Many of the items have distinguished former owners, including Harry W. Bass Jr. and more interestingly, Thomas F. Morris.

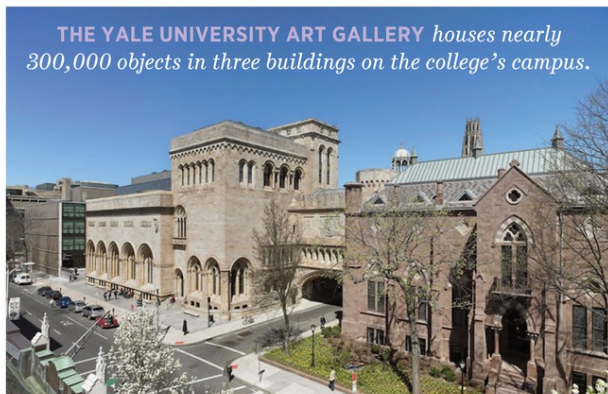
Educational Series \$1

Morris held numerous positions at several leading bank-note producers, including American Bank Note Company, Homer Lee Bank Note Company and the BEP, where he served as chief of the Engraving Division at the peak of his career. Some of his former items in the Yale collection include an 1897 \$1 face essay proof (2019.25.3), an 1896 \$2 face progressive essay proof (2019.25.5) and an annotated 1894 central vignette essay proof for the \$5 note (2019.25.12). The annotation reads "1st proof Nov 1/1894" and is signed by G.F.C. Smillie, then chief engraver at the BEP. Another interesting acquisition is a sepia photograph of the original artwork for the \$5 Silver Certificate note that bears Smillie's handwriting and reads, "Walter Shirlaw's design as

modified by Thos. F. Morris. Engraved by G.F.C. Smillie" (2019.25.14). (The handwriting was identified by Mark D. Tomasko and is not noted in the auction catalog.)

The Silver Certificates series receives its informal name, Educational Series, from the \$1 note. Designed by muralist Will H. Low and engraved by Charles Schlecht, the face entitled "History Instructing Youth" features a female allegory of History seated with her right arm around a male youth, pointing into the distance to Washington, D.C., which can be identified by the U.S. Capitol and Washington Monument. To the right of the note is a representation of the U.S. Constitution. The introductory words are engraved, and 23 small wreaths decorate the top, left and right borders of the note, enclosing the surnames of famous Americans (such as Washington, Franklin and Jefferson). The proof pictured on p. 38 (Figure 1) is dated to 1895, but the design was only used for the 1896 Series. The note elicited several complaints, including the general darkness of the design, lack of empty space (note the dark sky, flag, foliage and border) and the unclear denomination markers (in the top-two and bottom-right corners). In addition, the note lacks geometrical lathework, a crucial aspect of security engraving to prevent counterfeiting. In fact, notes in this series were the only ones issued by the United States since 1861 to bear no lathework on the face, which led to counterfeiting no less than four months after they were first released. *The New York Times* reported on August 14, 1896, that \$1 notes fraudulently raised to \$5 bills had been found.

THE YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY houses nearly 300,000 objects in three buildings on the college's campus.



¹ Accession numbers listed next to bank notes and numismatic items can be searched online at artgallery.yale.edu.

**The original design for the \$5 certificate was
created by engraver, painter and muralist Walter Shirlaw.**

Morris attempted to address some of these concerns by making several modifications to the Series of 1897 in regard to ink flow, foliage and the counters (Figure 2a). This note, engraved by R. Ponickau, E.M. Hall and G.U. Rose Jr., deviated from the muralist's original work but featured a composition that was more conducive to bank-note production. The misspelled "tranquility" remained on the note since that is the way it appears in the original Constitution. Inexplicably, however, the word "requisite" (for "requisite") is misspelled toward the end—an unusual oversight for such an advanced state essay proof

—an error that hitherto has gone unnoticed (Figure 2b). None of the other words that contain a letter "q" are misspelled.

Educational Series \$5

One of the largest groups of Educational Series material at the Yale Numismatics Department consists of the \$5 series with a sequence of die proofs and face-note proofs. The original design for the \$5 certificate was created by engraver, painter and muralist Walter Shirlaw; however, the note would undergo many subtle (and some significant) changes after Morris found fault with



FIGURE 1

FIGURE 1, a \$1 Silver Certificate face essay proof (2019.25.2), is dated 1895 but was used for the 1896 Series. Thomas Morris made several modifications to the 1897 Series, as seen in Figure 2a, a \$1 Silver Certificate face essay proof (2019.25.3). Figure 2b is a closeup of the Constitution on the right side of the note.

Not Actual Size



FIGURE 2A

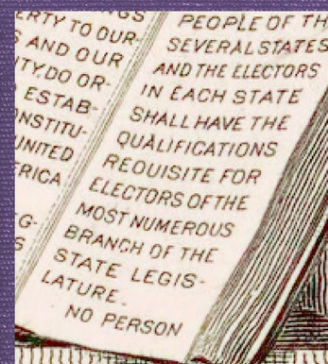


FIGURE 2B

scroll work on the original painting and convinced the director of the BEP, Claude H. Johnson, that the frame needed to be redesigned.

One of the more curious aspects of this series of notes is the existence of a reduction photograph of a painting for a modified bank note (Figure 3). This object features Smillie's handwriting (identified by Tomasko) and reads: "Walter Shirlaw's design as modified by Thos. F. Morris. Engraved by G.F.C. Smillie." The incorrectly attributed date of 1891 derives from the ribbon on the right that reads "Series 1891." This date is problematic for a number of reasons, but above all, it is considerably earlier than the first produced note of 1896 and any known proofs (dated to 1894). The 1891 date is often attributed to the reuse of an existing ribbon that had been produced for the Treasury notes of 1891. It is thought that the same engraving was applied to expedite the completion of the Silver Certificate design. A closer examina-

tion reveals more about the motif (which differs from Shirlaw's original painting).

The signatories indicate that the year on the ribbon is irrelevant to date the photograph and the painting since Morgan and Tillman only shared an office from 1893 to 1897. We can also rule out 1897, since a dated face progressive die proof at Yale (2019.25.18) has only one remaining ribbon after undergoing a redesign. Close inspection also reveals a different style of the painted "1" in 1891. The second "1" is visibly thinner, possibly indicating that Shirlaw simply ran out of space to place a "3" or another number. The randomness of the number chosen by Shirlaw is evident with the use of two serial numbers (0021000 and 0021012) on the face of the note.

A close comparison of the photograph with the approved face proof (Figure 4) highlights some of the differences between the painting and the final approved version with internal BEP

FIGURE 3 is a \$5 Silver Certificate production photograph (2019.25.14) with a note by Smillie that reads "Walter Shirlaw's design as modified by Thos. F. Morris. Engraved by G.F.C. Smillie." Not Actual Size



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4 is a \$5 Silver Certificate face essay proof (2019.25.17), highlights some of the differences between the painting and the approved note. Not Actual Size

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FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4

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PHOTOS: YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY (NOTES) & GETTY IMAGES/PROZSOUND

After just two years, the new Secretary of the Treasury, Lyman Gage, declared the notes a failure, and they were discontinued in late 1897.

PHOTO: YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY



▲ **FIGURE 5**, an 1897 \$5 Silver Certificate essay proof (2019.25.18), shows a simplified version of the note.

Not Actual Size

numerals were not prominent and easily raised; the notes were of the “wrong” style, particularly with too much nudity. Despite their failure to properly serve their function, notes in the Educational Series are a magnificent display of world-class workmanship and exemplify the peak of bank-note engraving in the United States. Few notes produced after them will ever

stamps and annotations. Yet another object, the 1897 face progressive proof of the \$5 certificate note (Figure 5), shows numerous and substantial changes, where the ribbon was perhaps one of the more subtle modifications. Although incomplete, it is immediately clear that the embellished framework had been greatly simplified, offering more open field areas, which was similarly a problem with the \$1 Silver Certificates. Background shading was improved, while the architectural feature on the far right was removed. This redesign would have been better for bank-note engraving, as the seals and serial numbers are more legible. Most notably, the central-vignette figures were changed in one considerable way. In early issues, Electricity presenting light to the world and Fame proclaiming the nation’s progress with her trumpet had been partially nude; here, they have been clothed. Morris, who was involved with the note’s redesign, also attempted to introduce lathework to the denominational counters in the top-right corners, again highlighting another failure with the original Educational Series notes.

Short-Lived Series

After just two years, the new Secretary of the Treasury, Lyman Gage, declared the notes a failure, and they were discontinued in late 1897. The major problems and criticisms have been addressed but can be summarized as follows: the notes were over-engraved and feature too little white space, which caused them to turn into dirty and dark “rags” when heavily circulated; the

be regarded with the same esteem.

The collection at Yale includes several other rare parts of this magnificent episode of bank-note engraving history. Some of this material will be put on display in the future, and all of it is available for study to interested visitors upon request. (For appointments, visit artgallery.yale.edu/numismatics-room.) The majority of the material is a large run of progressives for the faces of the \$2 and \$5 notes, as well as a proof of the never-issued \$10 note and a single progressive for the central vignette. For additional information on the fascinating history of these notes, see the references below.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Mark D. Tomasko for a useful discussion of this material. All errors remain my own.

SOURCES

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