

UPDATE on «STRAW» VARIETY RESEARCH

by Richard Fleming, member #270

After having collated dozens and dozens of «Straw» variants in both the «E» and «F» series of the 10-cent denomination of the CTC S-11 Series, I have come to the conclusion that my original speculation is totally wrong!

With the very able assistance of Louis Fontaine, a matrix in a 5 x 10 format copying what we believe to be is the original printing sheet lay-out (we also experimented with a 5 x 8 format as well with similar results) and labeled each box in the matrix accordingly, A-1, B-2, C-3, D-4, E-5, etc.. We then found placed each of the uniquely identified «straw» variants in their clearly identified «home» box on information supplied by Louis, Thayer Bouck, Larry Butler, as well as from Auction listings and from my own collection. The result shows one or more of the «straw» variety appears in almost every one of the printing plate positions. Only a very few of the boxes still remain vacant. Why are there some without any? Is it because those pieces simply haven't turned up yet? Or is there some other reason?

I had originally suggested that only one of the plates in the 5 x 10 format would have this flaw, hence, the number of maximum possibilities would be 1/50th of the number of notes printed. The printing record as recorded in the Bilodeau Guide suggests 10 million for Series «E» and slightly less than 6 million for series «F». That would make 20,000 pieces available in the «E» series and some 12,000 pieces in the «F» series. Proportionally, that may wind up being correct, if I can use my own collection for a rough estimate. The «straw» notes are randomly distributed throughout the «normal» notes of the entire series.

They DO NOT appear in logical order or in any sequence of numbers in either the «E» or the «F» series. Larry even sent information on a sequence of two notes; the first is the «straw» variety; the immediately following note is not! The investigation into the «straw» distribution has blown my original hypothesis right out of the water. How many of them really do exist and what is the explanation?

How can this oddity happen in the orderly production of notes? One clue may come from what is known about the printing process. The background on both the obverse and reverse are completed prior to the application of serial numbers. On the reverse side of each note, the background, consisting of the frame and lettering is printed earlier. In a later, (How much later... days, weeks, months?) separate process, the serial numbers are applied. What happens to the pile of printed sheets in the interim waiting to have serial numbers applied? Do they remain neatly stacked or are they stored in separate stacks? Do they ever get moved again other than to have the serial numbers applied?

What we have done in effect is to study the distribution of something that has happened in a later stage of a printing series to attempt to explain what happened at a totally independent, earlier stage. That is, we have used serial numbers, applied at the last stage, as the means to explain what happened at the earlier, completely separate, background printing stage! Not only is it a separate process, but it may

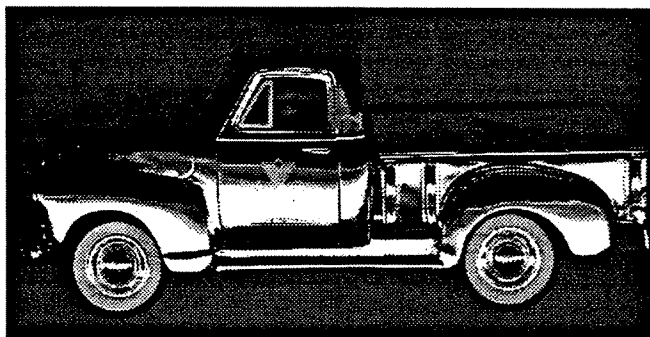
also be separated by meaningful intervals of time in which many possibilities for moving sheets of paper around are possible. That may have some influence, but I tend to think that is not the answer.

Underlying this investigation was also the assumption that only a SINGLE plate would have been used to print the backgrounds on all 10 million. The distribution research suggests multiple plates. How many were actually used? What is the process for copying additional plates from the originally approved plate? How is the transfer done from ONE originally designed printing plate to make 50 individual plates comprising the format for printing a single sheet of 50 notes. And how long does one of these sets of plates last in the printing process? Do they wear out differentially? Do the printers have a formula for automatically replacing a set of worn printing plates with new ones after a pre-determined number of impressions? Or in their quality control as individual sheets of notes are produced, do they watch for wear on individual plates and replace them one at a time? In examining sequences, we note abrupt variations in color. Suddenly, the previous note, which is pale is followed by a note which is sparkling. Is it just re-inking or is this the result of replacing the old printing plate with an entire new one? And how many «original» plates are there? 1, 2, 10? Does anyone know? And how are subsequent, individual plates copied from these and set up to print sheets of 50? At some point, randomness seems to have crept in. It's been an intriguing exercise and the end result is still a major puzzle with even more questions left unanswered than at the beginning. The question still remains as to how this variety could appear across the entire printing spectrum.

Is there a security-printing expert in the membership who can throw some additional light on this speculation and explain the apparent randomness we encountered without breaching trade secrets. However such errors occur, I firmly believe randomness is a function of the application of a very carefully thought out printing process. HELP!

NOTE: If anyone wishes to send additional information on their «straw» varieties, I would be happy to continue to collect this information and collate it for the benefit of all members.

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