

Fake New Mexico Token Hoard
By: Billy Kiser

For the past twenty or more years, it has been a well known fact among New Mexico token collectors that there were a number of fake New Mexico tokens made sometime in the late 1970's/early 1980's. These tokens, which numbered about 50 total, were all documented by cataloger Richard Worthington, and later by myself, in books published on New Mexico Trade Tokens. It was assumed that the approximately 50 known fakes were the extent of the hoard.

In the past ten years, I had only ever seen one fake New Mexico token on eBay. Then, in the last two months, there were two, both of which were listed by different sellers in Albuquerque. In both instances, the sellers were contacted and informed that the tokens were not authentic. Not a week after the last fake had been listed on eBay (a 5c example of the R.F. Heller token from Cabezon), I was contacted by a friend of mine in Albuquerque who had purchased over 800 New Mexico tokens at the Albuquerque flea market. He paid about \$2-4 each for them. It would have been an incredible bargain...if the tokens were authentic. After he began looking the tokens up in my New Mexico token book, he began to notice that most of them were listed with the caption "Fakes Known." This set off an alarm, and he rightfully assumed that the tokens were counterfeit.

My dad and I went to Albuquerque to view the tokens in person. As we expected, all were fake, and all of them possessed characteristics that were identical to the previously known New Mexico fakes. In addition, there were a number of previously undocumented fakes, which I will list at the end of this article.

The lady selling these tokens at the flea market supposedly obtained them from an abandoned storage unit. Apparently, the person renting the storage unit had quit paying on it, and the items were put up for sale. Among the items in the storage unit were at least 900 fake tokens, 42 different dies from which the tokens were made, and a number of fake military relics. The lady selling these items, who is transient and lives in her small truck, claimed to have been unaware that they were counterfeit, and I am inclined to believe her story. She was not the type of person to possess the knowledge, much less have the capability, to make the tokens herself. At any rate, she was selling the tokens for a mere \$2-4 each, so she was obviously not attempting to cheat anybody.

Unfortunately, the seller stated that she had already sold an estimated 100 of the fake tokens over the past month to various individuals who visited the flea market. At least one of the two fake tokens that appeared on eBay originated from this source. It is not improbable that more of these fakes will turn up for sale on eBay in the upcoming months, given the fact that more than 100 of them were distributed to random buyers before the hoard was finally obtained in its entirety.

The buyer of the 800-token hoard (who is not even a token collector) has decided, for the good of the hobby, to NOT return them to the seller. Rather, he will stamp the tokens with the letter "R" for "reproduction" on the reverse side. He may try to sell some of the tokens this way, for cheap prices, in an attempt to regain some of his money from the purchase. I think it is a very commendable action on this person's part to be willing to "eat" the cost in order to protect our hobby from a massive inundating of these fake tokens.

It is my well-formed opinion that all of these fake tokens were produced by the same individual (Howard Elam of Albuquerque), who produced the original small hoard of fake tokens that were discovered over two decades ago. These tokens are identical to the previously known fakes. Furthermore, the discovery of fake military relics with these tokens is also evidence that they were produced by Elam. He spent time in prison for making and distributing fake Indian, Spanish, and military relics here in New Mexico, stealing relics from various people and museums, salting historic sites with fake relics, and creating fake petroglyphs. I am confident that there is NOT a new person producing these fakes. What happened, I believe, is that he produced all of these fake tokens at the same time, in the late 1970's or early 1980's. He has been sent to prison more than once, and I believe that at some point he stashed his fake material in the storage unit, and never attempted to distribute these items following his release(s) from prison. A Google search on Howard Elam produces numerous articles involving New Mexico-related antiquities, as well as thefts for which he was accused. Articles pertaining to his first indictment and subsequent imprisonment were printed in the Albuquerque *Journal* in 1979, and proceedings on a case ending in 1993 can be found online as well.

Howard Elam, the producer of all the fake tokens, is currently active on eBay. A criminal investigator in Albuquerque was kind enough to look into the matter for me. Elam's eBay user ID is: **505auntbettysattic**. If you see anything for sale by this seller, DO NOT BID. He currently has over 400 active eBay auctions, including a wide array of historical items including relics, arrowheads, Indian artifacts, bottles, and so on. Some of the items are indeed authentic, but it is not worth the risk. This is the seller who listed the first of the two fake tokens on eBay, a fantasy piece from Fort Craig. This suggests that he might have more of the fakes in his possession (God forbid).

At any rate, I highly encourage all people buying New Mexico tokens to use extreme caution when buying tokens on eBay over the next few months. You should use the following criteria when deciding whether or not to purchase a New Mexico token:

1. If the reverse side of the token is stamped with an "R," the token is fake.
2. Every single fake token is made of brass. If a token is aluminum, it is 100% authentic and you need not worry.
3. If my 2009 N.M. token book lists a token as "Fakes Known," or "Brass is Fake," use extreme caution. You should email the seller ahead of time to ensure that they allow refunds. It is very difficult to tell if a token is fake based solely on an eBay photo.
4. If the seller of a token lists their location as Albuquerque, there is a chance that they may be selling a token they obtained from the Albuquerque flea market. Once again, you should email the seller to ensure they allow refunds.
5. My 2009 N.M. token book lists numerous methods of identifying these fake tokens. If you own a copy of my book, it might be useful to review these criteria.
6. If you do come across any N.M. tokens, and are unsure of their authenticity, I will be happy to answer any questions or look at photographs of the token in an attempt to identify the token as authentic or fake.

This should not be a reason to avoid purchasing New Mexico tokens. About 90% of this hoard is in safe hands and will not be distributed in any misleading ways. Still,

based on information provided by the seller of these tokens at the flea market, there could be as many as 100 of these fakes floating around in the Albuquerque area.

Finally, the following tokens were contained in the hoard, but were previously unknown to me, and are therefore NOT listed as fake in my 2009 book:

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| NM21.4 | Joe Badaracco / Albuquerque // 5c |
| UNL | BelAir Cocktail Lounge / Albuquerque // 5c |
| NM129 | W.E. Talbott / Albuquerque // Wholesale & Retail Wines, etc. |
| NM144f | Diamond Coal Co. / Allison // \$2.00 |
| NM167b | Cut Off Saloon / Belen // 12 1/2c |
| NM174b | Porter Merc. Co. / Bernalillo // 5c |
| NM175 | Putney Merc. / Bernalillo // 5c (Complete Fantasy) |
| NM245 | V.J. Romero / Chloride // 5c |
| NM323 | Deming Billiard Hall // 5c |
| NM401 | McIntosh Sheep Ranch / Estancia // (Ram Head) |
| NM447a | Post Exchange / 5c / Ft. Wingate |
| NM447b | Post Exchange / 10c / Ft. Wingate |
| NM447c | Post Exchange / 25c / Ft. Wingate |
| UNL | Post Exchange / 5c / Ft. Marcy (Complete Fantasy) |
| UNL | Post Exchange / 5c / Ft. Union (Complete Fantasy) |
| UNL | Post Exchange / 5c / Ft. Bayard (Complete Fantasy) |
| UNL | Post Exchange / 5c / Ft. Craig (Complete Fantasy) |
| NM451b | C.H. Algert / Fruitland // 25c |
| NM451c | C.H. Algert / Fruitland // 50c |
| (Arizona) | Troop K / 5 Cavalry / 25 (Oct. Br. Incuse) |
| (Arizona) | Troop K / 5 Cavalry / 50 (Oct. Br. Incuse) |
| NM498 | Harrington's Store (Gallup) |
| NM519b | Paul Mlocker / Aservo / Gallup // 25c |
| NM600 | Thomason Recreation Hall / Hatch // 5c |
| NM733b | Lordsburg Billiard Hall / Lordsburg // 10c |
| NM845d | Bloomfield's Commissary (Prewitt) // 50c |
| NM1062e | Star Lake Store // \$1.00 |
| UNL | Albert Starr – Starr Lake // 5c (Complete Fantasy) |
| UNL | L.V.S.R.W. Co. / One Fare // (Trolley Pic) |

To my knowledge, the above tokens, along with those already listed as fake in my book, are the only New Mexico tokens that should be cause for alarm. Any other New Mexico token should be authentic.

As I said, I will be happy to help with the identification of any potentially fake New Mexico tokens. I think it is imperative for the token collecting community to be aware of this situation in order to avoid potentially hazardous business deals.