

An American Bank Note Company Collage

American Bank Note Company Collage, New York, late 19th century. Collage; bank notes, security engravings, stamps, and stock certificates. Yale University Art Gallery, Promised gift of Susan G. and John W. Jackson, B.A. 1967, and the Liana Foundation



In April 2017, the Yale University Art Gallery's Department of Numismatics was the recipient of a transformative gift conferred by Susan and John Jackson, B.A. 1967, and the Liana Foundation. Their generosity has established an endowment fund for numismatics that created an independent numismatics department and will provide support for its activities as well as a new Jackson Curator. In addition, a substantial bequest from the Jacksons will see their premier collection of currency and related material housed at the Gallery.

One of the most exciting pieces in the collection is a collage dating to the late 19th century, currently on view in the Bela Lyon Pratt Gallery. Apprentices at the American Bank Note Company (ABNC) created this rare collage using available stock material, fashioning a unique way for the company to display their products to prospective clients. Although several competing private companies existed, ABNC was preeminent in the business of producing "documents of value"—a term conveniently used to describe a range of material, such as bank notes, stamps, stock certificates, and corporate, state, and municipal bonds. Framed in an immaculate, ornate, wooden Eastlake-style frame, the collage offers a glimpse into the vast array of material for which the company was known around the world. At the center

of the collage, 14 allegorical engravings—Lady Justice, for example—surround the vignette of Liberty that was used for Union Pacific stock and bond certificates. Two nature scenes complete the border around the Liberty vignette and depict Niagara Falls (above) and what appears to be Mount Hood (below).

Bank notes from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and Paraguay form part of the outer areas of the collage. While it may seem unusual to find foreign bank notes together with American material, South American countries became one of the most important markets for ABNC toward the end of the 19th century. During the Civil War, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) was established, adding pressure on the two largest currency producers of the time, ABNC and the National Bank Note Company. In 1877 Congress passed a law designating BEP as the sole producer of U.S. bank notes, leading to a merger between American and National in 1879. Nine years later, ABNC won a

four-year contract to engrave and print postal notes for the United States Postal Service, several types of which are found on the collage. These include the 3¢ Green Washington, the 2¢ Red Brown Washington, and the 4¢ Blue Green Jackson. As was the case with currency, BEP became the exclusive producer of U.S. postal notes in 1894, although ABNC continued to produce stamp notes for South American countries, of which 152 from Uruguay and Venezuela also appear on the collage.

At the four corners of the 30-by-50-inch collage, portraits of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, and Samuel Morse appear in oval vignettes, while the rest of the collage is filled with geometric lathework, used on bank notes to provide additional security against counterfeiting. Fashioned by some of the best bank note engravers, the arrangement and composition produce a colorful and graphic collage using original and rare material.

Sarah Hooker Leavitt and Her Worktable

This rare signed worktable, painted by Sarah Hooker Leavitt (1797–1837) in 1814 with extraordinary sepia-toned garlands, floral streamers, geometric borders, and four landscape views, is a recent gift to the Yale University Art Gallery's Department of American Decorative Arts from Lulu C. Wang and Anthony W. Wang, B.A. 1965, through the Shoreland Foundation. Beginning in the middle of the 18th century, worktables were made for fashionable French women as accessories for reading, writing, and sewing, but were not introduced in America until the Federal period. The top of Sarah's worktable is hinged and when raised, reveals a baize-lined surface that can be sloped for reading, writing, or drawing. Implements for these activities and sewing could be stored in its drawer, and the lower shelf could hold books or needlework. It was a highly decorative yet compact workstation for the accomplished woman.

The worktable belongs to a remarkable group of objects by Sarah and her sister Maria, some of which are at the Gallery. The group includes Sarah's 1810 needlework commemorating her grandfather Rev. Ezra Stiles, the seventh president of Yale College; her needlework and watercolor panel on a pole screen from around 1810 at Historic Deerfield, Massachusetts; and Maria's needlework and watercolor panel on a pole screen in the collection of Davida and Alvin Deutsch, LL.B. 1958, a promised bequest to the Gallery. These objects attest to the sisters' artistic talents, developed through the fine education provided by their parents. They were the daughters of the Greenfield, Massachusetts, magistrate Jonathan Leavitt (1764–1830) and his wife, Emilia Stiles Leavitt (1762–1833). Like many young women of their day, in

addition to reading, writing, and English grammar, their education included needle arts, drawing, and painting. The sisters were enrolled in the Deerfield Academy in the spring and summer terms of 1808 and 1809, where they were taught by Jerusha Mather Williams, who was a product of the renowned Misses Pattens' school in Hartford, Connecticut.

Intriguing questions remain to be answered. At some schools, instruction was given in painting tables and boxes, and the Deerfield Academy was one such school where Orra White taught painting on wood to her students between

1813 and 1818. The inscription on the rear rail of the worktable, however, indicates that Sarah painted it in 1814 in Northampton, Massachusetts, some 25 miles down the Connecticut River from her parents' home in Greenfield. With whom was she living, and where was she gaining further education? The pastoral scenes on the table feature British rural architecture, probably taken from drawing books commonly used at academies, but the exact sources for Sarah's compositions remain unidentified. These and other questions open avenues of research to gain a better understanding of Sarah and her world.



Sarah Hooker Leavitt, Worktable, 1814. Bird's-eye maple, white pine, and yellow poplar. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Lulu C. and Anthony W. Wang, B.A. 1965, in honor of Patricia E. Kane, Ph.D. 1987