Philatelic Society of Trinidad & Tobago

(Founded May 1942)

P.O. Box 596, Port of Spain, Trinidad, W.I.

Bulletin

Meetings: Second Wednesday of every month, 6:00 - 7:30pm
St. Mary's College, Frederick St., Port of Spain

President and Bulletin Editor: Mr. John Chay Tel: 637-7876

Hon Secretary: Mr. Robert Franco Tel: 637-3603

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY April-June 2019 VOL. 9 BULLETIN #285

Trinidad & Tobago Tokens

by Edward Barrow

This is a detour from pure philately, but a recent auction sale featured a number of Trinidad & Tobago tokens that are rarely seen, and it was thought that the details would be of interest to members. The text beside each illustration is taken from the auction catalogue.

In the 19th Century small change was a perennial problem in Trinidad. The pool of currency consisted of motley mix of British, French, Colonial Spanish and North American coins, some counter stamped, some cut into pieces. It has be put forward that one of the reasons the Lady McLeod stamp came into being was as a response to the shortage of small change. Persons using the service could buy a sheet of stamps and the letter carrier didn't have to receive money or provide change.

These tokens can be seen as privately manufactured coins – except they were not legal tender and carried no legal obligation to be accepted.



Ice Establishment, Port of Spain, Two pence, rev. John Robbins/Boston (the maker).
The company was located at 46-48 King Street, Port of Spain. It was founded in 1869 and owned by C.L. Haley & Co. who sold it to Croney & Co. The name was changed to Ice House sometime between 1897 and 1903. The business not only sold ice, but was one of the best grocers in Trinidad and sold meats, fruits, wines, spirits and soft drinks. The Ice House Hotel was located over the retail shop. Sold with a paper ICE ticket for 25 pounds of ice, from Furness Withy & Co. Ltd.



A Postcard showing the Ice House Hotel in Marine Square (now Independence Square), next door is Muir Marshall.



H.E. Rapsey, Half Stampee (at the time 1 cent). Port of Spain

Horatio Edwin Rapsey emigrated from England to Trinidad prior to 1860. He established a bakery and grocery business at 9 Fredrick Street which passed to his son John Alfred Rapsey about 1887. The token was issued c. 1860 (certainly prior to 1868)



The Carlisle, Port of Spain 48c and 72c

The Carlisle was located at 44 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain. An advertisement in an 1897 publication shows it was a hotel offering "first class accommodation for single gentlemen." The Carlisle had a restaurant, bar and billiard room and was owned by Croney & Co. who also owned the Ice House Hotel in 1903. The tokens are pre-purchase checks for services at the hotel.

The following three illustrations show tokens used on estates and at a coconut factory. These are interesting for a number of reasons: Firstly who remembers the archaic word “Manufactory”? Secondly, the first two are seem to be denominated in labour not currency. These have many unanswered questions, what exactly was a “Task”, did it have an exchange rate to normal currency? They seem reminiscent of the rhetorical question “how long is a piece of string”. One is denominated as 1 Fifth, a fifth of what? Another is denominated 1 Rod which has an ominous ring to it. Or perhaps it relates to the old measure of distance (5 ½ yards), but again, 5 ½ yards of what?



La Union Estates, Manzanilla

La Union Estate in both Trinidad and Tobago. The Trinidad property was a cocao estate owned by Mr J. H. Reyes. The meaning of 1 Fifth and ET has not been established. The token is attributed to Trinidad as it is very similar to the 1 Rod tally for Tuckers Valley Estate in Trinidad.



Tucker’s Valley Estate, Cuesa Valley

The business was established by Mr W. Tucker as a coconut estate and first planted with coconut trees about 1885 and the tallies were used as labour tallies. The likely period of the token usage was shortly after 1885 to about 1905..



Mayaro Manufactory, 10 Cents, rev. John Robbins, Boston (the maker)

The company was owned by Friedrich Uhrich and Anselm Gerold and was involved in producing various products from coconuts. The employees were paid on a task basis and there could have been other value tokens for the payment of various tasks.



A Postcard showing Tucker Bay Road and The Five Islands in the distance.

The brief history of John Lee Lum below, omits his central role in founding our local oil industry in partnership with Randolph Rust. The 13 cent value is an interesting one as it does not correspond to the value of a sterling coin, 12 cents or six pence would seem a natural value. Perhaps these could be bought for 12 cents, the extra cent being a bonus to encourage its use.



Lee Lum, 13 Cents, La Brea

John Lee Lum, originally from Kwangtung, China, started a business in Trinidad in 1885 and imported European and Far Eastern goods and exported cocoa, coffee and copra. He opened a chain of stores and eventually had over 60 stores in different locations around the island. It is known that there were at least 22 different values (stamped onto the tokens). It is believed the tokens were issued in the 1890's and apparently withdrawn in the 1920's


F D
1872
1872


F D
F D
F D
F D
CENTA
1864


F D
F D
F D
F D
1858

This selection shows the chaos of coinage in 19th Century Trinidad; here are Venezuelan, British, Irish, and The East India Company's coins all circulating with a value of 1c or 1/2 penny. It's a United Nations of currency. These were defaced with the initials of an enterprising local barber Francois Declos who accepted them at double the value, i.e. 2c or a penny. It's a bit like someone signing a $1 note and accepting it as payment for $2 worth of goods or services at their store. The temptation for forgers to make their own signed bills would be great indeed!

Francois Declos, Port of Spain

One Stampee, various Halfpenny size coins, countermarked incuse FC to increase the local value from a Half-Stampee to 1 Stampee, some are very crude and likely to be counterfeits of the time. Francios Declos was a barber in Port of Spain, There are at least 18 different examples of the FD countermark, many are very crude as the temptation to double the value of a coin by the addition of a simple FD countermark was very strong.

A farthing was 1/4 d or 1/2c in value.



J.G. d'Ade & Co, Farthing, c. 1870, Port of Spain

This modern token was the only one from Tobago. It looks like it was from the 1980's (remember Pac Man anyone).



Gaming (fruit machine) token at Sun Amusements Scarborough.
Sun Amusements were located on Main Street, Scarborough

Images and text reproduced by kind permission of Dix Noonan Webb.