

Tokens Of Old Toronto - Part I

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Toronto, during and after the days when it was known as "muddy York", saw a great variety of coppers in circulation because of a shortage of change by no means confined to the city or to the province of Upper Canada. The United Empire Loyalists made use of what little they managed to bring with them in their pockets and purses. The legal copper currency consisted of an insufficient supply of battered English and Irish halfpennies of George II and George III. Later immigrants from the British Isles brought specimens of the English copper coinage of 1797-1807, but not in enough quantity for the needs of a growing colony. Consequently, during and after the war of 1812, local halfpenny tokens began to appear.

First, came the tokens struck in memory of Sir Isaac Brock, struck after 1812 until 1816. Because Upper Canada at this time used the York Currency (which originated in the state of New York and not at York in Upper Canada), these tokens are light in weight. The Spanish dollar, used all over Canada at this time, was established at eight shillings currency.

In 1820 the sloop tokens were first issued. These were the first tokens to be struck after Halifax Currency was adopted by Upper Canada, and are therefore heavier than the Brock series. They depict a sloop, which at that time was the chief means of transportation on the Great Lakes.

In 1827 the first tokens of Lesslie & Sons appeared. These are the only Upper Canadian tokens which are not anonymous.

The halfpennies of good workmanship were first issued; those of poorer quality appeared about 1830. During this period the famous twopence appeared.

An anonymous token, bearing what was then a depressing fact, the legend NO LABOUR NO BREAD, appeared anonymously in 1830 and was still in use in some quantity in 1870.

"Blacksmith" tokens appeared about 1835, but not in the quantities that cursed the sister colony of Lower Canada. Two varieties are imitations of sloop tokens, and another piece definitely attributed to Upper Canada is the Rising Sun Tavern token.

A halfpenny of 1832 of similar fabric to that of the Thistle tokens of Nova Scotia, was the last token issued in Upper Canada before the Act of Union in 1840. After Union Canada West as Upper Canada came to be called, was supplied with pennies and halfpennies of the Bank of Montreal. These are the "Front view" tokens of 1842 and 1844.

The Bank of Upper Canada received the right to coin copper after the capital of Canada was transferred to Toronto in 1849. Accordingly the St. George tokens were released in 1850. Further issues were released in 1852, 1854, and 1857. These are the last tokens issued before the decimal system was adopted in 1858. On the adoption of the decimal system, the pound Halifax Currency was worth four dollars. This put a value on the penny tokens of 60 to the dollar and the halfpennies of 120 to the dollar, a pound containing 240 pence. The old tokens circulated at this valuation until 1870, when the Dominion government raised the value of those they made legal tender to par with the bronze cents of 1858 and 1859.

The Brock Tokens

In 1812 the Americans were repulsed at Queenston Heights by a Canadian force led by Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, who unfortunately was killed during the battle. Shortly afterwards a token appeared in his memory. The obverse depicts a frigate, and the reverse a memorial inscription. The token was immediately popular, and circulated in enormous quantities. It has been instrumental in freeing a man

from imprisonment for debt, as the following story relates.

Late in 1814 a young country general merchant name Harlow went to a wholesaler named Ackroyd in Kingston to purchase his stock for the coming winter. He took a large stock on consignment and gave a note for the unpaid balance. In January 1815, when the news of the signing of the peace reached Canada, the war boom abruptly ended, and the value of all goods fell fifty percent. Harlow faced ruin, and went to Kingston to get Ackroyd to modify his terms, but in vain. *"I'll get what you owe me,"* he threatened, *"if I have to send you to jail for ten years!"* Harlow returned to his home with a heavy heart. He could not raise the money, and Ackroyd had him arrested and seized his goods. Harlow was imprisoned at Kingston, and interim Ackroyd went to Montreal on business. By a proviso in the law, it was necessary for Ackroyd to give Harlow a dollar

a week, to be paid at the jail every Monday before ten o'clock in the morning. While Ackroyd was in Montreal he left money with his solicitor to be paid to Harlow at the jail. The money was brought in to Harlow one morning by Mrs. Dulmadge, the jailer's wife.

"Count the money please," said Harlow, *"in case he hasn't brought enough"*.

"Here," replied the woman, *"are three silver pieces at a shilling and threepence apiece, making three shillings and ninepence; and a Halifax shilling, making four and ninepence; and threepence in copper making five shillings in Halifax Currency or one dollar."*

"Count the coppers please," asked Harlow.

"There are five old halfpennies of George III and a Brock halfpenny."

"Tell Mr. Ackroyd," said Harlow indignantly, *"that I do not take black money. If he expects me to play the gentleman on a dollar a week he should pay in white money."*

"Young man," said the jailer's wife, *"I have no time to be trifled with by you. I have far too much work to do to indulge in such nonsense. The money will be in the office whenever you want it!"* And she swept angrily out of the room.

At noon Harlow asked Mrs. Dulmadge to fetch a lawyer. *"Are you willing to swear,"* asked the lawyer of Mrs. Dulmadge, *"that this is the very money left this morning by Mr. Ackroyd's solicitor?"*

"I am," replied the jailer's wife.

Accordingly the lawyer took a statement from Harlow, an affidavit from Mrs. Dulmadge, the money, and a copy of a very significant newspaper and sent them at once by post to York. The Kingston newspaper was very relevant indeed to the case. It contained a statement, endorsed by the principal merchants of Kingston, that Brock halfpennies were far too plentiful and might become worthless at any time, and that they, the undersigned, would no longer accept them in payment nor give them out in payment in any quantity. The first name on the list of the undersigned was that of Mr. Ackroyd himself.

Within a week the judgement handed down at York was published in Kingston. Since, in tendering a Brock token, which by his own admission was worthless, Ackroyd could no longer keep Harlow in prison, Harlow was to be freed at once and the debt was cancelled.

Harlow was observed to remark in a tavern that he could not understand why the Brock tokens made the Kingston merchants so nervous. *"I'll always accept them at my store back home,"* he said, *"They are as good as gold, and I'll always have one or two to remember Ackroyd by."*

In 1816 another Brock token appeared. It bore a representation of the original Brock monument on the obverse, with the date 1816 between elongated ornaments on the reverse. This token was issued in enormous quantities, and was very popular. Seven varieties exist. A peculiarity of this piece is that there are no mules. Whenever a die broke or wore out, the pair of dies involved were discarded and not just the one that was no longer serviceable.

The monument on this token is a portrayal of the first monument erected at Niagara Falls to Brock's memory. It was maliciously dynamited by a man named Lett, as Breton tells us, and was replaced by a much more imposing obelisk.

The Sloop Tokens

In 1822 Upper Canada abolished York Currency in favour of Halifax Currency. The York standard, brought from the State of New York by United Empire Loyalists, tariffed the Spanish dollar at eight shillings currency. The real, or eighth of a Spanish Dollar, was therefore called a York Shilling. It continued to be called by this term long after Halifax Currency was adopted. Halifax Currency valued the dollar at five shillings. By this Act Upper Canada brought her currency in line with that of the other Canadian colonies.

The adoption of Halifax Currency

made heavier tokens necessary, since a Brock token would never be accepted as a halfpenny Halifax Currency. As a result a series of anonymous tokens, heavier than the Brocks but still light enough to yield a tidy profit to the issuers, appeared on the scene after 1825. The pieces were antedated to evade the law of 1825, effective in both Canadas, against the use of private tokens after that date.

All these pieces feature on the obverse a sloop, which was the chief means of transportation on the Great Lakes at the time. The reverse of the commonest piece shows crossed shovels over an anvil, and is dated 1820. The two tokens with a keg are dated 1821. One shows a keg inscribed JAMAICA and refers to rum imported from Jamaica. This token is rare. The other, which is scarce, shows a keg inscribed UPPER CANADA, and is a reference to the growing popularity of whiskey, which by then was being introduced in the colony. Next came the halfpenny featuring on the reverse a plough, with the legend TO FACILITATE TRADE and the date 1823. This coin was re-issued dated 1833. Obviously, by 1833 issuers of tokens no longer cared about the law of 1825, and did not antedate their coppers. The sloop tokens also include a mule. The obverse was crossed with the COMMERCIAL CHANGE token of Nova Scotia, dated 1815 and depicting an Indian leading a dog. It is obviously an antedate, and was struck from badly worn dies. The last of the sloop tokens is a rather crude brass halfpenny featuring on the reverse two crossed shovels over an anvil, with a saw and vise at the sides and a hammer and tongs on the anvil. It is dated 1833. The

sloop tokens, with the exception of the two dated 1821, are common, and were the chief copper coins of Muddy York in the years after the adoption of Halifax Currency.

The Lesslie Tokens

In 1824 a halfpenny token appeared in large numbers in York, Kingston, and Dundas. It features a standing figure of Justice on the obverse, and a plough on the reverse. It is unique in that it is the only Upper Canadian coin with an inscription in French - "*La Prudence et la Candeur*", which may be freely translated as "*wisdom and honesty*." The coin was issued by Lesslie & Sons, a drug and book firm of Toronto with branches at Kingston and Dundas. The first pieces, of good workmanship, were issued from 1824-1827. They bear plain edges, and the inscriptions are clear. Later issues appeared from 1828 to 1830, and are of inferior workmanship. They have coarsely reeded edges, and the inscriptions have several partly blind letters, with a comma between YORK and KINGSTON. This comma is not always clear.

Lesslie & Sons also issued Canada's largest copper coin, a twopence dated 1822. It bears the same types as the halfpenny but is inscribed TORONTO & DUNDASS. Because of this fact, it was long supposed that the twopence was not struck until 1834 or afterwards, York not being renamed Toronto until 1834. However, the discovery of a twopence in an old cornerstone dated 1827 demolishes this theory. It is evident from this that the name of Toronto was well known even before it was given officially to the capital of Upper Canada.

The Lesslie twopence was struck in fairly large numbers by Boulton & Watt of Birmingham, but it is rare today. It never was popular on account of its size, and most of them ended their days as washers in the piping system of farmers' wells all over the province. Considering its unpopularity, the coin must have circulated widely, for most of them are considerably worn and scratched. A good VF or finer specimen is decidedly uncommon.

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