

JACOB PERKINS AND THE WASHINGTON DIE

By

ALBERT COLLIS, A.N.A. No. 23983

TOP antique dealers for years have hinted to prospective clients for rare pieces of furniture that "it came from Newburyport." What greater tribute could be paid a town?

Newburyport at one time was one of the wealthiest and most influential in the country. It was built largely by a flourishing sea

town would have gained all the more. Perkins was born in 1766 but little is known of his early childhood. He married Hannah Greenleaf in 1790 and they lived on Fruit St., near High. They had nine children, seven of them girls. They were not without family tragedy. One daughter died at fifteen months, another at five years and a third at twenty-one on the eve of her marriage.

Jacob Perkins died in 1849 in London and was buried in the family vault in Kensal Green cemetery. At least five of his children were buried there but it appears his wife was buried in Newburyport.

In the numismatic world we remember Jacob Perkins's connection with the Massachusetts cent, the Perkins dollar, the Perkins funeral medals, bank note plates and counterfeit detectors. Important as they are, they're but facets of his wonderful mind.

Of the forty patents granted Perkins in his time, seventeen were issued while he lived in Newburyport. He obtained two while living in Philadelphia for four years, and the remaining in England, where he spent the latter part of his life. His inventions outside numismatics ranged from nail-making machines to fire engines, watermills, screw propellers, pumps, steam engines, central heating systems, steam cannon, improvements to bedsteads and sofas, ice-making machines and many others. He clearly demonstrated he was a man of vision and new ideas, far ahead of his time.

An excellent biography of Jacob Perkins has been written by Greville and Dorothy Bathe. It was published by the Pennsylvania Historical Society at Philadelphia in 1943. A limited edition, it should be available at public libraries in the larger cities.

The Washington die shown in this article is the original for the un-



The die

trade directed by clever men. It broke away from its poorer half, Newbury, in 1764 to become a town by itself.

Newburyport isn't all like High St. and never was. The bawdy houses are still going full blast on parts of Merrimac and Water Sts. like they always have. The town always had a generous share of common people who were used to advantage to man the many sailing ships. They also came in handy during wars. But wealth dominated the town and Presidents, statesmen and high military figures paid homage to Newburyport over a long period.

Jacob Perkins added no small part to its fame. Had he remained in Newburyport all his life, the

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dated pieces of 1792. Where or when Jacob Perkins acquired it is unknown. The important thing is that it has been preserved through his foresight and his tenacious heirs. The writer feels honored to have been a part of it, though there is no connection with the family.

Although the die has been in my possession for about two years, the plan to make some restrikes didn't get off the ground until January of this year. Correspondence ran into weeks upon end before the actual striking began. What color metal? What thickness? Should they be toned or lacquered? Decisions were for copper with a color similar to the Lincoln cent, thickness 10 gauge, no buffing, no toning, no lacquer. Leave them raw like any coin and let time do the rest.

Since the reverse die was missing, it was decided to leave the reverse of the pieces plain, thus defeating any future attempt to pass these restrikes as originals.

Anyone with a knowledge of dies will quickly see that a working die would have to be created from the original to produce coins. The company didn't fully explain just how they would do this but did point out they couldn't be held responsible if anything happened to the original die in the process. Talking with them personally after it was all over, they told me they had to hit the original with a force of seventy-five to one hundred tons pressure to sink the old die into a block of mild steel. Meaningful glances were exchanged at that point.

But the die passed the test; it was neither too soft nor too hard and brittle. The new die was hardened and sunk into another steel block to create a working die exactly like the original.

The first of June, 1959, found everything in readiness for the strike. It was my privilege to be

present during part of the strike and to watch the exciting operation. A handful of coins were struck in rare metals before the comparatively small strike was made in copper. Strict supervision was exercised throughout the operation and a signed statement delivered showing the exact number of pieces struck in the various metals.

At the conclusion of the strike, the working die and also the steel impression made by the original die were taken to the grinder and defaced in my presence. That caused some wagging of heads and tongue clucking. This whole deal was the strangest thing they'd ever seen in the plant.



The restrike

Back in Newburyport, I contacted Mrs. Shepard Pond, President of the Boston Numismatic Society, telling her what I'd done and that I should separate myself from the original die. We felt it should go to a numismatic society rather than a local historical society. It was decided that such a rare, important die should go to the American Numismatic Association collection and that an excellent time for the presentation would be at the national convention in Boston next year. The die is now safely in the hands of the BNS and will be formally presented to the A.N.A. in 1960.

And so, after one hundred and sixty-seven years, a part of the past came to life. Long live the memory of Jacob Perkins.

Issue of New Currency Notes in Malaya - New currency notes of denomination of one Malayan dollar were issued in the Federation of Malaya on June 1. Parity is the same as the old, that is, 2s. 4d. sterling per Malayan dollar. The old notes are still legal tender throughout the currency area, and their value will not be affected by the new issue. Plans are under way for the issue of notes of other denominations.