

Off the Shelf

David F. Fanning

In the last issue, I wrote about the two binding variants of the 1893 Frossard and Hays work on United States large cents. While interesting, the two varieties of that work had been known about for quite some time. However, new discoveries are still occasionally made in the field of numismatic literature.

In December, I was finishing the cataloguing of our February 2013 mail-bid sale when I came across the following catalogue:

Trifet, F., & Co. *Catalogue of a Collection of American and Foreign Coins and Medals*. Boston: Leonard, Bird & Co., Nov. 17, 1869. 8vo, original printed wraps. 16 pages; 727 lots.

This is a somewhat scarce sale, and is the only sale listed by Gengerke¹ for Trifet. Though I hadn't seen a copy of this sale for a few years, I was only somewhat surprised to find a second copy in the same consignment. The surprise came when I picked it up and found that it was noticeably heavier than the first copy.

Something was up. I flipped through each to make sure that they were both complete. They were. I felt the paper: distinctly different. The second copy was printed on far heavier stock. Obviously a thick-paper copy.

A look through our database revealed that my partner, George Kolbe, had offered a special edition Trifet sale in his 63rd sale (Oct. 14, 1995), but that was an interleaved copy. This wasn't interleaved but was clearly heavier. I tossed them on a nearby postal scale and found the regular sale to weigh 0.85 ounces and the thick-paper copy a whopping 1.5 ounces.

Why Trifet would have issued a special edition—much less two of them—of his sole experiment with numismatic auctions remains a

¹ Martin Gengerke, *American Numismatic Auctions*, compiled on November 17, 2009 (PDF file available for downloading at www.coinbooks.org/resources/auctions.pdf), p. 649.

F. TRIFET & CO.'S FIRST COIN SALE.

CATALOGUE OF A COLLECTION

OF

American and Foreign Coins and Medals,

COMPRISING

Silver and Copper United States Coins, Colonials, Washingtons,
Proof Sets, Patterns, American and Foreign Medals,

AND A VALUABLE ASSORTMENT OF

RARE OLD SAXON AND ENGLISH GOLD AND SILVER COINS,

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,

BY LEONARD, BIRD & CO.

No. 146 TREMONT STREET, BOSTON,

On WEDNESDAY, NOV. 17, 1869, at 10 o'clock A.M.

Orders will be executed by the Auctioneers ; by HENRY COOK, 74 Friend Street ;
and by F. TRIFET & Co., Publishers of the American Stamp Mercury and Numis-
matist, 20 State Street, Boston.

Coins on exhibition the day before the Sale.



BOSTON :

PRINTED AT THE HERALD JOB OFFICE, No. 4 WILLIAMS COURT.
1869.

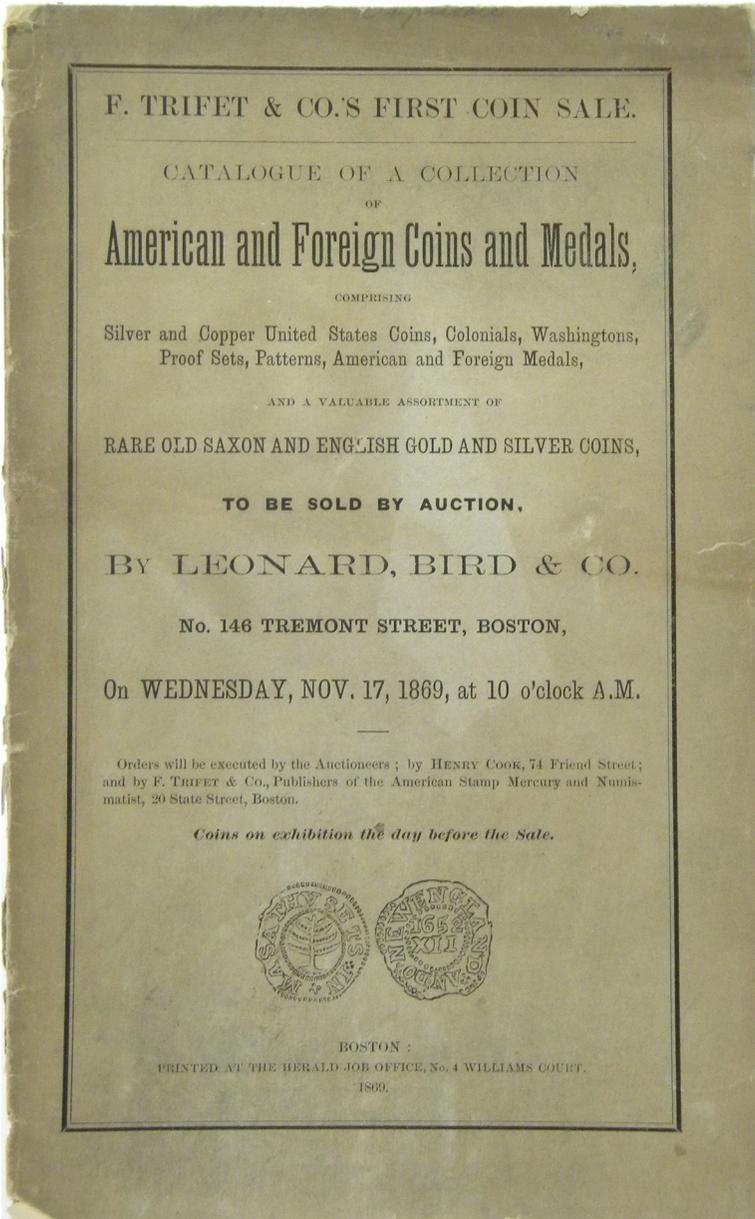


Figure 1. The Nov. 17, 1869 Trifet sale: (A, opposite) the regular edition; (B, above) the thick-paper edition.

mystery. What isn't uncertain is that both are quite rare, with the indefatigable Attinelli² missing both of them. Only the regular edition is included in Attinelli's groundbreaking bibliography, where he ascribes the collection to Charles S. Fellows.

Paris native Ferdinand Marie Trifet (1848–1899) was the publisher of the *American Stamp Mercury*, and was an early proponent of stamp collecting in this country. After the Civil War, he became a prominent stamp dealer in Boston. His scarce monthly magazine began life in 1867 purely devoted to stamps, but started to include numismatic content in its second volume (1868–69), upon which it added *and Numismatist* to its title.

Under the headline "Our New Name," the publishers wrote that to inquiries

of why it was not a Numismatic as well as a Timbrophilic paper, we always answered that two magazines on the former subject were enough. That we were mistaken, our Numismatic friends will at once see, for though there *are* two Magazines published in this country devoted to the collecting of coins, the editor of one [*American Journal of Numismatics*] is so learned, and the articles of the magazine so profound, that it will never be a *popular* magazine, though it should be read by every collector who takes an interest in his collection. The editor of the other [*Mason's Coin and Stamp Collectors' Magazine*] has the misfortune to lack what his brother has too much of, viz: that much needed, but seldom found, article, common sense. We have often wondered whether the Timbrophilic or the Numismatic articles in its columns were the least correct, but have not been able to solve this problem. Seeing the above state of things, we have determined to establish a Magazine that will be popular, or, in other words, one that can be understood by, and teach something to, everyone that reads it. To do this, we have enlarged the MERCURY, and will hereafter publish indiscriminately the best available articles on stamps and coins.

² Emmanuel J. Attinelli, *Numisgraphics, or a List of Catalogues, in Which Occur Coins or Medals, Which Have Been Sold by Auction in the United States, Also, a List of Catalogues or Price Lists of Coins, Issued by Dealers, Also, a List of Various Publications of More or Less Interest to Numismatologists, Which Have Been Published in the United States* (New York, 1876), p. 54. (Reprinted by Quarterman in 1976 as *A Bibliography of American Numismatic Auction Catalogues, 1828-1875*, with new material by John W. Adams.)

Writings of numismatic interest in subsequent issues include two articles by “Nemo,” proceedings of the New England Numismatic and Archeological Society and the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Montreal, a report on the “Mackensie” sale, an article on “Shell-Money” by R. E. C. Stearns, articles on “Copper Tokens” and “Curious Brunswick Dollars,” and poems entitled “The Old Coin” and “The ‘Bungtown.’” Interesting pieces on Massachusetts coinage were published under the initials H. E. W., identified by Charles Davis³ as Harlow Woodward, the son of W. Elliot Woodward. H. E. W. also contributed an article on “Our Half Cents.”

The *Mercury*, like many similar publications of its day, also was a means of communication throughout the hobby. Trifet ran the following request from Sylvester S. Crosby: “Being engaged in studying, for the purpose of publication, the varieties of the Colonial coinage, I wish to ask [[for]] impressions in copper or tin foil of any fine or rare specimens.” Ed Cogan even ran a request for assistance in cataloguing a few pieces from the Allan silver cabinet. A man of strong opinions, Trifet also made occasional comments at the expense of Ebenezer Mason (who replied in kind in his own magazine).

In 1869, Trifet had to defend himself against charges of stamp forgery, which makes for some interesting reading in Volume 2. The inclusion of numismatics apparently did little to increase circulation and the publication reverted to philatelic content only after July 1870, undoubtedly much to the satisfaction of Ebenezer Locke Mason. In the January 1871 issue of *Mason’s Coin and Stamp Collectors’ Magazine*, Mason noted that Trifet and Company had “gone up” and lamented the \$2 they owed him.

³ Bowers and Merena (Charles Davis, cataloguer), *The Armand Champa Library, Part 2* (Baltimore, March 23, 1995), lot 1489.