

Tokens Of Old Toronto - Part II

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The No Labour No Bread Token

This token appeared in circulation in Muddy York about 1830, against the wishes of the government. The law of 1825, outlawing private tokens, was equally applicable to Upper as well as Lower Canada. The tokens, imported by a local firm in York, were seized at the Customs House and sent to be melted down. It is said that the bulk of the issue mysteriously fell to the floor instead of into the melting pot. At any rate, they soon were noticed in quantity, and were plentiful as late as 1837.

The obverse depicts a man flailing wheat on a threshing floor, with the inscription NO LABOUR NO BREAD. The reverse depicts a farmer behind a plough pulled by two oxen. The legends are SPEED THE PLOUGH and HALFPENNY TOKEN. There are two principal varieties. One has a threshing floor which terminates almost vertically at the right, while the other shows a floor whose right end slopes upward from the bottom to the right.

The obverse legend was in those days and, until quite recently, a depressing fact. If one did not work, one did not eat. Today however, almost every community has one or two individuals who manage to evade this economic law by defrauding the welfare bureau. Fortunately, however, they do not do this for long.

The Britannia Token of 1832

This token, Breton 732, was struck by John Walker & Co. of Birmingham on Canadian order. The same error occurs on this piece as on the 1832 tokens of Nova Scotia, struck by the same firm. The bust on the obverse is of George IV, even though the coin was made two years after he was succeeded by William IV. The inscription is PROVINCE OF UPPER CANADA. The reverse depicts Britannia, as on English copper of 1806-1808, with the value and the date 1832.

It is not known whether this coin is a private or official issue. Is being a heavier coin than usual token of Upper Canada, it may have been a provincial piece like the Nova Scotia coppers. No information exists in the archives.

Blacksmith Tokens

Upper Canada was bothered with blacksmith tokens, but never on the same grand scale as her sister province of Lower Canada. Doubtless many of the types issued in Lower Canada found their way into the Upper province, but only three are known to have been issued in Upper Canada.

The best known is the imitation of the sloop token Breton 727. It bears on one side a crude sloop in a wreath, with crossed shovels over an anvil on the other, also within a wreath. The

second depicts a crude bust to the right on the obverse, muled with a crude copying of the reverse of Breton 730. The third is the RISEING SUN TAVERN token. This piece (Wood 24) depicts the laureate bust of the common Wood 23, die crack and all, on the obverse. The reverse is inscribed RISEING SUN TAVERN around the edge. The centre is blank. This legend was deciphered only

by comparison of several specimens. For many years this reverse was thought to have been an American type, as many taverns by that name existed in the United States in those days. It has been showed by J.D. Ferguson that the Riseing Sun Tavern of this coin was in Toronto.

The Bank of Montreal Tokens

On the reunion of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841, the Bank of Montreal was given the right to coin copper. Accordingly they ordered a new issue of pennies and halfpennies from Boulton & Watt of Birmingham, England. Two halfpennies dated 1845 are known. Despite the accounts of early writers, there are no pennies of 1844.

The coins depict on the obverse a front view of the bank building in Montreal, with PROVINCE OF CANADA and the bank name as legends. On the reverse is shown the arms of the city of Montreal, with the value and date and the words BANK TOKEN. The halfpennies of 1842 are scarcer than those of 1844.

There are three main groups of the halfpenny. The first, or "Tall trees" varieties, has tall, slender trees flanking the building. The right one comes up even with the upper string course (the protruding row of bricks between the storeys), while the left one is distorted, as if being buffeted by a stiff wind. The second, or "Heavy trees" group, has shorter, bushier trees beside the building. The third known as the "Small trees" group has short trees like the second group, but less busy. The "Tall trees" varieties are all scarce, especially the 1842.

The Bank of Upper Canada Tokens

The Bank of Upper Canada was chartered in 1818, and was the sole government bank in Upper Canada. Before 1837 it was entirely in the hands of the Family Compact, and its reorganization was one of the aims of the rebels of 1837. After 1841 the bank was reorganized, and when the capital of the colony of Canada was removed to Toronto after 1849 the bank received the right to coin copper.

In 1850 an order was placed with Ralph Heaton & Company of Birmingham for 5,000 of pennies and 5,000 of halfpennies. Further issues of this size were released in 1852 and 1854. In 1857 there was an issue of 10,000 of each. The obverse depicts Pistrucchi's St. George and the dragon, with the bank name and date. The reverse shows the old seal of the Province of Upper Canada, with the words Bank Token and the value.

These coins quickly became plentiful, and were adequate for the needs of the colony for several years. They are relatively common in uncirculated condition. They circulated side by side with the decimal coinages for many years after Confederation. In 1867 the Bank of Upper Canada suspended payment, and on examination of its affairs it was found impossible to reopen. During the liquidation of its assets, eleven tons of uncirculated pennies and halfpennies were found in the vaults at the head office. These were sold as copper bullion and ordered to be melted down under government supervision. Undoubtedly many people wanted a few as souvenirs, for a large number escaped the melting pot.

The Decimal Coinage

In 1858, the year of Sir John A. Macdonald's famous "double shuffle", the decimal system was adopted, and bronze cents made their appearance. They were accompanied by silver pieces of five,

ten, and twenty cents. The cents were made to be used as a convenient tool of measurement and of weighing small articles. They were an inch in diameter, and a hundred cents weighed a pound avoirdupois. Despite these advantages there was reluctance to accept them at first. Every post office in Canada East and West was given a packet of cents and instructed to put them into circulation. In a few cases the Postmaster-General had to take a high line with the postmasters who refused to co-operate. Despite all opposition, however, the coins gradually replaced the older tokens. In 1870 the various bank tokens of the Maritimes were authorized to pass as cents or two-cent pieces until enough cents could be introduced. In 1876 the first cents of the Dominion of Canada were released, and systematic withdrawal of tokens began. After about 1890 no more tokens were seen in the larger cities.

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