

The Durable Series of 1880 Legal Tender \$500 Plate

A NEW 4-SUBJECT \$500 LEGAL TENDER PLATE WAS MADE with Schofield-Gilfillan signatures at the start of the Series of 1880. It was lettered A1-B1-C1-D1, the same as a previous Series of 1874 plate.

Thus began an odyssey that would see this plate through 32 years of periodic service with ten different signature combinations and at least one reentry of the vignettes, which was carried out in the midst of the Rosecrans-Huston administration.

We have not observed a longer serving large size U. S. currency plate, although it is possible that one could be found.



The Paper Column by Peter Huntoon and Doug Murray

In contrast, three 4-subject Series of 1880 \$1000 plates were made during this same period. The largest number of signature combinations used on any one of them was four.

Fewer Series of 1880 \$500 notes were printed than \$1000s. A total of 27,000 impressions, or 108,000 notes, were printed from the \$500 plate in comparison to 52,000 impressions or 208,000 notes from the three \$1000 plates (Moffitt, current).

The early high denomination legal tender plates have proven to be very interesting for three reasons. (1) They were routinely altered to carry new series dates and treasury signatures. (2) The positions of the treasury signatures and their titles were transposed on several of the plates. (3) Patent dates for innovations involving printing technology and paper were placed on several of the plates.

We'll document these interesting occurrences for you here, so our discussion will range wider than a simple look at the Series of 1880 \$500 plate.



Figure 1. \$500 Series of 1880 legal tender proof with Rosecrans-Hyatt signatures. This combination was the third out of ten that was placed on the plate.

Signature Changes

Large size national bank note and high denomination type note face plates were not hardened because their limited use simply didn't require it. Consequently, it was rather easy to alter them, or to reenter worn or damaged design elements.

New signatures and series dates were placed on the high denomination legal tender plates with regularity. The process of changing signatures involved burnishing the old signature off the plate, and entering the new one.

An intaglio die was made containing the new signature. The die was then hardened so a soft steel transfer roll could be lifted from it. The roll was hardened, and used to transfer the signature onto each of the subjects on the plate. A separate roll was used to enter the title under the signature.

If removal of an old signature or entry of the new one caused damage to adjacent design elements, appropriate rolls would be retrieved and used to reenter them. Similarly, if the vignettes exhibited wear, they could be reentered as well before the plate was recertified and put back in service.

Typically, but not always, the siderographers who made the alterations added their initials to the upper border of the plate. Consequently, successive proofs generally exhibit new initials so the chronology of the work on the plate can be deduced with fair accuracy.

The first initials on the \$500 Series of 1880 plate were PJG, and appeared during the Rosecrans-Jordan administration, but sometime after their signatures had been added to the plate. The new work done by PJG involved adding the plate number 619 to the bottom margin and maybe even reentering the vignettes.

Siderographer initials were strung 2/3rds of the way across the top margin of the plate by the time it was discontinued in 1912! But not all of the siderographers placed their initials on it, especially during the early years.

The idea, though, is that this remarkable plate was one of the most, if not the most, frequently altered plate in the history of the large size issues!

Earlier \$500 Legal Tender Plates

The design used on the Series of 1880 \$500s was first used for Series of 1874 Allison-Spinner notes. Two 4-subject Allison-Spinner \$500 plates were made that were lettered A1-B1-C1-D1 and A2-B2-C2-D2. They were respectively logged into the record of plates on January 22 and May 12, 1874.

Only the A2-B2-C2-D2 plate was used to print Allison-Spinner notes. The positions of their signatures were transposed on it.

Both plates were altered into Series of 1875 Allison-New plates when New replaced Spinner in 1875. Their signatures appeared in the correct locations on the new versions of the plates. Notice that they had to move Allison's signature to the left side on both. Only one note is reported with Allison-New signa-



tures, and it is from the A2-B2-C2-D2 plate.

Later, when Wyman replaced New in 1876, the A1-B1-C1-D1 plate was altered again to carry the Allison-Wyman combination. The Series was left as 1875.

Lastly, the A2-B2-C2-D2 plate was altered again to carry the Allison-Gilfillan combination after Gilfillan assumed office in 1877. Series of 1875 was removed from the plate, and Series of 1878 was overprinted on the notes instead.

Once again, they transposed the positions of officer's signatures and titles on the Allison-Gilfillan version of the plate. This is especially odd because Allison's signature already was on the plate in the correct position before the alteration, so it had to be removed again and repositioned!

Both of the early \$500 plates were replaced by a new A1-B1-C1-D1 plate which served the entire Series of 1880, and which is the focus of this article. That plate was entered into the record of plates on February 17, 1880.

The BEP seemed to have had a problem with the placement of treasury signatures on some of the legal tender plates because signatures were also transposed on several versions of the \$50 plates as well. The signatures on the Series of 1874 and 1878 \$50 plate were transposed, but correctly positioned on the Series of 1875 version, just as had happened on the \$500 plate.

The problem persisted on the \$50s into the Series of 1880 where the first five signature combinations come transposed. These involve all the notes with the Bruce-Gilfillan, Bruce-Wyman, Rosecrans-Jordan, Rosecrans-Hyatt and Rosecrans-Huston combinations, including all the different treasury seals that go with each.

Patent Dates

Another curiosity involving the \$500 plates is a patent date that appears in very fine letters in the upper border of the box used for the lower left serial number. This reads "Geo. W. Casilear's Patent Nov. 24, 1868."

That patent date is on all the \$500 Series of 1874 through 1878 issues. It also was placed on the Series of 1880 plate for use with the unissued Scofield-Gilfillan and issued Bruce-Wyman combinations. The patent date was removed from the plate before the Rosecrans-Jordan notes were printed.

Reed (2008) advises that Casilear's Nov. 24, 1868 patent pertained to overprinting serial numbers on a fine line guilloche to foil tampering. The patent attribution first appeared on Series of 1869 Rainbow legal tender notes, but not the \$500.

Figure 2. The treasury signatures and titles on \$500 plate A2-B2-C2-D2 were successively altered and used to print the Series of 1874 (top), Series of 1875 (middle) and Series of 1878 (bottom). Notice that the positions of the treasury signatures were erroneously transposed on both the top and bottom versions of the plate. Especially notice how Allison's signature was moved back and forth on the plate between each series!



Figure 3. This detail shows Casilear's patent date for the concept of using a fine line guilloche behind serial numbers in order to foil alteration or counterfeiting. This same concept is the reason why seals on modern notes are overprinted over engraved work because it is difficult for counterfeiters to make photographic color separations from the original as they attempt to make their own plates to duplicate the note. (Photo courtesy of Doug Murray)

Casilear's patent no. 84,341 stated: "Be it known that I . . . have invented a new and improved Mode of Preventing the Alteration of Numbers or the Addition of Figures on Bonds, Notes, and other Securities . . . on a finely-engraved background . . . of scroll-lathe work, or any other printed matter, the groundwork of which shall be tinted in fugitive colors or inks."

Furthermore, he advocated printing serial numbers between terminators "leaving no room for adding an additional number on either side of the figure or figures." These terminators included parentheses, or, as seen on the Series of 1869 notes, a prefix letter and a suffix consisting of a five pointed star.

According to Reed, Casilear had a long and somewhat turbulent career in the bank note industry. He rose to Chief Engraver and Superintendent of the Engraving Division at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. He also patented an improved paper to foil altering in 1875, and three years later another improved bank note paper employing localized fibers and coloring.

His idea for using terminators in serial numbers resulted in their being adopted for use in treasury sheet serial numbers on national bank notes in April 1869. Three changes were made on the nationals: (1) in most cases, prefix letters were added to the numbers if they were not already in use for the plate combination, (2) the numbers were formally terminated with brackets, and (3) spaces between the prefix letter and the numbers were eliminated.

The idea of superimposing overprints on engraved work was used in the security engraving trade because the technique foiled the efforts of counterfeiters to make photographic color separations as they prepared their own plates. Often people look at a busy looking note, say a Series of 1882 brown back national bank

Table 1. Treasury signature combinations and seals that appeared on Series of 1880 \$500 and \$1000 notes. The signature combination was not placed on a plate if the denomination is omitted.

<u>Register-Treasurer</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Signatures</u>	<u>Current</u>	<u>Denominations</u> ^a		<u>Seals</u>
Scofield-Gilfillan	Apr 1, 1878-May 20, 1881			500		none printed
Bruce-Gilfillan	May 21, 1881-Mar 31, 1883					
Bruce-Wyman	Apr 1, 1883-Apr 30, 1885			500	1000(1)	large brown
Bruce-Jordan	May 1, 1885-Jun 7, 1885					
Rosecrans-Jordan	Jun 8, 1885-May 23, 1887			500	1000(1)	large red plain
Rosecrans-Hyatt	May 24, 1887-May 10, 1889			500	1000(1)	large red plain
Rosecrans-Huston	May 11, 1889-Apr 24, 1891			500	1000(1)	large red spiked
Rosecrans-Nebeker	Apr 25, 1891-May 31, 1893			500		small red
					1000(2)	large brown
Rosecrans-Morgan	Jun 1, 1893-Jun 30, 1893					
Tillman-Morgan	Jul 1, 1893-Jun 30, 1897			500	1000(2)	small red
Tillman-Roberts	Jul 1, 1897-Dec 2, 1897				1000(3)	none printed
Bruce-Roberts	Dec 3, 1897-Apr 6, 1898			500		small red
Lyons-Roberts	Apr 7, 1898-Jun 30, 1905			500	1000(3)	small red
Lyons-Treat	Jul 1, 1905-Jun 11, 1906					
Vernon-Treat	Jun 12, 1906-Oct 30, 1909				1000(3)	small red
Vernon-McClung	Nov 1, 1909-May 17, 1911					
Napier-McClung	May 18, 1911-Nov 21, 1912			500	1000(3)	none printed

a. The three plates made for the Series of 1880 \$1000 notes are distinguished by the number in parentheses.



Figure 4. The use of patent dates peaked on the \$1000 Series of 1869 legal tender plate with Allison-Spinner signatures. That plate carried both Willcox's patent date for his special paper and Casilear's patent date for overprinting serial numbers on a fine-lined background. Notice that Casilear's patent date appears under each serial number.

note, and comment that the designers failed to leave enough room for the treasury seal. Printing the seal over black design elements, even though it obscured certain information such as plate dates, was deliberate.

The odd phenomenon of putting patent dates for such ideas on notes made its appearance in another form. The patent date of July 24, 1866, for James M. Willcox innovation for introducing colored fibers into localized areas within security paper, was placed on the earlier \$500 Series of 1869 legal tender plate with John Quincy Adams portrait.

That plate bore Allison-Spinner signatures, and was used to print the rainbow notes (Reed, 2008). However, Willcox's patent date was omitted from the new Allison-Spinner Series of 1874 plates when the \$500 was redesigned during their term to feature Civil War General Joseph King Mansfield's portrait. Consequently Willcox's patent date wasn't mated with Casilear's patent date on any of the new design \$500s.

In contrast, the use of patent dates reached its zenith on the \$1000 Series of 1869 legal tender plate with Allison-Spinner signatures. That plate carried both the Willcox and Casilear patent dates. In fact, Casilear's patent date is repeated twice, one under each serial number, which in retrospect seems a bit absurd.

Had that trend persisted, notes eventually would have been peppered with all sorts of patent dates! The queer aspect to these dates is that there was no indication as to what they referred.

The design of the \$1000 face was left unchanged when the new backs were introduced for the Series of 1878, but Wilcox's patent date was dropped then. Casilear's patent date was dropped from the \$1000 Series of 1880 issues beginning with the Rosecrans-Jordan issues.

It is amazing to discover how interconnected things are.

Acknowledgments

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