Part 2 | DESERET EVENING NEWS. | 9 to 12

TRUTH AND LIBERTY.

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UNCLE SAM'S MONEY MILL.

How It is Grinding Out a Million Dollars a Day for the National Banks.

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing and Its Wonderful Work.—Extra Forces and Extra Hours.—A Steel Wagon Which Carries Millions.—How Uncle Sam Guards His Greenbacks—Blank Paper Worth Its Weight in Diamonds, and Steel More Valuable Than Gold.—How Bank Notes are Made.—What Engravers Get.—Women Who Handle Fortunes.—A Look at a Pot of Mush Worth a Million Dollars.—All About Our Bank Notes and How the Bank Centers Are Being Supplied With Funds.

Special Correspondence of the NEWS.

WASHINGTON, D. C., September 28, 1893.—The present financial troubles have made the bureau of engraving and printing the liveliest department of the United States government. This is Uncle Sam's great money mill. It is here that all the new national bank notes are being turned out, and greenbacks are now made by the million. At no time in our history have the employes been worked so hard. Their hours have been increased, and one hundred extra hands have been added in order to hurry on the work. On one day during the month of September two million dollars' worth of notes were turned out in the Treasury department, and on the 12th of August last nearly three hundred thousand plate impressions were made on bank notes with hand presses. On August 15th three hundred and twenty thousand plate impressions were made, which is the highest number ever made in the bureau here, or in any other bureau on the face of the earth. In twenty-one days twenty-seven million dollars' worth of notes were made, and the average is now more than a million dollars a day. Mr. Johnson, the chief of the bureau, emphatically states that he can print all the money the country can use if he has only the authority of Congress and the treasury to back him, and he has the great factory so organized that its capacity is practically unlimited. The money is turned out in sheets with four notes on each sheet and its amount is determined by the denomination of the bills. It takes no more time to print four one thousand dollar notes than four one dollar notes, and the capacity of the bureau is measured by sheets. In ordinary times it has turned out only six or eight thousand sheets daily. It is now running out from fifty to sixty thousand sheets every day and bank notes are being made more quickly now than ever before. The usual time required to make a bank note is twenty-one days. This under the present stress has been reduced to fourteen days, and the nerves of the engravers and the muscles of the printers are strained to the utmost. The increase of the work in the bureau began about the first of July and went on steadily during that month. August and September, and today the hum of the machinery in the bureau is like that of a great factory, and its machines are rattling away with such a noise that they almost shake the Washington monument which stands near them.

MILLIONS IN NATIONAL BANK NOTES.

The vast increase of work has come from the demand for money from the national banks of the country. They have been depositing more bonds in order to increase their circulation, and it has been found that a large number of them have been holding bonds upon which they have not demanded the currency. New orders for paper have had to be sent to Dalton, Mass., in order to supply the demands and the great steel van which carries the bank notes over to the treasury has been making several trips daily. Not long ago this van delivered $3,000,000 to Secretary Carlisle in one day. It required two trips, and it took $1,500,000 at each trip. I saw this big money wagon at the door of the department as I came up to it today. It is hauled by two horses, and it is driven from the treasury to the bureau with four guards, two of which hang on the behind and the other two sit with the driver. It is securely sealed and locked before it leaves the bureau, but it drives its way unostentatiously with its millions over the cobble stones and slips along across the asphalt to the treasury. It looks as though it would be easy to rob it, and its guards carry only revolvers. Nothing of the kind has, however, been attempted, and that old steel wagon will go on carrying millions for generations to come.

HOW UNCLE SAM GUARDS HIS PAPER MILLIONS.

I walked through the bureau of engraving and printing this afternoon and watched the fifteen hundred clerks working away making these untold sums of money. I asked their wages and I was told that they range from a little over a dollar a day up to several thousand dollars a year. It seemed strange to me that they could resist the temptation, and I inquired into the safeguards which Uncle Sam has placed about the money. It seemed so easy to slip away with a $1,000 note or to take home one of these steel plates and print enough to last you a life time. My investigation, however, showed me that no miser's hoard has ever been guarded as is the money of Uncle Sam's. This bureau itself covers several acres. It contains three stories and a basement and it is packed full of machinery and engraving material. Every bit of this material has to be accounted for every night before any one can leave the building. In the corridor as I went in I saw a metal plate set in a frame in the wall. It looked much like the electric button plate at a hotel office. It contained twelve round holes and each hole was labeled with the name of the departments of the bureau. There was no pins or buttons in the holes, but I found that they all had to be filled before any one could leave the department. As soon as the inventory has been taken of the work of a department at the close of the day, and all accounts are found to be correct, the superintendent of that department marches down and puts a pin with a button on the end into the hole marked with his division. As he does so an electric gong rings and the watchman permits the men of the division to go out. All of the holes have to be filled before the building is emptied, and if a sheet of paper, a bank note or a scrap of anything important is lost the employes are all kept until it is found. The hands in this factory are prisoners during the day. The most of them work inside of steel cages and the notes are printed on the machine surrounded by a great network of steel fence.

BLANK PAPER WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN DIAMONDS.

The paper used in this big money factory is worth its weight in diamonds. At least if it is lost it may cost the bureau or the clerks more than its weight in diamonds to supply its loss. Every sheet of it which is made is registered at the mill at Dalton, Massachusetts, and the paper mill can't make a sheet which must not be accounted for to the government. The paper is sent from the mills to the treasury and it is issued by the Treasury Department from day to day to the bureau of engraving and printing. It is carried over in the big steel wagon which hauls back the money, and as soon as it is sent from the treasury it represents so much money. If, for instance, a thousand sheets are sent over in hundred dollar bills these thousand sheets represent $400,000, as there are four bills to each sheet. If in the printing of these sheets one sheet should happen to be lost the clerk who lost it would have to pay $400 for it. If the denomination of the sheet was $1,000, instead of $100, he would be liable to the extent of $4,000, and he or the bureau would have to make up the loss. I took a look at a lot of this paper yesterday. It was piled away in great stacks, much of it being dampened for the presses. It is white and it comes to the department in sheets just large enough for the printing of four bank notes. Two sheets joined together would be the size of a lady's handkerchief and two lines of silk thread run down one side of the sheet so as to make them go on the face of every note. I handled some of this paper. It is [illegible] strong, and I would have liked to have carried away a sample, but when I suggested it the superintendent looked at me with horror and I found that all defective sheets have to be accounted for as well as the good ones, and that such sheets are canceled by holes punched through them and they are sent back to the treasury with the good money. Each one of these sheets is counted about forty times before it is turned from white paper into greenback dollars. Every man who puts his finger on a sheet has in some way to leave a register of it, and if a printer spoils a sheet in printing he is obliged to send it in. The names of the printers are on the plates they use, and it would be a great deal easier to carry off a half dozen bags of silver from the steel vaults of the treasury than to take one of these sheets of blank paper.

STEEL WORTH MORE THAN GOLD.

It is the same with the steel plates from which the money is engraved. They are worth more than their weight in gold, and are more carefully guarded than the crown jewels in the Tower of London. In one department of the bureau there are four great vaults, before which guards always sit. The chief of these guards gets $1,200 a year, and he is responsible for the dies and plates in his charge. He has them locked away in these vaults in such order that he can put his hands on them at any moment. The vaults are secured by steel doors, and the combinations with which they are closed are three for each door, and only one of them is a time lock. The combination locks are each known to one man, who keeps the secret to himself, but writes out a duplicate and sends it in a sealed envelope to Secretary Carlisle. If he should die suddenly the envelope would have to be opened before the combination could be known. Each bank note plate has a separate pigeon hole in these vaults. It is only issued on order, and the plate printers, when they arrive in the morning, have to give a check like a trunk check for the plate, the ink and even the rags which they use for wiping the plate. They have to account for every bit of paper they get, and it is impossible for them to get away with any of the dies, plates or paper of the bureau. There are about 50,000 different pieces of steel in the vault. These weigh about fifty tons, and constitute the most valuable steel in existence.

HOW BANK NOTES ARE [illegible]

These fifty thousand different pieces of steel represent the work of many lives. They are covered of the finest of engravings, and a pack of human eyes have been ruined in their production. There is no finer engraving in the world than on our bank notes, and there is none so ruinous to the eyesight. The engravers work in little cubby holes under the windows, and there is a long room here filled with engravers. The entire face and back of a note is never engraved by the same man. One engraver makes the fancy letters on a bill. Another makes a specialty of portraits and another has some other particular part of the work which he can do better that any one else. He does his work on a piece of soft steel. When it is done it is hardened and is transferred to a soft steel roll about as big around as a schooner beer glass. This roll of steel is hardened and its impression is rolled off on the steel plate from which the note is to be printed. Every plate has on it the face or back of four notes, and it takes just as much trouble to engrave a one-dollar bill as it does a thousand-dollar bill. Engravers get from $15 to $100 a week, and the highest priced men are those who work on portraits. They make the engraving for revenue stamps and postal cards, as well as for bank notes, and their work has to be perfect in order to pass. Just now they are engraving a diploma to be given out to the exhibitors of the world's fair exposition at Chicago. This will cost thousands of dollars and is a wonderfully fine piece of beautiful workmanship.

PRINTING FOR THE NATIONAL BANKS.

The work being done on the national bank notes at the present time is more like ordinary printing than the fine work of the bureau. All national bank notes have their characters and seals put on by the surface process, and there are a dozen or more flat presses which are working away finishing the engraved notes for the national banks. The national bank note plates are all the same, but the bureau has had to make new plates for some of the banks, and the engravers and the plate printers have been turning out the original notes for this printing at lightning speed. The printing of the notes, with the exception of this surface printing, is all hand work. Inside a great steel fence surrounding a room covering about half an acre there are hundreds of hand presses, each of which is worked by a printer and his assistant. The printers are of all ages and their assistants are all women. I noticed that some of the women were colored, and not a few of them are as black as the ace of spades. The printers are paid so much and they have to hire their own assistants. They are not allowed to change their assistants, but they have to take the women which the department gives them. The plate has to be inked and wiped off for every impression, and the printers work away with their sleeves rolled up to their elbows and their arms covered with green ink.

The press which prints the greenbacks and other money looks like a four armed windmill, and it consists of two metal rollers between which there is a slab of iron running on four guide wheels. The printer first puts his plate on a small gas stove, rolls ink over its surface with a roller and then rubs the surplus of the ink off with his hand and rag. He polishes the plate with whiting until it shines like a mirror and takes all the ink off but that in the engraved line. He now places the plate on the press, the paper is put on it and by a hard pull of the windmill-like arms of the press the impression is made. This prints only part of a bill, and all bills have to go through the presses several times. As soon as the banknotes are finished they are taken to the drying room and left there over night. This room is heated by steam to 100 degrees above zero, and in the morning the sheets are thoroughly dry and as crisp as crackers. In the counting they are carefully examined for imperfections and the least fault in a sheet causes it to be thrown aside. If a smudge of ink has gotten upon it or if there is the slightest mistake in the printing it cannot be used, and the printer who caused the trouble has a certain amount deducted from his wages for every sheet so missed. The sheets are now polished by being put between mill boards and a pressure of 3,000 pounds to the square inch is placed upon them. They are then numbered by automatic machines, and are finally put up in packages of 1,000 notes each, with ten slips of paper between each 100 notes.

WOMEN WHO HANDLE FORTUNES.

The women who handle the money are the most expert counters in the world. Their fingers go like lightning. They do not move their lips nor hit their eyes, but they rattle off the bill at the rate of a hundred a minute. They have to be women of nerve, and if mistakes are made they are charged with them. After the notes are counted they are put into the iron van and carried over to the treasury. Whence they are now being shipped all over the country. At the treasury the notes are counted as soon as they are received. The sheets are cut up and the money is sent out in packages of a hundred notes each. Before starting it is safe to say that a greenback is counted thirty times since it has left the printer, and there is no possible chance for fraud or theft.

A MILLION DOLLAR POT OF MUSH.

Leaving the girls counting out these national bank notes and bundling fortunes in an hour, I went down into the basement of this great money factory, and saw a pot of the costliest mush the world has ever known. Think of a pot of mush worth more than a million dollars. This is what I saw in the basement. It was steaming and seething in a great cylinder, and it was made of cut up greenbacks. All the money that comes back to the treasury is brought over to this place and soaked and ground and steamed until it turns into a pulpy, pasty mixture for all the world like hot [illegible] gruel. This cooking goes on every day, and from one to two million dollars are ground up every twenty-four hours. The money is cut in halves in the Treasury Department. It is hauled here in the great steel van, and it takes sixteen hundred pounds of it to fill the mush pot. It goes in dirty and filthy with the soiling of many hands. The chemicals and steam takes all the dirt and filth out of it, and it comes out gray and pulpy. It is then molded into boards looking for all the world like bales of unstained leather and is sold to paper mills. Some of it is made into little images of the Washington Monument, caricatures of Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland, and these are sold for paper weights or souvenirs for sightseers. Each souvenir is labeled with the amount of money which is supposed to have been made from the pulp from which it is constructed. But this, of course, is all guess work. The same amount of pulp could make a hundred thousand dollars worth of notes, or a thousand dollars worth of notes, according to the denomination printed on the paper which it represented.

MONEY PROSPECTS.

Mr. Claude M. Johnson, the chief of this great bureau of engraving and printing, is a Kentuckian, but he has been connected with the bureau for some time. He is, I judge, about forty years of age, and is noted for his business talent and his executive ability. He has broad gauge ideas of the money question of this country and during my talk with him he said that he thought we would soon have more money than we would know what to do with. "The national banks," said he, "have greatly increased their circulation and the money which has been drawn out to be hoarded will be thrown back into the channels of trade as soon as confidence is restored. This will be within less than two months, and it is safe to say that within that time more than two hundred million dollars will come to the banks from that source alone. In the meantime the bureau of engraving and printing is ready to supply the country any amount that Congress and the treasury may authorize. All we want is the proper authority and we will do the work."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Notice of Condemned Ice.

Notice is hereby given that the ice known and sold as City Water Ice, from the pond known as the Isaac Hunter ice pond, has been condemned as impure and unfit for use excepting solely for refrigerating purposes. The said Isaac Hunter has been notified that prosecution will follow any sale of the ice made without the representation that it is impure and for refrigerating purposes only.

T. B. BEATTY, M.D.,
Health Commissioner.
A. S. KENDALL,
Inspector of Provisions.