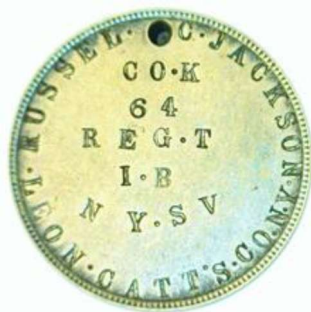


A Counterstamped Pocket Piece by Bill Groom

Most counterstamped coins served some commercial purpose. Many circulated to promote word-of-mouth advertising, akin to “little billboards.” Others served as tool checks, passes or tickets of sorts, receipts for items left with a merchant, employee ID's and a wide variety of business operations. These stamped coins were accordingly struck in small and large numbers; most often, by virtue of a single, prepared stamp.

During the Civil War, die sinkers and engravers utilized individual letter and number punches to create identification disks for soldiers to carry. Many years later, during WWI, comparable military ID's were deemed “dog tags.” Civil War era ID's, like the one pictured below, often show letter misalignment. Some makers took great care in punching ID's, but others lacked alignment tools and/or finesse.



Russell C. Jackson of Leon, NY
was a private in the Cattaraugus
Regiment of the N.Y State Volunteers.

Note the central misalignment of
letters. The well-placed peripheral
letters suggest that the maker likely
had a tool to better assist with that
application.



While the 1850's were “boom years” for counterstamped coins, the love token fad of engraving coins boomed after the Civil War. Surviving host coins today show us that the two practices, punching and engraving, often intersected. Many counterstamps qualify as love tokens...

Successful businessmen of yesteryear routinely carried pocket watches. If they were a mason or member of another fraternal order, they might also carry a personalized coin to serve as a badge and/or conversation-starter. The coins were often holed and attached to watch fobs; sometimes, gifted by a loved one. Most were engraved but many were counterstamped. The 1866 Liberty Seated half dollar, on the next page, is an example. The stamping reads: C.G. SHEPARD. / BUFFALO, N.Y.

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Note the artful placement of the name and town, carefully aligned in love token fashion.

This counterstamp, was unknown to Brunk and Rulau. Brunk listed an S. SHEPARD & CO. / BUFFALO, N.Y. counterstamp on an 1861-O half dollar, # S-377; this, likely Sidney, possibly a relative to C.G. Shepard. A search of early Buffalo directories reveals but one C.G. Shepard.

Charles G. (Gurley?) Shepard, 1850-1928, was but 16 years old in 1866 when C.G. Shepard & Company was founded. Walter J. Shepard (father to Charles?) was a senior partner in this iron hardware business. (Note that 1866 is the date of this counterstamped love token coin.) Might this stamped coin have been gifted to Charles by his father who, in 1866, set young Charles up in business? If so, what a great backstory!

Apparently, the company name was later changed to Shepard Hardware Company. Note that Charles and Walter are cited as the principals, whereas John D. Shepard (perhaps an uncle or grandfather to Charles) is cited as company founder in 1866.

This Mammoth Foundry was situated on a 3.5 acre plot. It's noted that Buffalo's access to the Great Lakes and Erie Canal likely benefited the business to a large extent, shipping-wise.

CHARLES G. SHEPARD.	WALTER J. SHEPARD.
SHEPARD HARDWARE COMPANY	
ESTABLISHED IN 1866 BY JOHN D. SHEPARD.	
MANUFACTURERS OF	
HARDWARE SPECIALTIES	
Office and Works, Forest Ave., Erie Canal, Black Rock Harbor.	
MAMMOTH FOUNDRY	
3 CUPOLAS.	FOUNDRY FLOOR, 300 x 265 FEET.
MAIN BUILDING COVERS ABOUT 3½ ACRES.	
CUSTOM WORK, when in Considerable Quantities, SOLICITED.	

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Charles was apparently a gifted inventor and artist. Having become knowledgeable in the iron business, he and one Peter Adams secured patent for at least a dozen mechanical toy banks, during the 1880's. They also marketed trading cards that promoted the banks; today, highly sought after by collectors, as are the banks. Shown below are some of these products...



These mechanical toy banks encouraged children to save money and still do, even today!

By 1892, the Shepards' had sold their business to J. & E. Stevens of Cromwell, CT. Since that time, their toy banks have been reproduced by many other companies, foreign and domestic. Original Shepard banks have realized many thousands of dollars at auction, whereas modern copies can now be had for well under a hundred dollars.

Closing thoughts on the counterstamp: As counterstamps go, this C.G. Shepard attribution is highly-probable; this, as opposed to its being proof-positive. In this collector's estimation, the singular directory evidence alone doesn't make for a proof-positive attribution. However, circumstantial evidence pertaining to the 1866 date does tend to elevate the level of proof somewhat. Ideally, was a matching stamp to be found on a mechanical toy bank or other iron product, that evidence would constitute a proof positive attribution.

In closing, the study of counterstamps, attributed or not, can be very engaging. There are many thousands of maverick counterstamps presently begging attribution. This writer encourages others to attempt solving their mystery. Do keep in mind that gathering solid and/or strong circumstantial evidence is key to making the case.

Recommended Reading about the Shepard Banks:

"OLD MECHANICAL BANKS of the SHEPARD HARDWARE COMPANY" by Bill Norman -

https://www.mechanicalbanks.org/scrapbook/1980s/pages/1982_shepard_banks.htm

(END)