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THE CANADIAN BLACKSMITH COPPERS

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URING THE PAST decade a good deal has been heard about the so-called "Blacksmith" tokens, but, as much uncertainty exists as to what they are and what they look like, drawings of the different varieties are here published for the first time. Although the series has already been partially catalogued by Dr. Eugene G. Courteau, in *THE NUMISMATIST* for May, 1908, the extension of the list and the illustrations of the different specimens are thought a sufficient reason for treating the subject again.

It is my desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to Messrs. R. W. McLachlan, E. W. Barton, Samuel S. Heal, John Dow, J. E. Carswell, Lyman H. Low, Dr. Eugene G. Courteau and others for the loan of some of the specimens as well as for important information.

As many of the varieties are so poorly struck, and on such thin flans, the whole of the type being seldom shown on one specimen, it has been thought better to give drawings rather than photographs of the whole series. The dies in all cases crudely cut, were, in many instances, purposely left unfinished, so as to give the issue the appearance of a worn coin. No. 11 is a good example of this style of die cutting. The unsatisfactory condition of the currency in Canada up to comparatively recent times explains, as will be shown, the reason for the issue of such barbarous coins. For many years the supply of legal copper coins had been altogether inadequate, so that often anything in the shape of a copper passed current. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the only legal copper circulating medium was an insufficient and diminishing supply of worn out British half-pence sent over from England. A little later this was supplemented by a deluge of imported private tokens. Their over-abundance soon caused them to be discredited, and stringent means were adopted to prevent further importation of such coin into Canada or its manufacture there.

But as the necessity for an adequate supply of small change became more pressing various ways for evading the blockade were evolved, one of these was by making or importing tokens which bore a date previous to the date of the edict excluding private coins. Mr. M. McLachlan has conclusively proved that the head and harp series, Breton 1012, although mainly dated 1820, were not issued until after 1825. Another way, which was at one time very prevalent in England, was to evade the counterfeiting laws by suppressing the legends and

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substituting instead some capricious or meaningless legend, as "CLAUDIUS ROMANUS," "GEOBGIUS TI ROX," "GEORGE RULES," "GLORIUS IER VIS," etc. These spurious coins presented the same general appearance to the ignorant populace as the regal coinage. A third means, and this is characteristic of the Canadian Blacksmiths, was by counterfeiting the worn British half-pence, the only legal copper coins in circulation, on which the date, legend and all but an indistinct outline of the design had been effaced. Although they thus produced a rude coinage these early Canadian coiners showed considerable skill in so making fresh coins bear the appearance of an old worn out but still legal currency that they were able to circulate vast quantities of their spurious imitations. It is worth while noting here that the designs on these Blacksmiths often face in the opposite direction to their prototypes. The head on Nos. 1, 2 and 11 is plainly intended for George III., but it faces to the left while the head on the regal coinage, its prototype, faces to the right. The same fact holds good with the Britannia on the reverse, but the harp faces the same way as its model. The probable reason for this is the inexperience of the die-cutter, who cut the head in the die facing the same way as his model instead of opposite. The English counterfeit series has not this peculiarity as far as I know.

The rude coins, which, for the most part bear on one side an indistinct outline of a head and on the reverse an equally rude seated female figure or a harp have been styled Blacksmiths, but for whatever reason is rather uncertain.

Mr. McLachlan in "Canadian Numismatics," page 126, relates a story of a Blacksmith of dissolute habits living in Montreal, who "when he wished to have a 'good time' struck two or three dollars of these coppers and thereby supplied himself with sufficient change to gratify his wishes." I believe that we are indebted to Mr. John Dow for adopting this name and extending it to the whole series. In any case, this is the first instance in which they were described, while the series was almost wholly neglected by other cataloguers of Canadian coins until the appearance of Dr. Courteau's list, although several collectors had been for some time working on the series. Their rude worn appearance led to this neglect, they were considered unworthy of a place among ordinary coins and might well have been the work of an unlettered blacksmith. It is certain, however, that no party issued all of these pieces, and that they were not all issued at one time.

Their exact date of issue is hard to determine, for naturally, being counterfeits, or at least issued without authority, no publicity was given to their utterance nor any record kept by the makers. There is no doubt that they come later than the English imitations of the regal coinage or the American Bungtown series. I have assigned the head to left series, (Plate 1) to the earliest place, although I have no direct proof to substantiate this theory, putting them down as being issued during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It would appear however that their manufacture was resumed at a later date as is shown by rusted dies, thinner flans, and one or two mulings. Those struck in brass (Plate 1, 13-18) I conclude were uttered after the earlier issues of the copper pieces, and were copied from these rather than from the worn regal coinage. Why these were struck in brass rather than copper is hard to say, possibly because a large number of brass coins was in circulation at the time in Canada, namely, the Head and Harp 1820 series (Breton 1012), and the Tiffin counterfeits (Breton 960 and 961). The second series (Plate II, 19-22) I feel certain was issued between 1825 and 1830, though dated 1820. Mr. J. E. Carswell owns a specimen of this series (No. 19) struck on a George IV. half-penny of 1825. I consider that they were thus dated 1820 in order to evade the law against counterfeiting, as in the case of the Head and Harp pieces. The series in question, the only one bearing date is illustrated by Breton under number 1008.

The next series (Nos. 23 to 29) that can be properly designated as such offers a number of curiosities and puzzles, especially as one die each of two United States store cards is found muled with them. I would assign the dates between the years 1830 and 1840, possibly those struck on comparatively thin flans from the dies in a rusty condition as well as the mules should be assigned to the latter date. It is almost impossible to set a closing date for the series. The natural time would seem to be about 1835, for after that no very light weight tokens were accepted, and the Bank tokens, which were put into circulation in June, 1838, shut off further issues of private tokens. A glance at the pieces themselves must convince one that some at least were issued after 1835. Those found muled with the United States store cards could not have been issued until sometime after 1835, as some of these, Nos. 27 and 29 have the reverse of the card of N. S. Starbuck & Son, Troy, N. Y. This piece was made by a die-cutter named True, of Troy, N. Y., and the first record we have of him was in 1835. It, therefore, must have been a few years later, at least, that the discarded die found its way into Canada. The scarcity of these pieces and of those with the eagle shows that they were issued in limited numbers, probably caused by the growing tendency to reject all light weight coins. These eagle pieces probably represent the last attempts to inject the Blacksmiths into the circulating medium of Canada.

It is difficult to determine what to include and what to exclude in preparing this list, for while certain types lend themselves to this category, there are many isolated specimens that can only be included with hesitancy. Most of those on Plate III are more or less doubtful but are without question Canadian and have enough Blacksmith characteristics to be classified, namely, the rude workmanship, the incomplete designs and for the most part the absence of inscriptions.

Unless otherwise mentioned the specimens listed are in copper.

THE HEAD TO LEFT, COPPER SERIES.

1. Bust of George III, to left in cuirass, double hair bows of about equal size, ends of bow thin, the upper end curving upwards and the lower one nearly straight.

Rev. Seated figure of Britannia to right, spear in right hand, sprig in left, head and bust large, lap prominent.

2. Close copy of No. 1, mouth slightly open, prominent Adam's apple, double hair bow, the upper one being the larger and the lower one pointing downwards, the ends of the bow both point upwards, hump on shoulder prominent.

Rev. Same as No. 1, but the die is not in as good condition.

3. The same as No. 2 but in brass.

No. 2 was evidently reissued at a later date as specimens are found struck from the obverse die in rusty condition showing traces of recutting, notably a circular line, the same diameter as the flan that passes through the wreath at top of head, as shown in the accompanying illustration.

4. Obv. same as in No. 2.

Rev. Britannia not so well executed, head smaller, neck long and thin, bust very prominent, shield not so ornate. Thick and thin flans.

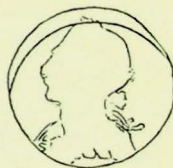
5. Obv. Same as No. 2.

Rev. Harp with ten strings. The die gives one the impression of being badly cracked or slivered around the edge.

6. Obv. Same as No. 2.

Rev. Harp with ten strings, the breast of female larger than on No. 5 and no

Thick and thin flans.
(Wood Coll.)



filigree around edge. This die later became broken, the cracks showing distinctly in three places. Thick and thin flans.

(This variety is also found with the rusty obverse die and the cracked reverse die. Specimens are known with this cracked reverse die only, the other side being blank.)

7. Obv. The rusty obverse die of No. 2.

Rev. The so-called Britannia on water variety. No hair on head, right arm inclined downwards, large sprig in left hand, no ornament to shield, many fine lines in exergue, die badly cracked, obliterating the middle part of figure. (Wood Coll.)

8. The same in brass. (" ")

(Specimens of No. 7 are known showing only the reverse, the other side being blank.)

9. The rusty obverse die of No. 1.

Rev. Full rigged ship to right. This is the obverse die of the drooping flag variety of the Ships, Colonies & Commerce series. The die is badly worn and cracked. Thin flan. (Wood Coll.)

10. Obv. Same as the reverse of No. 5.

Rev. SHIPS, COLONIES & COMMERCE. This is one of the two reverse dies found on the drooping flag variety of the S. C. & C. series.

Thick and thin flans.

11. Similar to No. 1 but eyebrows do not project and the neck runs more into the chin, mouth wider open, small termination to wreath at top, back of head not cut, small loops to bow, and ends farther apart and nearly of equal length.

Rev. Tall, thin figure of Britannia and less ornamentation to shield, which is smaller.

12. Obv. Same as No. 11.

Rev. Seven-stringed harp, more crudely cut than No. 5 which it resembles. Similar filigree work around edge.

THE HEAD TO LEFT, BRASS SERIES.

These pieces are much more crudely done than the copper ones, and the heads are smaller and present the impression that they were copied from the previous series.

13. Head larger than the rest of this series, front part of cuirass shows horizontal bands, both bows at back very plain, chin prominent and pointed.

Rev. Large seated figure of Britannia, right arm well modelled, broad shoulders, short left forearm.

14. Head slightly smaller than No. 13, chin small and pointed, and without curves, but little curve to end of bow, lower bow thick and square.

Rev. Crude outlined headless Britannia, right forearm long and thin, exergual lines run to shield support instead of below it. This variety is found in both yellowish and reddish brass.

15. Same as 14 but in copper. (Wood Coll.)

16. Low forehead, nose large, chin small and underpart indefinite, but is apparently a double chin; lower bow very small and away from ends of ribbon which are shorter on this variety than on any other; double outline to front part of bust.

Rev. Small Britannia with head, arms well modelled and short, spear shows between arm and dress, exergual lines run to shield support.

17. Forehead angular, nose thin and pointed, chin strong, neck long, lower bow long and slender.

Rev. Probably from same die as No. 16.

18. Obv. Same as No. 17.

Rev. Britannia resembling No. 14, but right arm very thick and drapery under this arm large and angular, exergual lines away from shield support.

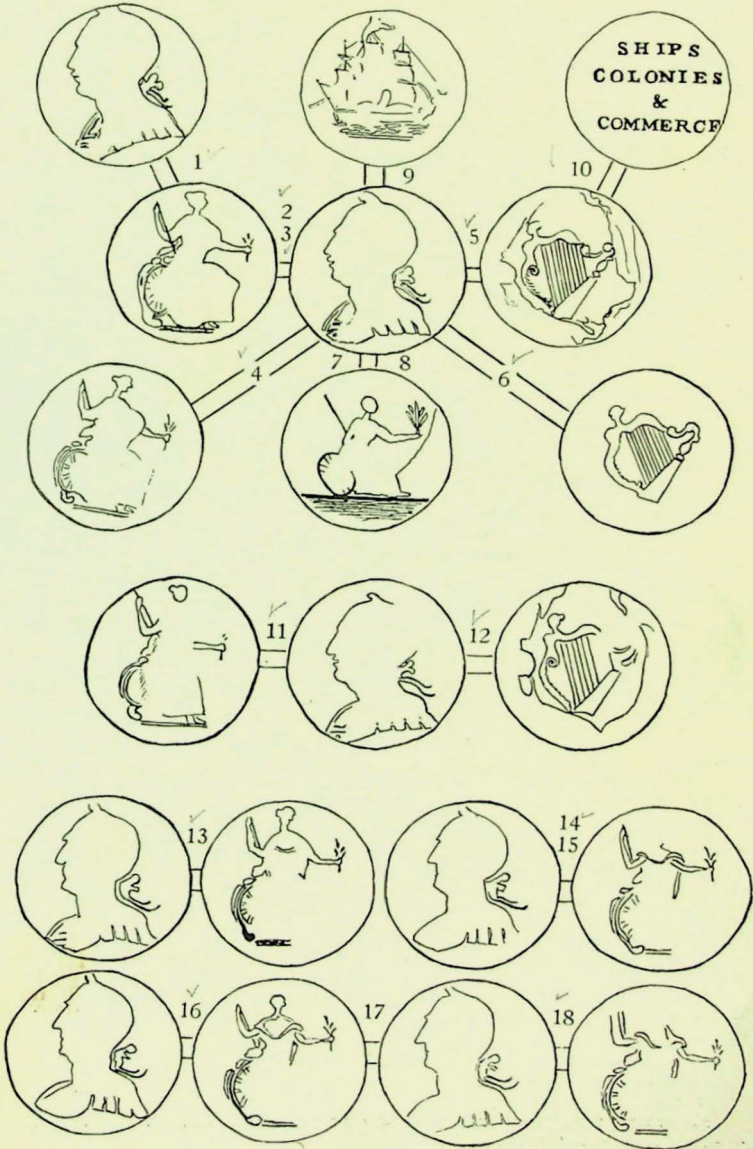


PLATE I.

THE SERIES DATED 1820, HEAD TO RIGHT.

19. Head of George II. (?) to right, broad truncation to bust, nose aquiline, three spears of hair on head, long pointed chin, ends of bow curving outward.

Rev. Commerce to left seated on a bale showing six hummocks, which rests on a broad diagonally lined base; in right hand scales, in left cornucopia, in exergue 1820. Copper. Large and small flans.

Mr. E. W. Barton possesses a specimen of this piece struck over No. 6.

20. Same as 19 but in brass. (Wood Coll.)

21. Head similar and probably from the same die recut, the points of difference being a small nose and small weak chin, and the ribbons of bow pointing inwards.

Rev. Same as No. 19. Copper. (E. W. Barton Coll.)

22. Obv. Same as No. 21.

Rev. Harp to left, in exergue 1820. Copper.
(E. W. Barton and Dr. Courteau Coll.)

THE HEAD AND EAGLE SERIES, ALL COPPER.

23. Bust of George II. (?) to right in cuirass, prominent lower jaw, double chin, one bow to ribbon, serrated edge. There is a break in the die on all specimens running from edge above head through shoulder.

Rev. Seated figure of Britannia to right holding spear in right hand and sprig in left, shield without ornamentation, edge serrated.

I have yet to see this reverse fully struck up on account of the thinness of the flan and the relief of the head on the obverse side. The drawing has been made up of several specimens. A comparison of a number of these pieces show that as the obverse die continued in use the break behind the head gradually became more pronounced and the die became much worn and rusted. The reverse die undoubtedly was touched up several times as it became worn, so that some of the later specimens present the appearance of a new variety, as is shown in the accompanying illustration, but the differences are not thought to be of enough moment



to warrant a separate number.

24. Obv. Rusty and badly broken die of No. 23.

Rev. RISEING SUN | TAVERN around edge, centre apparently plain.

No one specimen shows all the inscription, and it was for a long time in doubt what was the correct reading. Dr. Courteau was the first to make this out from a comparison of several specimens.

25. Obv. Same as No. 24.

Rev. MACHINE SHOP | TURNING AND BORING, etc., with a screw in the centre. This is the reverse of the card of N. S. Starbuck & Son, Troy, N. Y.

26. Obv. Same as No. 24.

Rev. Eagle with thin neck and wing feathers defined, serrated border.

The prototype of this eagle is a question, but it probably was a crude imitation of the reverse of the common token of Britannia and eagle dated 1813-14-15. Breton 994.

27. Eagle, same as the reverse of No. 26.

Rev. Same as reverse of No. 25.

28. Obv. Same as No. 27.

Rev. PECK'S PATENT TIN MACHINES, etc. This is the obverse of J. & C. Peck's card, Troy, N. Y.

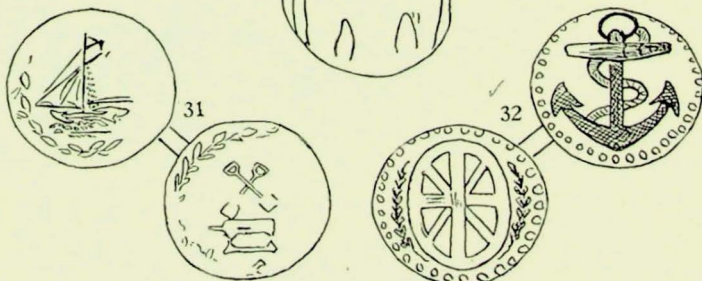
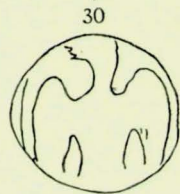
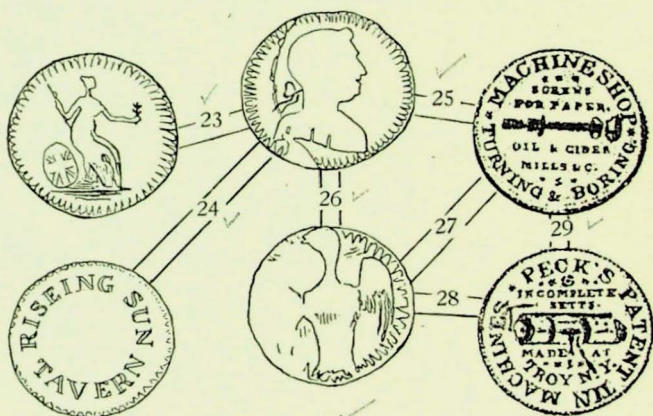
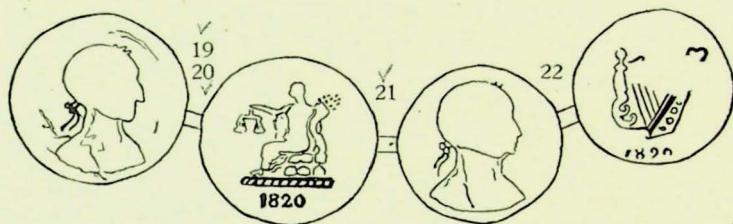


PLATE II.

There may possibly be a combination of this eagle obverse muled with the seated figure reverse of No. 23, but until this combination has been actually located it is thought best not to give it a number.

29. Obv. Same as the reverse of No. 25.

Rev. Same as the reverse of No. 28.

This is a muling of Peck's and Starbuck's cards, and as all the specimens that I have seen are on thin and badly clipped flans, this combination should certainly be considered in this series.

30. Obv. A similar eagle to No. 26, but with thick neck and wing feathers not defined. No serrated borders.

Rev. Same as obverse.

(Dr. Courteau Coll.)

These two sides were without doubt struck from the same die, as I have been unable to distinguish any differences. The flans of this variety are, as a rule, thick, and it is doubtful if this piece was made by the same person who made the series just mentioned.

THE MISCELLANEOUS AND DOUBTFUL SERIES

31. Obv. A sloop to left within a wreath.

Rev. Crossed spades over an anvil within a wreath.

(McLachlan Coll.)

This piece is undoubtedly a copy of the well known token, Breton 727.

32. Obv. Union Jack in oval shield within a partial wreath, border composed of large dots.

Rev. Fouled anchor, border composed of large dots. Thick and thin flans.

A comparison of the obverse of this piece with the reverse of the Montreal bank tokens cannot but suggest that the bank token served as a model for this piece, even though a Union Jack is represented rather than the arms of Montreal. The idea of the anchor on the reverse was without doubt taken from the British Colonial silver pieces of 1822 (Breton 857-860), which were at one time in very common use in Canada.

THE GLORIOUS III. VIS. SERIES.

33. Obv. Head to right with large pug nose. Ins. GLORIOVS III. VIS.

Seated figure to left holding shamrock. Ins. BITIT(?).

This is undoubtedly a counterfeit, not of a regal coin, but of one of the English counterfeits with similar inscription. The head, however, faces the other way, a peculiarity common with the Blacksmiths.

34. Obv. Head to left, showing wreath and cuirass, indecipherable inscription, but undoubtedly meant for Glorious III Vis.

Rev. Seated figure to right holding shamrock, shield in rear. Ins. I I I I, probably to represent Bitit.

(McLachlan and Barton Coll.)

This piece is clearly a counterfeit of No. 33, the head and figure facing in the opposite direction to its prototype.

35. Obv. Head similar to No. 34. Ins. probably reads GLO. III. Vis.

Rev. Harp to left.

(McLachlan Coll.)

The obverse of this piece, like No. 34 is clearly copied from No. 33. Specimens are found with reverse blank.

36. Obv. Head to left of the same general appearance of Nos. 34 and 35, probably an inscription around edge, in exergue 1471, which was doubtless intended for 1741.

Rev. Blank.

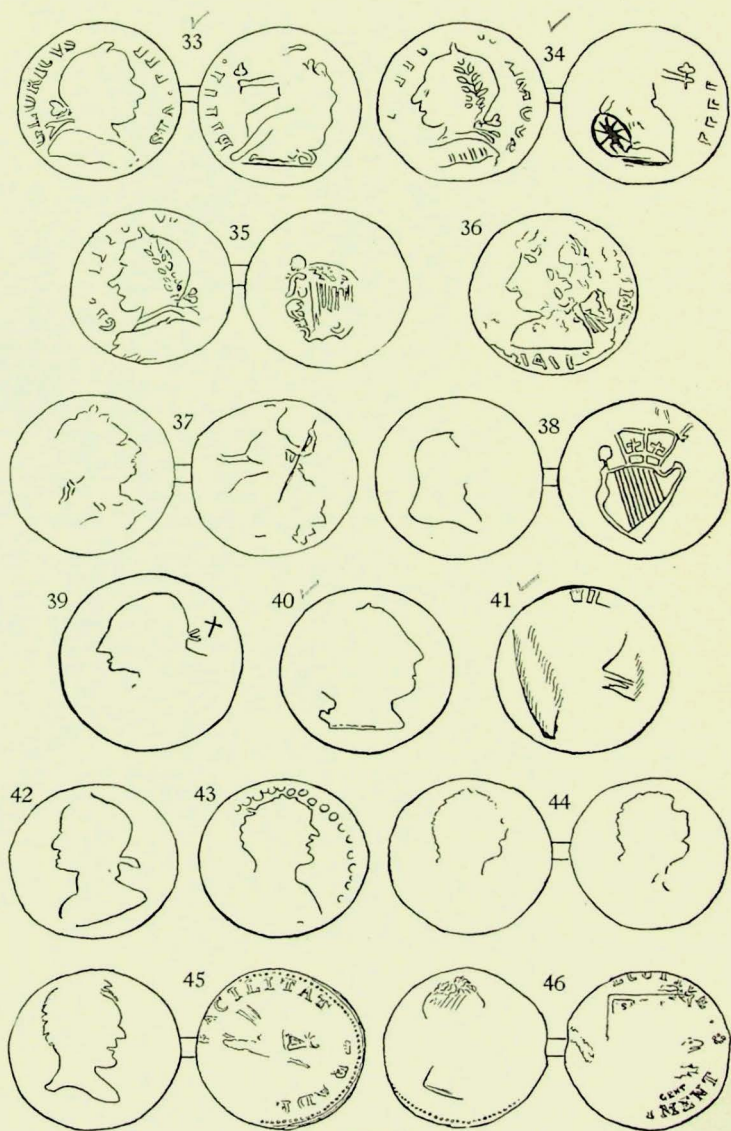


PLATE III.

37. Obv. A fairly well cut though incomplete head of George III. No inscription.

Rev. A partially cut Britannia. No inscription. (McLachlan Coll.)

38. Obv. Small head with large truncation to right. No inscription.

Rev. Crowned harp to left. (Heal Coll.)

39. Obv. Head to left with protruding tongue, cross behind head.

Rev. Blank. (Heal Coll.)

40. Obv. Large head to right, flat truncation.

Rev. Blank. (Barton Coll.)

41. Obv. Some indefinite object, possibly a head.

Rev. Blank. (Barton Coll.)

42. Obv. Head of George II. to left. No inscription.

Rev. Blank. (McLachlan Coll.)

43. Obv. Crudely cut head to right, surrounded by border of large dots.

Rev. Blank. (Wood Coll.)

44. Obv. Rough outline of head to right, resembling a dog's as much as anything.

Rev. Similar. (McLachlan Coll.)

The two following are included with hesitancy. They have many Blacksmith characteristics, namely, the partially cut obverses and the crude manner of execution.

45. Obv. Tousled head to right.

Rev. Plow and inscription TO FACILITATE TRADE. Brass. (Wood Coll.)

The reverse of this piece is similar to Breton 730, whether from a genuine die or not, I cannot say.

46. Obv. Head to right, of which only a fragment is visible. From the little that shows there is a suggestion of a copy of the obverse of Breton 1002.

Rev. Safe on tortoise and inscription. This is from the worn, broken die of the Hard Time token, Low 19. Very thin flan. (Wood Coll.)

