In 1869, Laban Heath, the publisher of Heath’s Greatly Improved and Enlarged Infallible Government Counterfeit Detector..., appeared before the Senate Joint Select Committee on Retrenchment as part of an investigation into the methods adopted by the Treasury Department in printing securities. During an inquiry by Sen. George F. Edmunds, the following interchange took place:

Edmunds: “I see that you have a very handsome frontispiece in your book containing the heads of Washington, Grant, Sherman, Johnson, McCulloch, Clark, and Colby, together with a perspective of the treasury [sic] building. How did you procure that, from whom, and under what circumstance?” – A. [Heath]

From Mr. Clark [Spencer M. Clark, chief of the First Currency Bureau (the early Bureau of Engraving and Printing)]. Mr. Clark had the plate in his possession. It was something he had gotten up, I believe. He was showing it to me one day, and we suggested the idea between us that it might be a very fine thing for the book.”

Despite Edmunds’ description, that frontispiece has over time posed questions as to the identity of the men pictured. Appearing only in the larger banking and counting house editions of Heath’s book, it is labeled at the bottom, “Engraved & Printed at the Treasury Department” and consists of a grouping of seven small portraits surrounding an eagle about to take flight with a shield and the United States flag in its talons. Above the inscription is a depiction of the Treasury Department.

The gentlemen whose portraits encircle the eagle have been, for the most part, identified. In the past, clockwise from bottom left to bottom right, the portraits have been noted as: Spencer M. Clark, Chief of the First Currency Bureau, Sen. Stephen A. Douglas (incorrectly), Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, George Washington, Gen. William T. Sherman, Hugh McCulloch, Secretary of the Treasury from 1865 to 1869, and Francis E. Spinner, Treasurer (incorrectly).

Using as my source a copy of Heath’s 1867 counterfeit detector located in the HRC collections in the BEP, I
Appearing in the 1830s-1840s, bank note reporters (frequently also called counterfeit detectors) were periodicals designed to aid bankers and merchants in avoiding bad currency. The bank note reporter provided rates of discount for notes that would not be taken at their face-value in a business transaction, and lists of counterfeit, altered, raised, and spurious notes, as well as lists of defunct banks. In the late 1850s another type of counterfeit detector appeared: actual bank note engravings and focused on studying the engravings as a way to detect counterfeits. In addition, the 1867 publication of Heath’s book, once compared with other depictions of John the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, there was no question, it was possible a portrait of Francis Spinner, Treasurer of the United States from 1861 to 1867.

Wood was more elusive as an image of him available in the book Illegal Tender by D. H. Johnson. As, in the case of George Washington, “Father of the Country.” Only “Douglas” and “Sherman” had a good head of hair, a closely cropped beard and glasses. He worked as assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury from 1865 to 1867.9

Finally, while looking for images related to President Abraham Lincoln, a small oval profile was located. Later, a coupon with the same portrait was found. This coupon included six months’ interest on a $50 bond and was signed by Register of the Treasury Stoddard B. Colby. As register, Colby’s duties included keeping accounts of receipts and expenditures of public money, and of all currency. The bank note reporter provided rates of discount for notes that would not be taken at their face-value in a business transaction, and lists of counterfeit, altered, raised, and spurious notes, as well as lists of defunct banks. Four images of Colby were located in the Mathew Brady Studio, four images of Colby were located in the Mathew Brady Studio.

During the course of Edmunds’ investigation, Heath answered more questions, including why Clark had this engraving. His response:
Whether or not Heath was being honest, Newman points out that the frontispiece “Treasury officials whose cooperation was needed to prepare Heath’s publication,” Treasury Department it makes perfect sense that Colby’s portrait would be included.

Historically, images engraved for use on a bank note are often reused on another note. Engravings are done in advance of a future need and thus considered stock.

Portraits and vignettes frequently appear multiple times and in multiple formats. Vignettes, I noticed that the Consol of 1867 used several of these same portraits. The question of when these portraits were engraved and for what purpose. Were the Consol or for the frontispiece?

In the HRC is a volume titled “Record of Dies” in which lists of dies that were held in the Treasury Department. The layout consists of a column with dates, descriptions of the dies, and engraver’s and the dates cover the period from February 1863 to May 1869. In red ink are notated First Currency Bureau was preparing for the House of Representatives “Report to the Condition of the Engraving and Printing Bureau of the Treasury.” In the section there are numbers written in black and in red. Those written in red correspond to the report. Pieces that make up the Consol appear in the listing for miscellaneous stock least 10 identifiable dies used on the Consol are recorded and are enumerated below (including the die number in the House report, date, and a description of the die):

180, October 9, 1864, Vignette Eagle and shield.
237, January 15, 1866, Head of Prest. Johnson with Legend of $1,000 Coupon Fundi
247, January 24, 1866, Head of Gen. Grant with Legend of the $500 Coupon F. Bond.
261, February 20, 1866, Head of Reg. of the Treasury, S. B. Colby and Legend of $50
268, February 20, 1866, Imprint Eng & Printed at the Trea. Dpt.
276, March 13(?), 1866, Head of McCulloch, Sec of the Trea. & Legend of $100 F.B. co
282, March 22, 1866, Vignette Soldier, drawn by Darley.
283, March 22, 1866, Vignette Treasury Building.
291, April 6, 1866, Head of Gen. Sherman F.B. coupon.
294, April 9, 1866, Vignette Sailor, drawn by Darley.17

Given these dates are in winter/early spring and the descriptions include legends first created for the Consol. In Heath’s testimony to Sen. Edmunds, Heath states the date of 1866:

“Q. [Edmunds] Which of you suggested that idea? – A. [Heath] I think it was Mr. Clay size for your book,’ and I said ‘Yea, just the thing.’ He said it would be a good frontis] Q. At what time was that? – A. About the time he sanctioned it.

The portraits that appear in the sample coupons beneath the bond illustrated in Th: interest to be paid to the bearer every six months—$30 for the purchase of a $1,000 bond, and $1.50 for a $50 bond. Illustrated from left to right are President Andrew Jt of the Treasury Hugh McCulloch, and Gen. William T. Sherman. As has been noted, coupon for the $50 bond with Colby’s portrait. Of the five individuals selected, Regi might have had the least public recognition. Colby was appointed to the position of September 1867. Johnson and McCulloch were in office from 1865 to 1869. Grant rex Sherman was well known for his campaign through the South in late 1864/early 1865 portrait on it is also for the $50 Consol. The substitution of Sherman could very well

In designing the frontispiece, a model with proofs arranged and pasted together may have been made first. Then, rolls would be used to transfer the individual images from the dies to a plate, text at the bottom stating that the print was “Engraved and Printed at the Treasury identify those individuals who did the individual engravings. During this period the Treasury Bureau was done by private bank note companies, and therefore, it was easy to see engraved elsewhere.
exception to the die numbers matching was number 261 (head of S.B. Colby) which tobacco stamp. In addition, the head of Colby does not appear in any of the books of engravers as reference material. It is possible that this particular die was disposed of.

In the same House report, there is a miscellaneous plate listed as “44. Vignette, treasury [sic] and eagle and heads.” This description could very well apply to Heath’s frontispiece, but there is no corresponding plate card in the BEP.

The name of the engraver Charles K. Burt appears on most of the die cards for the portraits. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, he came to the United States in 1842, and worked for several engraving companies including Rawdon, Wright, Hatch and Edson; and the American Bank Note Co. For the bureau, Burt worked on a contract basis as a picture engraver. His name is written on bureau die cards until about 1876. He died in 1892 in Brooklyn, N.Y.21

Charles Skinner is credited with engraving the vignette of the eagle. He began working for the Continental Bank Note Co. before moving to American Bank Note Co. in 1878 when the two companies consolidated.22 There is no record that he worked directly for or contracted with the BEP. The name Hatch was written on the die card for the depiction of the Treasury building. If Hatch, by the time of this engraving, he was president of American Bank Note Co.,23 with managing that company than with engraving. It is doubtful that he was the engraver.

The Treasury Department “Record of Dies” assisted in pointing to another engraver for the depiction of the Treasury building: William H. Dougal. He was a picture engraver and had established a studio which did work for the BEP, and is known to have made engravings for the Lt. Charles V. Hatch expedition to explore the mouth of the Red River.24

Using engravings originally created for the Consol of 1867, Clark composed—for political reasons—an image that became a fitting introduction to Heath’s book. The portraits and vignettes that were used on both the Consol and on the frontispiece were in Spencer Clark’s possession by the spring of 1866. Heath’s testimony to Sen. Edmunds confirmed Register Colby’s depiction and, by inference, Clark’s political desire to promote the First Currency Bill through military heroes, the Father of the Country, and Treasury officials. By placing Colby’s portrait on the frontispiece, Clark and Heath ensured that as many people would see Colby’s portrait as would see William Tecumseh Sherman. Colby has the last laugh, and this was all discovered by finding the identity of a portrait.

Note

This paper was produced in the Historical Resource Center, Bureau of Engraving and Printing while the author was under contract to Noll Historical Consulting, LLC. The views, conclusions, and opinions stated in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Historical Resource Center or the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The author also bears all responsibility for the accuracy of all dates, numbers, calculations, citations, names, and other salient facts. The author would like to thank Mark Tomasko for his kind input and insight into the material.

End Notes

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