

The Fate of the 20 Cent Silver Pieces

© 2008 by Rob Turner, All Rights Reserved

In my 2007 book, “The 1858 Cents of Provincial Canada”¹, I presented an estimate for the amount of 1858 twenty cent silver pieces that escaped the melting pot. That estimate relied heavily upon two sources of data, the financial records of the Dominion of Canada² and the annual reports published by the Royal Mint³. Unfortunately neither source provided a complete picture of what occurred, which necessitated that my 2007 analysis contained some estimated quantities. Since then, other information has come to light that allows a fuller examination of the question, and most importantly an examination that does not rely upon estimated numbers.

Once again the analysis starts with the financial records. When in the early 1870’s the Dominion government began withdrawing the 1858 twenty cent pieces from circulation, they accounted for the quantities in their financial records. Starting in 1876 the financial records reflect a separate “Silver 20 Cent Account”. When the government expended funds to buy the silver withdrawn from circulation by the banks, the silver went into this special asset account and the balance went up. When they sold silver to be melted, it went down.

From fiscal year 1876 (July 1, 1875 to June 30, 1876) through fiscal year 1886 the financial records only report the annual yearend balance of this account, but not the amounts of purchases and sales of silver during the year. From fiscal year 1887 through fiscal year 1899 they reported the aggregate net total of purchases and sales each year as a revenue or expense, but did not segregate the two types of transactions. These abbreviated reporting methods meant that in my 2007 work I had to estimate the annual quantities of silver bought and sold, using first the change in annual balance of the account and later the reported net quantity of purchases and sales. I did this by interpolating the purchases between the adjacent years. Because

the government did not sell silver in any two consecutive years, the interpolation was fairly straightforward. After 1899 and until the account closed in 1912, the financial statements presented separate values for the amounts of silver purchased and sold.

Interpolation produces estimated quantities and I worried about the accuracy of those estimates. This concern caused me to seek out other sources to verify the amounts of silver sold. I recently found the needed evidence in various pieces of correspondence between the Department of Finance of Canada, the Receiver General of Canada, and the High Commissioner for Canada in London. By knowing the actual amounts sold, the amounts purchased can then be calculated with certainty.

After fiscal year 1906 ended, the Canadian government used the Silver 20 Cent Account to collect worn silver of all denominations. In 1909 they changed the name of the account to the "Worn Silver Account". As a result, the sales of silver reported in the final four fiscal years from 1909 through 1912 contained few, if any, twenty cent pieces.

The government of Canada sold silver twenty pieces to the Royal Mint or Heaton in seven years during the life of the Silver 20 cent Account (1876 through 1912). The first year they sold silver, 1882, also represented their largest sale. The details of this sale are contained in an 1882 letter from Toller, the Comptroller, to Galt, the High Commissioner⁴. It describes a sale of \$79,500 in twenty cent coins plus £280 of shillings (not accounted for in the Silver 20 Cent Account) to Heaton and Sons of Birmingham. The letter asks Heaton to re-coin the lot as 25 cent Canadian coin.

A second sale of \$18,000 in twenty cent coin occurred in 1885. The correspondence⁵ tells us that nine boxes containing \$2,000 each in twenty cent pieces left Canada on March 4, 1885. The Royal Mint subsequently re-coined them into 25 cent pieces.

An 1888 letter from the Minister of Finance (Courtney) to the High Commissioner (Tupper)⁶ details a shipment of \$17,074.70 in silver sent to England on October 31, 1888. The letter describes the shipment as the greater part being 20 cent pieces and the remainder being mutilated silver. It was sent in eight boxes of \$2,000 each plus one box of \$1,074.70. The letter infers that the eight boxes contained all twenty cent pieces, while the final box contained some twenty cent pieces and all of the mutilated silver. The Royal Mint subsequently re-coined all of this silver into 25 cent pieces.

The Royal Mint report for 1889 states that \$16,585 in twenty cent pieces were re-coined into 25 cent pieces. A summary table in the 1908 mint report states that \$17,074 of old silver was re-coined. It seems likely that the \$16,585 figure does indeed represent the value of the twenty cent pieces, leaving the remaining \$489.70 as the value of the mutilated silver.

Another letter from Courtney to Tupper⁷ in 1894 gives instructions for the “proceeds of conversion of \$15,000 in 20¢ pieces into 50¢ pieces also to go to Halifax”. Clearly the 1894 shipment contained only twenty cent pieces.

The records also contain a manifest⁸ for an October 1898 shipment of old silver to the Royal Mint for re-coining into twenty-five cent pieces. The shipment contained five boxes of twenty cent pieces, four containing \$2,000 each and one containing \$1,500. It also contained seven boxes of old silver belonging to the Montreal Street Railway Company. These seven boxes, not part of the Silver 20 Cent Account, contained the grand sum of \$25.00 in twenty cent coin.

The financial records are quite clear that in 1904 and 1906 the government shipped \$4,000, and \$2,000, respectively, in twenty cent pieces to the melting pot.

Based upon the information described above, Table 1 shows a summary of the annual activity of the Silver 20 Cent Account for its entire life from 1876 through 1912. This table does not rely upon estimated values and I consider it to be quite accurate, much more so than the one I published in 2007.

**Reconstruction Of The
Dominion Of Canada Silver 20 Cent Account**

Table 1

Fiscal Year	July 1 Fund Balance	Withdrawn Silver Expenses	Sales 20 Cent (Revenue)	Sales Other (Revenue)	June30 Fund Balance
1876	\$0.00	\$20,715.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$20,715.00
1877	\$20,715.00	\$9,312.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$30,027.00
1878	\$30,027.00	\$14,655.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$44,682.00
1879	\$44,682.00	\$9,148.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$53,830.00
1880	\$53,830.00	\$10,212.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$64,042.00
1881	\$64,042.00	\$7,372.60	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$71,414.60
1882	\$71,414.60	\$8,248.00	(\$79,500.00)	\$0.00	\$162.60
1883	\$162.60	\$9,620.60	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$9,783.20
1884	\$9,783.20	\$2,290.80	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$12,074.00
1885	\$12,074.00	\$5,999.50	(\$18,000.00)	\$0.00	\$73.50
1886	\$73.50	\$3,093.40	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,166.90
1887	\$3,166.90	\$5,985.80	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$9,152.70
1888	\$9,152.70	\$3,379.60	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$12,532.30
1889	\$12,532.30	\$7,011.20	(\$16,585.00)	(\$489.70)	\$2,468.80
1890	\$2,468.80	\$2,364.20	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,833.00
1891	\$4,833.00	\$2,593.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7,426.00
1892	\$7,426.00	\$1,499.40	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,925.40
1893	\$8,925.40	\$2,494.70	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$11,420.10
1894	\$11,420.10	\$3,889.60	(\$15,000.00)	\$0.00	\$309.70
1895	\$309.70	\$2,448.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,757.70
1896	\$2,757.70	\$2,028.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,786.20
1897	\$4,786.20	\$1,258.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$6,044.20
1898	\$6,044.20	\$2,106.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,150.20
1899	\$8,150.20	\$1,859.50	(\$9,500.00)	\$0.00	\$509.70
1900	\$509.70	\$1,395.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,904.70
1901	\$1,904.70	\$674.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,578.70
1902	\$2,578.70	\$573.40	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,152.10
1903	\$3,152.10	\$862.30	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,014.40
1904	\$4,014.40	\$799.40	(\$4,000.00)	\$0.00	\$813.80
1905	\$813.80	\$527.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,340.80
1906	\$1,340.80	\$1,407.00	(\$2,000.00)	\$0.00	\$747.80
1907	\$747.80	\$4,470.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,217.80
1908	\$5,217.80	\$12,605.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$17,822.80
1909	\$17,822.80	\$27,006.65	\$0.00	(\$25,395.10)	\$19,434.35
1910	\$19,434.35	\$437,889.48	\$0.00	(\$344,768.64)	\$112,555.19
1911	\$112,555.19	\$258,309.75	\$0.00	(\$363,536.66)	\$7,328.28
1912	\$7,328.28	\$3,017.50	\$0.00	(\$10,345.78)	\$0.00
Totals		\$889,120.88	(\$144,585.00)	(\$744,535.88)	

Note: Numbers in grey were calculated from the other values shown.

The annual reports of the Royal Mint provide another useful source regarding the demise of the twenty cent pieces. Table 2 summarizes the pertinent data contained in these reports. The reader should note that the Canadian government also forwarded other silver to the mint for re-coining. Before 1907 they did not account for this other silver in the Silver 20 Cent Account, which explains the differences between Tables 1 and 2.

Re-Coining Of Canadian Silver Coins Reported By The Royal Mint

Table 2

Year	Amount Re-Coined	Minted Into	Total New Coins	% By Wt. Fm. Old Coin	Good Coins Struck
1882	1882 re-coining done by Heaton. No mention in the annual mint report.				
1885	\$18,000.00	25 Cents	205,537	35.05%	192,000
1889	\$17,074.00	25 Cents	79,569	85.87%	66,324
1894	\$15,000.00	50 Cents	33,534	89.50%	29,036
1899	\$20,000.00	25 Cents	432,428	18.51%	415,580
1904	Not Reported				
1906	\$7,460.75	25 Cents	1,245,850	2.40%	1,237,843

Source: Annual Mint Reports of 1885, 1888, 1889, 1894, 1899, 1904, 1906, & 1908

All of this information produces a very startling fact. The Canadian government caused a total of \$144,585.00 in twenty cent pieces, or 722,925 coins, to be melted and re-coined. The Montreal Street Railway Company contributed 125 additional pieces to the re-coining effort. Given that only 730,392 were minted, then only 7,342 escaped the melting pot. Incredibly only about one per cent of the original mintage was spared.

¹ Turner, Rob; "The 1858 Cents of Provincial Canada"; published by the author; Fountain Valley, CA; 2007.

² Sessional Papers (series); 1876 through 1912; www.canadiana.org and Libraries and Archives Canada.

³ Annual Report of the Deputy Master of the Royal Mint (series); 1870 through 1908; Her/His Majesties Printing Office; London.

⁴ February 23, 1882 letter, Toller to Galt; Library and Archives Canada.

⁵ March 5, 1885 letter, Courtney to Tupper; Library and Archives Canada.

⁶ October 31, 1888 letter, Courtney to Tupper; Library and Archives Canada.

⁷ February 13, 1894 letter, Courtney to Tupper; Library and Archives Canada.

⁸ November 2, 1898 manifest, SS Parisian; Library and Archives Canada.