

COLLECTING SOUTH AFRICAN PAPER MONEY

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Interest in paper money collecting as a hobby (and investment) has grown rapidly during the past few years. Many good books and catalogues on the subject have appeared and this is having a compounding effect on the whole field. Many countries already have active and well-informed groups of collectors who buy up all good material that comes onto their markets. It is probable that the 1970's will prove to be a decade in which banknote collecting will find its place among the great hobbies such as coin, stamps and art collecting. In any event, coin collectors are beginning to realise the potential of banknotes as an adjunct to their present hobby.

Although the majority of enthusiasts collect notes of all countries, many like to specialise in the notes of their own country. Some excellent literature has appeared on South African paper money but, in the main, this has been in the form of historical treatises on notes which are no longer available to the average collector. The prospective collector, unlike those in other countries, is at a loss to know what is collectable and where to obtain these at modest cost.

In other countries, the supply of obsolete notes has grown with the increased interest, just as it has in the case of coins. Unfortunately, however, the laws of supply and demand dictate that the prices must also increase as interest grows. This phenomenon induces still more people to "climb on the bandwagon" and has a further compounding effect both on the number of collectors and the "winkling" out of obsolete notes.

It was early in my collecting career that I realised that South Africa has a deep heritage in the form of paper money. Starting at the end of the 18th Century, the government of the day issued crude notes to overcome the shortage of coin at the Cape. Not long after, in 1837, the first of some forty private banks started issuing their own notes in many varieties and denominations. Later, the governments of the Cape, Transvaal and Free State issued several series of notes. During the Anglo-Boer War both sides issued emergency money and "good fors" that are still easily obtainable. These are better known to collectors overseas than they are in South Africa. In fact, some of them are among the most famous notes in the world. As the different varieties are recognised and

catalogued, this can only stimulate demand.

The first notes issued by the South African Reserve Bank were dated 1921. During its first fifty years, the Bank will have issued some 2½ billion notes in about 100 different denominations and varieties. These notes were dated until 1961, giving a vast range for the potential collector. Since decimalisation, the Bank has issued replacement notes and the early issues of these will undoubtedly be among the rarities of the future. These are notes with special serial numbers which the Bank uses to replace defective notes. The Reserve Bank has also taken over liability for the legal tender issue of the Treasury notes and the private banks of South West Africa.

Collecting Banknotes

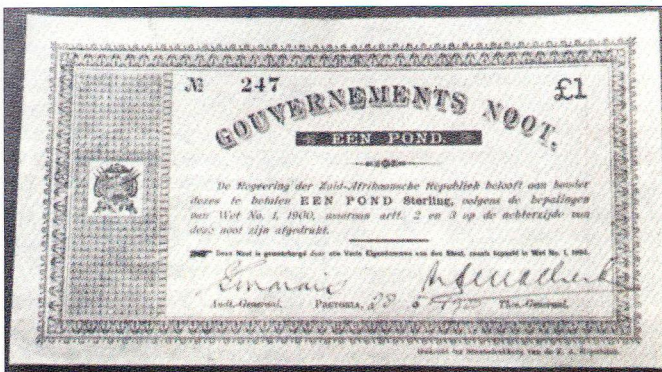
Many banknote collectors trace their initial interest to the field of coin collecting. By adding a few notes to enhance their collection, some have gone on to specialise in this branch of numismatics. Many stamp collectors have also branched out into this field. Jacob Perkins, who printed the first postage stamps (including the British penny blacks and Cape triangulars) was originally a renowned bank note printer. Stanley Gibbons, the famous stamp dealers in London, have become pioneer banknote dealers and have coined the phrase "Notaphily" for the collecting of banknotes.

It is understandable that coin collectors pay a great deal of attention to the condition of their coins. Banknote collectors are not nearly as concerned with the condition of their specimens. Old notes are acceptable in almost any condition, and, in fact, often do not exist in perfect condition. Failure to recognise this fact will only lead to frustration. Personally, I collect notes in any condition. If, at a later date, I obtain a better specimen, my first specimen becomes a useful duplicate for exchange. Many of my most valuable specimens are in less than fine (F) condition. Whilst it is true that notes in good condition are more valuable than those in poorer condition, collectors must remember that "beggars cannot be choosers". Naturally, the easily obtainable notes should only be collected in at least extremely fine (EF) condition if at all possible.

Cancelled and demonetised notes are highly prized and are generally worth as much as the uncanceled equivalent note or even more. Specimen notes are usually rare and worth many times the value of regular currency.

How to build up a collection

Unlike the coin or stamp collector who can find dealers in every large town, the banknote collector has to put in a greater effort. This effort is very worthwhile, particularly as there is always a chance of coming across a rarity. There are several items in my collection which are possibly the only



specimens extant. Some of these were acquired for a few rand - if they had been coins or stamps of equivalent rarity, they would have cost hundreds of rands.

When I started collecting, I made the fact known to all my friends and was I surprised at the number of people who had old notes tucked away. The most useful friend that I had in this respect (and in other respects!) was my bank manager. Occasionally, customers come in with old notes and my friend was easily persuaded to let me have the notes rather than send them off to the Reserve Bank for destruction.

In 1969, I made a tour of the leading London coin dealers - with only slight success. Now most British coin dealers offer a wide range of banknotes and some have specialised in this field. South African coin dealers, following in the footsteps of their overseas colleagues, are also turning their attention to banknotes, and can supply an ever-increasing range of South African and foreign notes.

Notes of the South African Reserve Bank

These notes afford the collector most opportunity for forming various types of collections. The more specialised collector could collect one or more notes of each denomination of each type and signature. Other interesting, but more easily collectable themes are as follows:

- 1) One note of a certain denomination for each year of issue from 1921 until 1959, when dating ceased.
- 2) From 1948 onwards all Reserve Bank notes have been issued in two types i.e. with English predominant and Afrikaans predominant. This doubles the possibilities for the years 1948 to the present.
- 3) Low serial numbers e.g. A/500 000001 or A/550 1000000.

- 4) Notes with the same serial numbers e.g.: A/400 555555.
- 5) Replacement notes.
- 6) One of each serial number prefix i.e. the smaller number appearing under the letter. At the present rate of issue this should cost about R400 per year if all the issues of all the denominations could be found.
- 7) A similar collection to (6) but for one or two denominations only or in one predominant language only, perhaps alternating periodically.
- 8) Errors. The following are the types of errors to watch out for:

Printing omitted from back of note (extremely rare).
 Missing serial numbers.
 Different serial numbers on the same note.
 Double printing on a note.
 Off-centre printing.
 Extra paper through faulty folding.

Some of the numerical themes listed above can be very challenging. Although it forms a minor part of my collection, I am attempting to collect a series of 150 serial numbers that were issued between 1933 and 1945.

While the collecting of notes may cost the beginner more than a collection of low denomination coins, it should be remembered that the average life of a Reserve Bank note is less than six months, making a given serial number rapidly unobtainable. This saving money may also prove to be very profitable. It can be said that the paper money collector also has the whole world to conquer. He can branch out into notes of other African countries and thence into notes of all countries. These can be obtained for a few cents or for many thousands of rands a piece.