



The Paper Column

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Misspelling error on \$1000 Series of 1882 Gold Certificates



Figure 1. Series of 1882 gold certificate, all of which contain the misspelling “Thonsand” in the banner underneath the Treasury seal. Smithsonian photos.

Introduction and Purpose

Doug Murray, while perusing the scans of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing proofs on the Smithsonian website, discovered that the word Thousand is misspelled “Thonsand” in the “One Thousand Dollars” banner on the proofs for all the \$1000 Series of 1882 gold certificates, including the countersigned variety.

The misspelling was acknowledged on the last proof made for the \$1000s in the series—a proof lifted from a Lyons-Treat plate upon which someone at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing sketched a correction on the A-subject. However, the mistake had been detected over 15 years earlier because the identical banner was corrected on \$1000 Series of 1890 and 1891 Treasury notes.

It is the purpose of this article to describe the occurrence of this mistake and reveal how it was produced.

The \$1000 Misspelling

The plates for the Series of 1882 gold certificates were designed and master dies made for them



Figure 2. Misspelled Thonsand as it appears on all \$1000 Series of 1882 gold certificates. Notice the differences in the crossbars at the top of the letter n, which occurs three times in the line. The differences reveal that the line was engraved instead of being laid-in one letter at a time. In contrast, “IN” and “Gold Coin” were laid-in one letter at a time using Casilear’s patented lettering process.

during the heyday of the reign of Bureau of Engraving and Printing Chief Engraver George Casilear. The notes incorporate lines of text and numbers made using Casilear’s patented lettering technology. The concept was that full alphabets of letters and/or numbers were designed and engraved on a die, each alphabet consisting of a specific font. The characters were then taken up one at a time on a transfer roll. When text was needed on a die or plate, the required characters were efficiently laid-in one character at a time to compose the text instead of having the text hand-engraved by a letter engraver (Huntoon, 2018). In this manner, the same font could be reused on any number of Bureau products.

Classic examples on the face of the note illustrated on Figure 1 include “THIS CERTIFIES THAT,” “GOLD CERTIFICATE,” “DEPARTMENT SERIES,” “Gold Coin,” “WASHINGTON, D.C.,” and the letters and numerals used in the corner counters. One of the most distinctive of the fonts reproduced by Casilear’s patented lettering process was that used to spell out GOLD CERTIFICATE on the back of the note. All the other letters and numerals on the back also were laid-in using the patented lettering process including the large M.

However, the banner “One Thonsand Dollars,” which is the focus of this article, was not composed using the patented lettering process. In contrast, that line of text was hand-engraved on a component die by a letter engraver as a one-off job. This is evident if you will carefully examine the three occurrences of the letter n in the banners illustrated on Figures 2 and 3. Notice that the crossbars at the tops differ in detail, something that could not occur if laid-in from one n from one of Casilear’s character rolls.

What transpired in the case of the misspelled line is that it was engraved only once, lifted on a roll from the component die upon which it was engraved, and then transferred to the generic full-face master dies for both the countersigned and non-countersigned varieties of the \$1000 notes. This type of recycling of text was a common practice in the bank note industry.

The completed images on the two generic full-face master dies, which included everything except the Treasury signatures and plate serial number, were picked up on master rolls that were used to lay-in the generic designs of the notes onto the required plates. The plate-specific Treasury signatures were rolled in separately and plate numbers probably etched in.

All the proofs for the \$1000 Series of 1882 gold certificates are listed on Table 1. A total of six plates were made but additional proofs were lifted because the Treasury signatures were altered on some. Bureau personnel didn’t harden such little-used plates, which allowed alterations to be made with relative ease.

The Mistake is Acknowledged

After poring over the proofs several times, Murray spotted the sketched U on the A-note on the proof lifted from the second Lyons-Treat plate illustrated on Figure 5. The image is from Treasury plate number 21325, plate serial number 5.

We have no way of knowing if the sketch was made before or after the plate was certified on

Table 1. Record of all the proofs lifted from the \$1000 Series of 1882 gold certificate plates used in the series, all with the spelling "Thonsand." All were 4-subject plates.

Treas. Pl. #	Pl. Ser. #	Register	Treasurer	Cert. Date	Status	Special Consideration
none	1	Bruce	Gilfillan	Sep 16, 1882	new plate	countersigned version
814	1	Bruce	Gilfillan	Nov 23, 1882	new plate	Treasury plate no. in pencil
814	1	Bruce	Wyman	no date	sig change	Treasury plate no. in pencil
814	1	Rosecrans	Hyatt	no date	sig change	
814	1	Rosecrans	Hyatt	no date	re-entry	
814	1	Rosecrans	Hyatt	no date	re-entry	
814	1	Rosecrans	Huston	Mar 18, 1891	sig change	
814	1	Rosecrans	Huston	no date	re-entry	
814	1	Rosecrans	Nebeker	Jan 28, 1892	sig change	
9426	2	Lyons	Roberts	Aug 21, 1899	new plate	
13548	3	Lyons	Roberts	Jan 19, 1904	new plate	
21310	4	Lyons	Treat	Jan 29, 1906	new plate	
21325	5	Lyons	Treat	Feb 7, 1906	new plate	misspelling flagged on A-subject



Figure 3. Misspelled Thonsand as found on the countersigned version of the \$1000 Series of 1882 gold certificates (Fr.1218a). Notice that every detail in "One Thonsand Dollars" is identical to that on Figure 2 revealing that the line of text was reproduced from the same component die.

February 7, 1906. Significantly, BEP Director William M. Meredith's initials were not crossed out to cancel the certification. No second proof was lifted from plate 5 to reveal that the misspelling was corrected.

A total of 27 \$1000 Series of 1882 gold certificates are recorded in Gengerke's census, four of which are Lyons-Treat notes. The highest serial number among them is D15131 from plate 4. The last serial number used in the series was D16000. Plate 5 never was sent to press.

A Joker

The fact is that the misspelling on the 1882 gold notes was old news at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing by 1906. Lee Lofthus, while reviewing this article, pointed out that the same One Thousand Dollars engraving was recycled to the faces of the \$1000 Series of 1890 and 1891 Treasury notes, except the misspelling was corrected on them as illustrated on Figure 6. Consequently, the problem had been caught over a decade and a half earlier.

Furthermore, a smaller version of the engraving was adapted for the 1890 backs but with a peculiar twist. A crossbar was correctly added to the bottom of the u but left on the top. See Figure 7.

Evidently when it came to the 1890 and 1891 Treasury notes, a new die with the banner was laid-in from the roll lifted from the original and the u repaired before the die was hardened. A new roll was lifted from the new die, hardened and used to lay the correctly spelled banner into the generic master die made for the \$1000 Treasury note faces.

Although very straight forward, this explanation begs the question of why they didn't change it on the Series of 1882 gold certificates. The problem they faced was that the full-face generic die and roll they

had for the gold certificates already were hardened so could not be altered.

The fact is that nothing was done about the misspelling on the \$1000 gold certificates so the tack taken by those in the know was to let sleeping dogs lie.

Curiosity

Murray had the distinct advantage of looking at naked proofs, which facilitated his ability to spot the error, but so did the trained and critical plate inspectors who scrutinized the first proofs back in 1882 who missed it.

The big surprise for us is the fact that no numismatist ever published on the misspelling. More than half of the reported Series of 1882 \$1000 gold certificates are in collector hands and collectors tend to intently study their notes. However, when you glance at text, you tend to see it as it should be. Those who own varieties with a large seal certainly can be forgiven for missing it because the seal obscures the offending character. However, the misspelling is fully exposed on the more common variety with small seals as per Figure 8.

References Cited and Sources of Data

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Figure 4. Proof of the countersigned version of the \$1000 Series of 1882 gold certificates payable at the Assistant Treasurer's office in New York. Thomas C. Action hand-signed the issued notes. The seals on the issued notes did not obscure the misspelling.

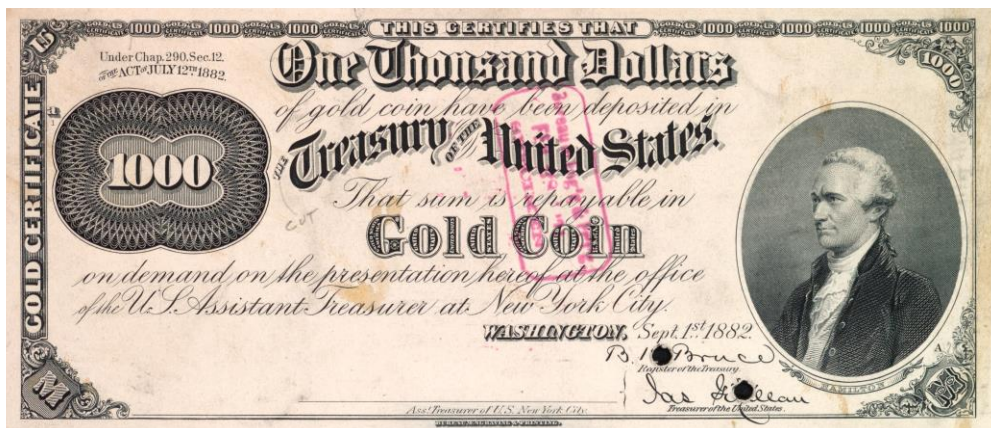


Figure 5. Sketched correction that appears on the A-subject of Lyons-Treat plate 21325/5, which was the last \$1000 plate made for the series. The plate was certified February 7, 1906 despite the misspelling.



Figure 6. Series of 1891 Treasury note with small scalloped seal that allows you to see the entire One Thousand Dollar banner, which was recycled to this design but with the correct spelling of Thousand. Smithsonian photo.



Figure 7. Series of 1890 Treasury note back. The banner here is a look-a-like but different, smaller engraving where the misspelling has been partially corrected by adding a crossbar to the bottom of the u but erroneously leaving it at the top. This is curious! Smithsonian photo.



Figure 8. Series of 1882 gold certificate with a small scalloped seal that does not cover the misspelling of Thousand in the banner. These seals were used on Rosecrans-Nebeker, Lyons-Roberts and Lyons-Treat notes. Heritage Auction Archives photo.