

American Bank Note Co. Loses USPS Contract

“American Commemorative Panels” Now Produced by Jeffries Banknote Co.

THE U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has contracted with the Jeffries Banknote Co. of Los Angeles to produce the

by BARBARA R. MUELLER, NLG

A random sampling of vignettes used on the first one hundred or so panels (see “Sources of Information” below) reveals the

American Commemorative Panels (ACP), beginning with the first four released in 1985, Nos. 237-240. The “panels” are 8½ x 11 pages devoted to a new stamp issue, with a block of four of the stamps, background information and prints of complementary steel engravings; the engravings, of course, are the syndicator’s primary interest, since they are derived from the printer’s bank note history.

USPS thus ended the involvement of the American Bank Note Co., which had produced the series since its inception in 1972. Correspondence with Dickey B. Rustin, acting general manager of the Philatelic Marketing Division of USPS, elicited the following statement dated April 29, 1985:

“The contract with American Bank Note Company to produce these panels expired in 1984, and the contract to produce the 1985 panels was awarded to Jeffries Banknote Company on a competitive bid basis. Both companies responded to our invitation to bid on the 1985 contract, and both were judged to be capable of producing a product meeting our specifications—including the use of intaglio printed vignettes. Jeffries was awarded the contract because their bid price was lower than the American Bank Note’s bid. The printing of the intaglio vignettes is done on the contractor’s premises with the same printing equipment used for the printing of other security items.”

A press release from Jeffries printed in the June 29, 1985 edition of *Stamps* magazine carried this information:

“To personalize this year’s collection, the engravers at Jeffries Banknote Company searched through their extensive 90-year-old archives for just the right engraving to complement the stamp. In addition, the company worked with students from USC’s School of Journalism to research and write an informative description of the stamp subjects. Lastly, they coordinated with the Minnesota Diversified Industries, a private corporation which provides employment opportunities for disabled individuals, to add the final touch of hand mounting the stamps on the panels.”

In this reviewer’s opinion, it is rather foolhardy of Jeffries to boast about their 90-year-old archives in view of the depth of the 19th century archives of American Bank Note and its roots in the 18th century. Ninety years ago the heyday of bank note engraving, especially for private banks, had long passed. Jeffries is noted more for stock certificates and related security paper than for its bank notes and stamps. (A worthy project for specialists would be the researching of Jeffries’ postal and currency products to establish just what direction connections their archives can yield for the design of future commemorative panels.) (It is known that they printed a long series of engraved stamps for Panama picturing Popes; they are unlisted by Scott because of what is considered the “black blot” character of the series.)

antiquity of the vignettes, their possibilities for matching-up with currency and stamps, and their distinguished origin, many having come from pioneer bank note concerns that merged into American Bank Note in 1858 and 1879:

No. 1, **Wildlife**, 1972—The deer vignette is found on the \$2 note of the Northwestern Bank, Warren, Ohio and on the 1¢ proprietary revenue stamp of the Union Match Co.

No. 41, **Christmas, Currier & Ives design**—The ship “City of Hartford” engraved by Danforth, Wright & Co. was used on a note of the Orange Bank of Indiana, 1854; the “sleighting” vignette was done by Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Co., ca. 1832-34.

No. 42, **Christmas**—The vignette “Thunder and Lightning” was done by James Smillie for American Bank Note in 1877 and used in 1887 on a stock certificate for the Cincinnati Gas Light & Coke Co.

No. 43, **Benjamin West**—The vignette “Benjamin West” was engraved by Draper, Toppan, Longacre, ca. 1835-39 and used on a \$1000 note of the Bank of the United States.

No. 66, **Benjamin Franklin**—The vignette of Independence Hall was done by Bald, Cousland & Co., ca. 1853-58, and used on a diploma for the Yorktown Centennial Celebration of 1881.

No. 67, **Signing of the Declaration of Independence**—The vignette of that event was engraved by Charles Toppan, 1840.

No. 68, **Olympics 1976**—The vignette of the Acropolis was done by Charles Skinner for American Bank Note and used on a note of the Banque Nationale de Greece.

No. 81, **Peace Bridge**—The beaver vignette was done by Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson, 1847-58 and used on a Bank of Toronto note, 1892.

No. 91, **Captain Cook**—The coconut palm vignette, done by the National Bank Note Co., ca. 1869-79, was used on a \$50 gold note of the Republic of Hawaii.

No. 102, **American Trees**—James Smillie worked over the Bald, Cousland die “The Palm” for use on an Imperio do Brazil note of 1877.

One would assume that for the initial offering, Jeffries would have tried to use similar engraved vignettes to please the match-up collectors. However, such match-ups do not seem feasible with the vignettes described below. If Jeffries is to maintain the iconographic style established by American Bank Note Co., it may have to resort to modern versions of period-style art. The question then arises, does it, or indeed does any modern concern, have the artisans capable of emulating the bank note style of the Smillies, Toppan, Delnoce, and other engravers of the past?



AMERICAN COMMEMORATIVES

Wildlife

Conservation of the natural world has been on a new upswing this decade. This conservationist edifice has been frequently honored by the U.S. Postal Service. The 1977 Wildlife Conservation Block was one of the most beautiful and beautiful in the continuing U.S. Commemorative series.

The 1977 Wildlife Commemorative Block, again designed by the well-known California artist Stanley Kern, featured the California and Texas quail, the California and Brown Pelican, and the Fur Seal and the Brown Pelican are depicted with their young, illustrating the importance of protecting the species so that they may again populate their native habitat. The Cardinal, one of our most noble and colorful

birds, is illustrated in its habitat. The seal and the pelican are engraved, based upon the original etch and engraving done from the mid-19th century. The vignette of the beaver, engraved between 1945 and 1965, was used on the membership certificate of the American Museum of Natural History. The same vignette was engraved in 1961 and was used on an Argonnebank bank note. The striking deer was engraved in 1859.



American commemorative panel number 1, with the deer vignette definitely attributable. See text for details. Can anyone match up the other two?

In view of the recently proclaimed financial crisis in USPS and its consequent curtailment of philatelic promotion, and even cancellation of a scheduled 14¢ Seasons Greetings stamp and a souvenir card for National Stamp Collecting Month for 1985, it can scarcely gamble with the popularity and quality of its ACP series if sales are to be maintained. In the words of a *Coin World* article of July 31, 1974, "The American Bank Note Co., . . . was portraying vivid Americana in steel-engraved vignettes on its products long before the advent of the camera and more modern means of graphic reproduction . . ." These vignettes and their relationship to philately and syngraphics are responsible for the success of the ACP series. Random, derivative, period-type art of modern origin may well spoil that success.

Description of the Vignettes on the First Four Jeffries Panels

No. 237, **Jerome Kern** — three vignettes, the first, a modern cowgirl with a rifle, the second, a street lamplighter scene and the date 1886, and the third, a group of people in period costumes boarding what would seem to be a show boat. The last one appears to be primarily an etching, with some of the figures in outline form only. The "JBCo" copyright symbol appears on the first two, but not on the third.

No. 238, **Mary McLeod Bethune** — three vignettes, the first is the seal of Bethune-Cookman College, the second an etching of a log cabin scene, and the third a copyrighted eagle against a shield over crossed quill pens and an acorn. Compared to

the great eagles that came from the burins of the 19th century engravers, this one appears to be a lifeless, stuffed bird in my opinion.

No. 239, **Duck decoys**—The largest amount of space is taken up by what seems to be an uncopyrighted woodland scene of a cabin beside a body of water with a duck in flight and two in the water; those waterborne birds are crude in execution and the entire scene is very dark and murky. A second vignette consists of three ducks, or they may be decoys; from the lifeless eyes it is difficult to tell the difference. The only copyright vignette on this panel is one of an Indian chief with head dress. No Running Antelope he, but still passable.

No. 240, **Special Olympics**—In addition to a lithographed logo of the Games, there are two small vignettes, one of a skater facing directly forward and another of a skier and his instructor. A large vignette across the bottom of the panel consists of the two hemispheres of the globe resting on typical bank note scroll-work.

Sources of Information on Commemorative Panels

Two organizations have embraced the panels in their spheres of interest, The Essay-Proof Society and the Souvenir Card Collectors Society (SCCS). Articles on them can be found in *The Essay-Proof Journal*, Nos. 126-127 (Spring and Summer 1975), 139 (Summer 1978), 143 (Summer 1979), 145-46 (Winter and Spring 1980), 149 (Winter 1981), 151 (Summer 1981) and 163 (third quarter 1984). The references to *Journals* 139-151 are to actual listings of the origins and previous uses of the vignettes on approximately the first hundred panels as furnished directly by American Bank Note Co. Various issues of the *SCCS Journal* have also carried references to the panels.

A formal listing of the panels has been included in *Scott's U.S. Stamp Catalogue Specialized*, although the listing in the 1985 catalogue appears to be a perfunctory afterthought on the second-to-the-last page, entirely out of normal sequence. Indeed, it is merely a repetition of the listing in the 1980 edition, which covered issues into 1979. The future of the listing in the hands of Amos Press, new owners of the Scott catalogues, is unknown at this writing. At any rate, its continuation or deletion will have a definite impact on the demand for the panels, as will Jeffries' future performance. ■

*An up-to-date listing with rather unrealistically high valuations is included in the USPS annual publication, *The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*, available at most post offices.

**AT YOUR BANK
ASK FOR
AND THEN USE
\$2 BILLS**

INTERNATIONAL PAPER MONEY CONVENTION

Sponsored by
The Society of Paper Money Collectors

NOVEMBER 14-17, 1985
HYATT-CHERRY HILL,
CHERRY HILL, NJ

We've made attending this conference as simple as possible. A special CONVENTION DESK* has been staffed with responsible, knowledgeable coordinators who will handle all the details of your conference . . . and we have also provided you with a special unlisted toll-free telephone number to call our CONVENTION DESK.*

Transportation . . . As official airline, Eastern will be handling your air travel arrangements . . . even if you do not live in a city served by Eastern . . . just call our toll-free number and we'll book you on Eastern or the airline of your choice.

35% OFF
Normal Coach Fares

Fares . . . Eastern will guarantee a Group Discount of **35% off** the full day coach fares for individuals traveling roundtrip on Eastern from many cities within the continental United States. To qualify, reservations must be booked through Eastern's special CONVENTION DESK. In certain instances, even greater discounts may be available with restricted availability. Residents outside of the continental United States should call their nearest Eastern office for the best applicable fare.

Ticketing . . . After you have reserved your flights you may purchase your tickets from your local Travel Agent, any Eastern Ticket Office or we will mail them directly to you along with an invoice for payment. Regardless of where you choose to pay for your tickets, call Eastern's CONVENTION DESK now to reserve your flights.

Other Services . . . Our convention coordinators will also provide you with information on your meeting . . . suggest things to do and see during your free time . . . make car rental reservations . . . and arrange for pre and post-convention tours.

REMEMBER CALL

800-468-7022

(in Florida 800-282-0244)

*Convention Desk Sales Hours: 9:00 AM-8:00 PM, Mon.-Fri. Eastern Time.

TO MAKE YOUR TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS
REFER TO EASY ACCESS NUMBER:

EZ11P19

