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Pictures From a Distant Country: Seeing America Through Old Paper Money

Richard Doty

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Everyone knows that there is only one form of American currency, the product of a single issuer. That currency is the greenback, and the issuer is the federal government. But this arrangement has not always been the rule: for much of our nation's history (including its most dynamic period of growth) there was no federal currency in circulation. Instead, Americans spent currency issued by private banks and other businesses. We call these pieces of private money obsolete bank notes, and they form the basis of this outstanding new book by Richard Doty, senior curator of the Smithsonian's National Numismatic Collection.

What do the designs and images on these notes tell us about the United States of the 1800s? How did we Americans view women, children, family, the workplace, racial minorities, new technology? Can these obsolete bank notes serve as "pictures from a distant country"-snapshots from the United States of yesteryear?

Hundreds of detailed images of these private notes illustrate Doty's engaging text. *Pictures From a Distant Country* is a must-read for every collector, and for anyone interested in our nation's colorful past.

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