

(the return of)

## "Tokens of History"

a monthly column

by

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(This column was featured in the SHS newsletter several years ago, but was discontinued after a few installments as the photos were unclear in the old format. We are happy that our new format enables to reprint the inaugural article along with a clear color photo.)

Each month I will be featuring a different trade token from my personal collection that was issued by one of the early merchants of Shasta County, including any history I have been able to find related to the business or people involved. I hope this can be viewed as an interactive process with the members of the Shasta Historical Society, as in many cases the information is sparse and I ask that any member who has further details to please share this with me, which can then be shared in future newsletters. For this inaugural installment, I will begin with a general history of trade tokens, and then discuss my most recent acquisition.

Merchant trade tokens were first utilized in the United State as a response to general coin shortages, especially during the "Hard Times" period of 1828 to 1844 and the Civil War period of 1861 to 1865. Merchants who received large denomination coins from their customers frequently had difficulty making change, and the more entrepreneurial among them issued their own tokens. These tokens could be redeemed at any time by the customer for cash, merchandise or services.

After 1890, trade tokens were issued primarily as advertising items for the business issuing the token, or the name of the product for sale (the token below illustrates both). Tokens were also given to customers to encourage repeat business or as gifts to non-customers to encourage their initial purchases. Another reason a merchant might pay to have his own tokens issued was to increase income. Copper, brass, and aluminum tokens cost the merchant a tiny fraction of the face value of the tokens they used. Issuing tokens to make change netted the merchant a substantial profit, especially since large numbers of tokens were never redeemed, and those that were eventually redeemed gave the merchant some extra time to hold on to their "real" money.

When a business changed hands, the outstanding tokens were considered a liability to the new owner, so they were often holed or counter-stamped to show that they were newly issued, or simply thrown out. Trade tokens were very popular with merchants in Shasta County from the 1890' s (there are no tokens from the town of Shasta listed in the major reference books, evidently because it was already in decline by this period, although I've heard rumor that there have been some tokens found from Shasta) through the 1930' s, having them manufactured by one of a handful of companies in San Francisco (the name of the manufacturer can often be found in very small letters along the coins rim). Merchant trade tokens fell out of favor due to the metal shortage that followed the nation's entry into World War II, but the modern use of coupons may be considered to have taken their place.



Town: Keswick  
Business: McDonald's Saloon  
Obverse: MCDONALD'S / ONE / SMILE / KESWICK / CAL. / SALOON  
Reverse: SMOKE / REINA DE ORO / CIGARS

This token was "good for" or worth "One Smile" from McDonald's Saloon in Keswick, and also advertised the Reina De Oro cigars (I have been unable to locate any information about this brand of cigar). A "Smile" was the old saloon term for a shot of whiskey, supposedly because in the old west "men were men" and it took whiskey to wash the days dust down one's gullet. Today we would probably call it a "Grimace."

History: According to the Dictionary of Shasta County History, Keswick was a copper mining town named for Lord Keswick of London, the president of Mountain Copper Company created as result of Iron Mountain Mine in 1896. It was the second largest Shasta County town at the turn of century, with a population of 1000 and 35(!) saloons at its peak, located on the original site of Stump Ranch. The Keswick post office operated from 1896 to 1923, and again from 1962 to 1965.

I have been unable to locate any clear information on McDonald's Saloon, and indeed very little about the town of Keswick and the people who lived there despite its being described (above) as a very active mining town. I do have a few clues however, and I am hopeful that more data will surface.

The 1881 History and Directory lists Bernard, John, Patrick and Luke McDonald as miners in Whiskeytown. It also indicates that a Charles McDonald was the Shasta County Clerk from 1864 to 1868, as well as the proprietor of McDonald's Saloon on Main Street in Shasta. The marriage license index lists a John W. McDonald as having married a Harriet E. Thompson on November 8, 1885. The 1898-99 Business Licenses for Shasta County lists a "John G. Mcdopnald" (sic) as having a retail liquor license in Keswick. The Census Index for 1900 lists an Alexander McDonald as a resident of Keswick. Perhaps Charles and/or a relative moved the McDonald's Saloon from Shasta to Keswick after Shasta began to decline?

At this point the McDonald Saloon of Keswick remains a mystery. It is not listed in the standard references on California tokens. If you have any more information regarding this saloon, the cigars, or even early Keswick history in general, please contact the author via the Shasta Historical Society, or directly at my office phone or email: [chetsunde@gmail.com](mailto:chetsunde@gmail.com), 244-4436.

Add from 1903:

