

Text 16

Funny Money

Counterfeiting of paper money in the United States has quite a long history. Ever since people began using paper currency, criminals have been making fake money. During Colonial times, when each colony issued its own "notes" or bills, counterfeiting was a huge problem. Most of the Colonial bills were small and printed on only one side. The designs on them were fairly simple. Anyone with just a bit of skill and the right tools could copy them without too much trouble.

Counterfeiting was also a problem in the 1830s when up to 1,600 different banks were issuing paper money. There were so many different kinds of bills circulating that it was hard to pick out the counterfeits.

In the 1860s, the United States Treasury began issuing its own paper money. The government tried to design bills that would be hard to counterfeit. The bills were printed on cotton and linen paper with red and blue fibers running through it. The bills bore a Treasury seal and very elaborate designs. While these steps did help cut down on some of the counterfeiting, they did not put counterfeiters out of business.

Since 1877, the Department of the Treasury's Bureau of Engraving and Printing has printed all U.S. currency. But counterfeiting is still a problem. Today's thieves are quick to take advantage of new technology. For example, counterfeiters now use advanced copiers and printers to make copies of money, or they use a computer to scan images of the bills and print them out on desktop printers.

In 1990, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing introduced security threads and microprinting on its bills to try to prevent counterfeiting. In 1994, the government came up with better designs for bills. Newly designed \$100 notes were issued in 1996, \$50 notes in 1997, and \$20 notes in 1998. The new \$5 and \$10 notes came out in 2000. The government does not plan to issue newly designed \$1 bills since they are not popular with counterfeiters.

These new bills boast many features designed to help cut down on counterfeiting. One of them is a special ink that changes color when light hits the money at different angles. Another is microprinting of words that are so small, they are hard to duplicate.

Many people think the new bills look funny. The portraits on the front of the bills are much larger than before, and they are slightly off center. The new bills also have watermarks, which are based on the same art as the portrait. The watermarks can be seen from both sides when the bill is held up to a light, and they are extremely difficult to copy.

Preventing counterfeiting seems to be an ongoing battle. But who knows, it just might be this "funny money" that finally puts an end to the phony money business forever.

