

Hello and welcome back to the program designed to help you learn and improve your American English. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Today we are going to make some money! We will visit a place not far from the VOA studios to find out how U.S. paper money is made. We will also learn how officials protect the real money from being imitated by counterfeiters.

But first, the story of some things that may be more valuable than money to some people who once lived in Iraq.

Maurice Shohet is looking through a box filled with old black-and-white photos. The pictures recall his days in Baghdad, Iraq. Mr. Shohet grew up in the Iraqi capital among one of the world's oldest Jewish communities. About 150,000 Jews once lived in Iraq.

The photos show family celebrations including weddings and bar-mitzvahs – coming of age ceremonies. In one picture, he and his mother and brothers are in a rowboat floating on the waters of the Tigris River.

The Shohet family fled Iraq in 1970 after Jews became unwelcome in the country. They left on foot at night during the rule of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. But Mr. Shohet still praises his former nation.

"I love Iraq because I was born and raised there. And the people are wonderful. We cannot equate what happened at the time by the Baath regime as reflecting everybody."

Mr. Shohet loaned his book of family photos to go with an exhibit seen first at the National Archives in Washington. The exhibit of religious books and community documents now is in the National Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.

American soldiers looking for nuclear weapons discovered the objects in the flooded lowest floor of the Mukhabarat. That agency served as Saddam Hussein's intelligence service.

More than 2,700 books and documents were recovered from the Mukhabarat headquarters. They included many pieces from the Torah, the first five books of Jewish scriptures, or writings.

The soldiers found a case for the holy book. They discovered documents as old as the 16th century. Many were published in Baghdad. But some came from faraway places like Venice.

The soldiers who rescued the objects found them wet and with pages stuck together and covered with mold. Doris Hamburg directed the effort to save the objects. She said they had to be frozen immediately. And even though war was taking place around them, the rescuers found a freezer vehicle.

“They were able, believe it or not, to find a freezer truck in these very difficult circumstances ((in this difficult situation.))”

The documents are to be shipped to Iraq this year after they are repaired and restored. The U.S. State Department says it has trained Iraqi archivists to make sure the collection is protected in Baghdad. But Iraqi Jews living in the United States say the American government had no right to promise to return the objects.

Iraq's ambassador offered to delay the return of the objects. He made the proposal to the Jewish Daily Forward.

But for Maurice Shohet, that is not enough. He says Iraqi Jews were never asked about the agreement. He says the objects were taken from the Jewish people, and still belong to them.

“So it has to be returned to the community, since there is no (Jewish) community left in Iraq. Only five people (are left) who are afraid even to meet each other.”

The exhibit of religious books and community documents at the National Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City will be open until May 18th of this year.

American dollars are popular both in the United States and around the world. For more than a century and a half, the U.S. Department of the Treasury has worked to make sure that the bank notes are real. The department wants people to know their currency, their paper money, has value.

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing is part of the Department of the Treasury. The Bureau designs and produces millions of U.S. paper bank notes at two centers. One is in Texas and the other is here in Washington, D.C. The Bureau is among the largest printing operations of money in the world.

The agency was established in 1862 during the Civil War. At the time, Abraham Lincoln, America's sixteenth president, was in office.

Today, Bureau director Larry Felix says creating a bank note from start to finish requires a number of steps and systems.

"It looks like ink on paper. And it is ink on paper. But there are an extraordinary amount of systems that are on that bank note."

The background color is put on during the first part of the process. For example, the Bureau's off-set printing machines put the blue eagle, and the orange and green colors on the background of a \$20 bill.

Next, the notes are pressed onto plates containing ink and engraving. A kind of design called Intaglio is used for pictures, numbers and lettering. These and other additions are different for the bank notes of differing value.

Just about anyone who produces a bank note wants to put Intaglio on that note. It gives bank notes a distinctive touch and feel.

“The United States puts more intaglio on than almost any other country because we put Intaglio in the front and on the back.”

The next step involves the letter-press printing process. In this process, numbers and seals of the money are added.

“So we put these features in these notes to assist people, to make sure that they can tell if the note is real. And every step of the way it also helps machines to identify if that note is real or not.”

He says the Bureau is always guarding against threats of counterfeit, or false, notes. He says the Bureau has designed special ways to protect the bank notes. These methods use digital and other developing technologies.

Mr. Felix says there is no such thing as a note that cannot be made counterfeit. But he says the counterfeit notes in use amount to less than one one-hundredth of one percent.

U. S. Treasurer Rosie Rios agrees that the percentage of false notes in circulation is very small. But she says the government continues to redesign American currency to prevent counterfeit.

Ms. Rios pointed to the example of the \$100 note. The note was recently designed with a special security feature.

“One of the first things you notice about this new \$100 bill is that it has this blue, 3-D security ribbon.”

The ribbon and other new security additions make it easier for the public to make sure that the note is real. And they make it harder for criminals to counterfeit.

“U.S. currency is trusted worldwide. People recognize it. So we want to make sure that we produce something that’s trusted, that’s secure, that’s safe and people can continue to use in the future.”

Rosie Rios’ job includes watching over both the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and the U.S. Mint. They are separate agencies within the Treasury Department. The Mint produces coins – metal money.

A copy of Ms. Rios’ signature appears on every American note.

Before we leave you, we'd like to help out a listener who wanted to know the history of dental floss. It seems that in the early 1800's, a dentist named Levi Spear Parmly from New Orleans, Louisiana, told his patients to use a thin silk thread in order to better clean around their teeth and gums. Dentists in the U.S. still recommend brushing and flossing your teeth every day.

That's all for now, but stay tuned because more Learning English programs are headed your way. And there is world news at the beginning of each hour on VOA. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington.

