
FULTON
CALHOUN
CLAY
JACKSON
ADAMS
JEFFERSON
WASHINGTON
FRANKLIN
HAMILTON
PERRY
MARSHALL
WEBSTER
MORSE
ONE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SERIES OF 1896.
A
>117<
COOPER
IRVING
LINCOLN
SHERMAN
HAWTHORNE
BANCROFT
GRANT
FARRAGUT
EMERSON
HISTORY INSCRIBING TO THE
THIS CERTIFIES THAT THERE HAS BEEN DEPOSITED IN THE
TREASURY OF THE UNITED STATES
ONE SILVER DOLLAR
Payable to the Bearer on demand.
WASHINGTON, D. C.
J. Fount Tillman
Register of the Treasury.
D. N. Morgan
Treasurer of the United States
SILVER CERTIFICATE
SERIES OF 1896.
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>117<
ONE
ONE


THIS CERTIFIES THAT THERE HAVE BEEN
DEPOSITED IN THE TREASURY OF THE
2 UNITED STATES 2
TWO SILVER DOLLARS
PAYABLE TO THE BEARER ON DEMAND
>17388251<
TWO SILVER DOLLARS
>17388251<
WASHINGTON D.C.


2 UNITED STATES 2
ONE SILVER DOLLAR CERTIFICATE
ONE SILVER DOLLAR CERTIFICATE
THIS CERTIFICATE IS REDEEMABLE FOR CUSTOMS, TAXES AND ALL PUBLIC DUES, AND WILL BE PROMPTLY PAID WHEN PRESENTED FOR THAT PURPOSE
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The Educational Series of United States Currency

America's Most Beautiful Paper Money

Among all the paper money ever produced by the United States government, few issues inspire as much admiration as the Educational Series Silver Certificates of 1896. Collectors, historians, artists, and museum curators have long regarded these notes as the pinnacle of American banknote engraving. More than a century after they first entered circulation, they remain icons of both numismatics and American art.

Unlike modern currency, which emphasizes portraits of presidents and national leaders, the Educational Series embraced allegorical artwork inspired by classical sculpture and Renaissance painting. The notes celebrated knowledge, science, industry, and progress, reflecting the optimism of a nation entering a new technological age. They were intended not merely to facilitate commerce, but to communicate ideals that Americans valued as they approached the twentieth century.

This remarkable series consisted of only three denominations—the $1, $2, and $5 Silver Certificates—and each note presented a different allegorical theme. Although they were printed for only a single year, their influence on American currency design has endured for generations.

America at the End of the Nineteenth Century

The 1890s marked a period of extraordinary change in the United States. The nation had recovered from the Civil War and was emerging as an industrial giant. Railroads stretched from coast to coast, steel mills powered economic expansion, and inventions such as electric lighting and the telephone transformed daily life.

The Treasury Department sought a new style of currency that reflected these achievements. Rather than relying solely on portraits, officials envisioned banknotes that celebrated the nation's intellectual and technological progress. Currency, they believed, could serve as a small work of art that citizens carried in their pockets every day.

The result was the Educational Series.

Why They Were Called the Educational Notes

The title "Educational Series" was intentional. Each note was designed to teach as well as to circulate. Instead of depicting military victories or political leaders alone, the designs emphasized universal concepts such as history, learning, science, commerce, industry, and enlightenment.

The allegorical figures represented ideas rather than actual people. This artistic tradition dates back thousands of years to ancient Greece and Rome, where virtues such as Liberty, Justice, Victory, and Wisdom were portrayed as idealized human figures. The designers believed these timeless symbols would communicate America's aspirations more effectively than portraits alone.

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing

By 1896, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing had become one of the world's foremost security printing organizations. Skilled engravers translated original paintings into steel plates using thousands of finely cut lines. Every shadow, fold of clothing, facial expression, and cloud was engraved by hand.

The complexity of the Educational Series exceeded nearly every other American banknote produced before or since. Even under magnification, collectors continue to marvel at the precision achieved without the aid of modern technology.

The $1 Educational Note – "History Instructing Youth"

The $1 Silver Certificate features one of the most celebrated designs in American currency. The central image portrays History teaching a young boy while the Washington Monument rises in the background and the Capitol appears in the distance.

The symbolism is unmistakable. America's future depends upon each generation learning from the past. The child represents the nation's youth, while History serves as a guide leading the country toward wisdom and responsible citizenship.

The reverse displays portraits of George Washington and Martha Washington, making it one of the few regular issues of U.S. currency to feature a First Lady.

The $2 Educational Note – "Science Presenting Steam and Electricity to Commerce and Manufacture"

The $2 Educational Note honors the Industrial Revolution. Science appears as the central figure introducing Steam and Electricity to Commerce and Manufacturing.

Factories, machinery, ships, and railroads fill the background, illustrating the technological innovations that transformed the American economy during the nineteenth century.

The reverse honors inventors Robert Fulton, whose steamboat revolutionized transportation, and Samuel F. B. Morse, whose telegraph forever changed communication.

Together, these portraits reinforce the note's central message—that scientific discovery drives national prosperity.

The $5 Educational Note – "Electricity Presenting Light to the World"

Many collectors regard the $5 Educational Note as the most beautiful piece of paper money ever issued by the United States.

Its central figure represents Electricity carrying light across the globe, symbolizing knowledge, innovation, and civilization. The composition reflects the excitement surrounding the rapid spread of electric power during the late nineteenth century.

On the reverse appear portraits of President Ulysses S. Grant and General Philip H. Sheridan, honoring two prominent Union leaders whose service helped preserve the nation during the Civil War.

Artistic Inspiration

The Educational Series was heavily influenced by European classical art. Designers studied Greek sculpture, Roman mythology, Renaissance paintings, and monumental public murals to create images that elevated American currency to the level of fine art.

Unlike previous banknotes, these designs resembled paintings more than traditional financial documents. Flowing robes, balanced compositions, and symbolic figures gave the notes an elegance unmatched in U.S. currency history.

Public Reaction

When the notes entered circulation, Americans admired their beauty. Newspapers praised the extraordinary engravings, and collectors immediately recognized them as exceptional.

Not everyone approved, however. Some critics considered the classical robes of the allegorical figures too revealing for everyday currency. Although modest by modern standards, these concerns contributed to the Treasury's decision to adopt more conservative portrait-based designs in subsequent years.

Why the Series Was Short-Lived

Despite its artistic success, the Educational Series lasted only one year.

The notes required exceptionally complex engraving and lengthy printing times, making them expensive to produce. Simpler portrait notes could be manufactured more quickly while still providing effective anti-counterfeiting protection.

Beginning in 1899, the Treasury introduced a new series of Silver Certificates featuring large presidential portraits, ending the Educational Series after its single-year run.

Collecting the Educational Notes Today

Today, the Educational Series ranks among the most coveted issues in American paper money. Even heavily circulated examples command significant premiums because of their artistic importance and limited production.

Collectors evaluate these notes based on originality, paper quality, centering, color, signatures, and the presence of folds or repairs. Notes certified in high grades are especially prized and frequently headline major numismatic auctions.

Complete matched sets of all three denominations are rare and represent one of the most prestigious accomplishments in U.S. currency collecting.

Counterfeits and Authentication

Because of their value, counterfeit Educational Notes have appeared over the years. Modern collectors should purchase examples that have been authenticated and graded by reputable third-party services. Genuine notes exhibit exceptionally sharp engraving, distinctive paper, crisp Treasury seals, and finely detailed line work that is difficult to duplicate.

A Lasting Legacy

The Educational Series occupies a unique place in American history. It represents a time when the United States sought to express its confidence in education, scientific discovery, and technological progress through the design of its currency.

More than 125 years later, these notes continue to inspire collectors and historians alike. They are displayed in museums, studied by engravers, and celebrated as masterpieces of American craftsmanship.

While many beautiful U.S. banknotes have been issued over the years, none have quite matched the combination of artistic vision, technical excellence, and symbolic meaning found in the Educational Series of 1896.

For these reasons, the Educational Notes remain not only treasured collectibles but enduring works of art—small masterpieces that carried America's ideals in the hands of its citizens every day.