



# Some Reflections on the Earlier BNA PROOFS of the American Bank Note Co.

NORMAN BOYD, M.D., FRCS(C), FRPS(L)

The BNA proofs of the American Banknote Co. are one of the most perplexing problems of philately. Frequently it is impossible to separate contemporary from post-contemporary proofs. The striking thought is the chaos in the field; there is no apparent reason for the production of many of them and no simple system of classification is possible.

Certain general observations become apparent. Almost every die and plate of the ABN Co. becomes involved, namely: Province of Canada Pence and 1859 Decimals, New Brunswick Decimals, Nova Scotia Decimals, Newfoundland 1865 Decimals and certain other non-BNA material. During this period several reorganizations of the company occurred and several series of inventory proofs were said to be made. Periods of reorganization suggest confusion and possibly some relaxation of security regulations.

"Stampomania" was in full swing. At that time it was not uncommon to privately manufacture facsimiles when the originals were rare, and they were sold as such. These facsimiles were surprisingly well received by many collectors, knowingly or unknowingly. How much more acceptable it was to have "genuine" ones made from the original plates, such as those M. Moens of Brussels supplied from the Heligoland plates. At that time it was not particularly disreputable to use the dies and plates of demitized stamps for other purposes; the Perkins-Bacon Newfoundland Pence dies and plates were used for such into the 20th century. Even governments got into the act with official reprints. One conclusion is certain: there are more die and plate proofs than can be explained in the legitimate production of the stamps or for legiti-

mate use by the government or banknote company.

## Yellow-Orange Plate Proofs

Boggs states that in 1864 these plate proofs were made of the Canada 1859 Decimal issue and the Pence issue, except the 12d. This statement is indeed reasonable. I do not know how he arrives at the exact date of 1864 but it certainly was about that year; the 12d would be missing because it was sent to Canada in 1857.

There is an exact shade of color in all these plate proofs showing that they were all printed with the same batch of ink. In addition to the above plate proofs, I would add all the Decimal issues of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia; the color shade is identical and the date would have been after 1860. I have copies of all the Nova



The 1868 Trade Sample Sheet

Scotia and New Brunswick Decimals including the Connell (except the 1c and 12c) in the identical yellow-orange. I presume the 1c and 12c also exist in that shade.

The 2c Canada 1864 orange-red plate proof is *not* the same shade and there would have been no reason to exclude it if the yellow-orange plate proofs were printed after late 1864. Nor are the 1865

Newfoundland yellow-orange proofs in this color. Bogg's date of 1864 is indeed reasonable. However, why were they printed? Were they printed for inventory purposes, for favors, or both?

### Compound Die Proofs

I cannot see any value of compound die proofs except to collectors. There were two

examples of these — the 12d and 10c Canada, and the 5c Connell and 10c New Brunswick. Neither of these were engraved together on the same die or transferred to the same transfer roll (see the record of dies and transfer rolls destroyed in 1902, *Boggs*, page 216). For the 12d, either the original die or a secondary die — made from the original transfer roll — was used. For the 10c the original die was used. Probably the two dies were placed side by side and proofs taken, which would account for the unusual degree of separation. Of course in the Connell when in separate colors they would be printed separately.

The 12d of this compound die is known as the "scarred" die proof. The name "scarred" implies a damaged die, as though a heavy tool had fallen on it. This damage, if true, must have occurred after the die was hardened, and the transfer roll made, as the flaw does not show up on the plate. It would be quite difficult to cause damage such as this after the die was hardened, but it *could* have happened; some believe that the flaw is an unfinished engraving and that there never were lines in the CE of PENCE in this die.

This does not make sense to me; we know that a die was finished and, as the "scarred" die was definitely post-contemporary, it would mean that a second die was engraved (or a transfer roll made) and a secondary die made which was then finished. There is no evidence to support the hypothesis of this expensive and unnecessary method.

I think it reasonable that the 12d compound die proof was made from the original die which was definitely still in the possession of the banknote company at that time and the die had been damaged some time between 1851 and 1868.

### Trade Sample Sheets

Trade sample sheets, dated 1864, contained 20 items of BNA, U.S., and South America. They were cut-out plate proofs in the color of issue and pasted on the blank spaces of the sample sheet. The BNA postage proofs were 3d, 10c, 17c (Canada), 1c, 12½c, 17c (New Brunswick), and 5c and 12½c (Nova Scotia). Plate proofs salvaged from this sample sheet are indistinguishable from contemporary plate proofs, which they probably were. Any estimate of the number of sheets prepared would be merely a guess; the Canada 3d

plate proof in the color of issue sells for a premium, so there probably were not many made.

The 1868 sample sheet is the one that gives all the trouble. A special plate was made up from the original transfer rolls. Each impression is separated from the others sufficiently that when the sheet is cut up each stamp resembles a small die proof. The plate was certainly well done; the siderography was excellent; the nineteen items are perfectly aligned — better than most stamp plates. This is as might be expected, for an official sample sheet was intended to show the high quality of the company's stamp production. The BNA items included Canada ½d and 10d, side by side; the five items of the 1864 Newfoundland issue: the 12½c New Brunswick; and the 1c and 8½c Nova Scotia.

The Canada ½d and 10d were sometimes cut out together and offered as a compound die proof. The siderographer's position dots are quite apparent and they make it not too difficult to identify most of the items on the sheet, particularly when there are maximum margins present.

These sample sheets were printed in so many colors and on so many papers they defy classification; to find two copies of the same shade is unusual. (I have about 40 copies and I have yet to see two shades the same. The colours vary from intense bright ink to pale, almost invisible tints.) The papers vary from high-quality stamp paper to newsprint.

What possible explanation is there for this wide variation in colors and papers? It has been suggested that they were used as color charts: a salesman for the company may have had a full color-swatch book of these sheets to provide samples of each color as it would appear on various papers; this is the accepted theory which resulted in the term "sample sheets" being used. I can't accept this theory; surely there would be some evidence on each sheet that they had been bound together into booklets. They were not printed in double sheets for binding, and they had no binding stitch-marks or staple holes. They were definitely separate, cleanly-cut sheets. If they were used as sample sheets, surely they would be numbered so the colors or papers could be identified. They were not numbered nor do they show such identification marks.

*(To be concluded next month)*