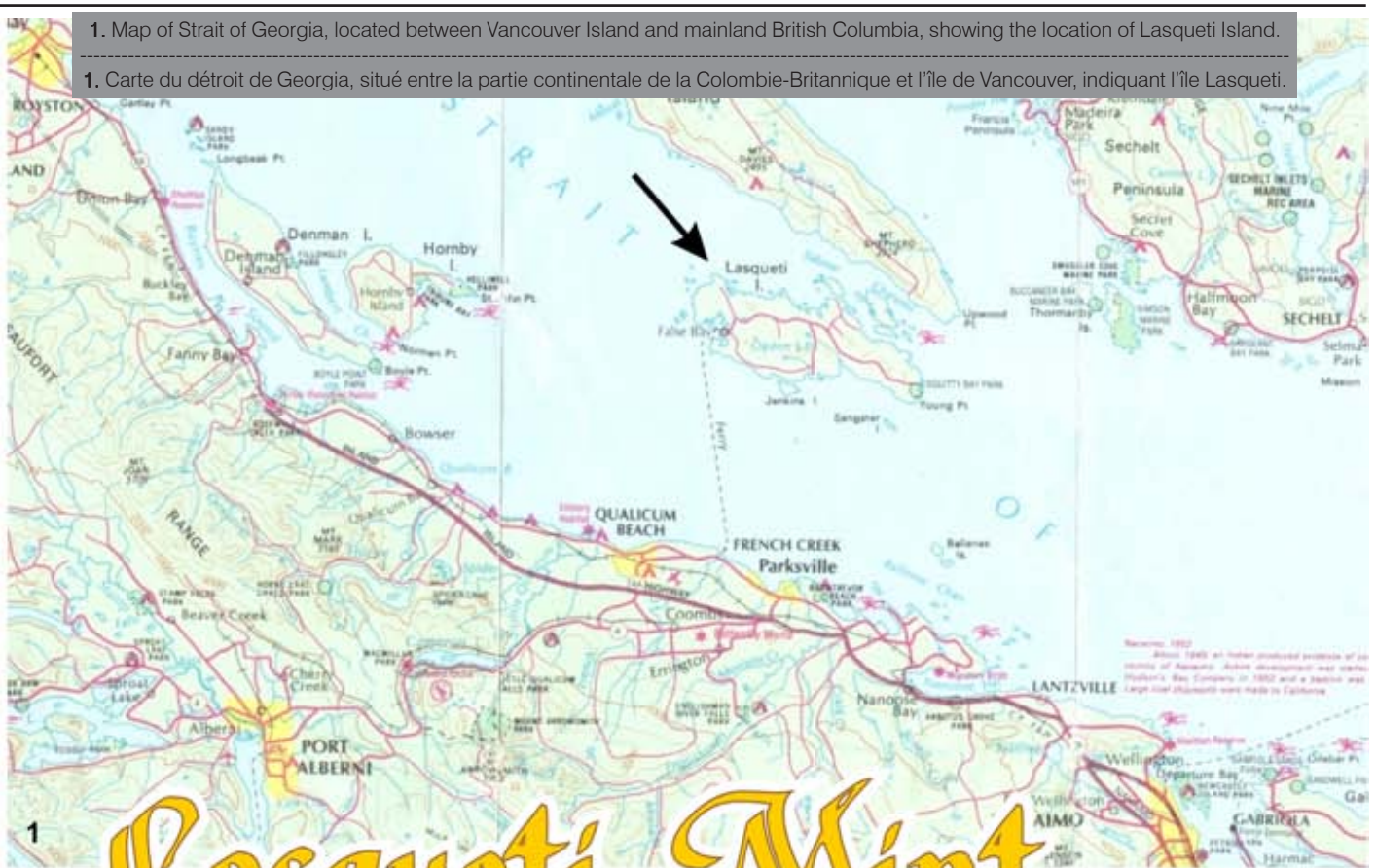


1. Map of Strait of Georgia, located between Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia, showing the location of Lasqueti Island.

1. Carte du détroit de Georgia, situé entre la partie continentale de la Colombie-Britannique et l'île de Vancouver, indiquant l'île Lasqueti.



Lasqueti Mint

The early years

by Tolling Jennings

I must express at the outset my thanks for the profound naiveté that accompanied the beginnings of this endeavour. The entire process of creating a mint and issuing precious metal coins and medals has grown far beyond my wildest dreams. I would not have guessed that such beautiful medals and coins could come from such a humble origin. One must have some understanding of the conditions and equipment at the Lasqueti Mint to truly appreciate the coins we turn out. I don't think one could choose a more disadvantageous situation than that found at the Mint for turning out truly beautiful works of art. Then again perhaps these conditions are exactly what is needed.

The Lasqueti Island

The Mint is located on an island that is off grid, has no road access or car ferry. The buildings the Mint is housed in are primitive by most standards. The tractor shed where our smelting, shearing, and machine maintenance takes place has no south wall. Most of our actual minting equipment is situated in a wash house/summer kitchen that is heated by a wood stove in the sauna that is a small room in the back of the building. What power there is, is supplied by solar panels,

a wind generator, or a 6 KW diesel generator. The machines used in the actual production of the coins have to be classified as "antiques." Our drop hammer was made in the 19th century with nonstandard threads on all bolts. Our two fly presses were salvaged from shops that couldn't wait to get rid of them. And our arbour press was made in China and cost \$75.00. Our pantograph was state-of-the-art 50 years ago and the big lathe we use was old in the 1920s. We do have

some state-of-the-art tools such as a high-quality scale, a beautiful stereo microscope, a cutter-grinder, a diamond lap tool, and other high-tech equipment in the die shop. We went to great lengths to assemble these tools, much to the amusement of the locals. You don't know what fun is until you load a 2,500-pound fly press from a barge into a 12 foot aluminum skiff and head out to sea. Considering the conditions we work under and the equipment we use, each of our coins could be considered a small miracle. I look upon the minor imperfections of our coins as marks of originality, but as an old Sufi says: "one tries for perfection and settles for what one gets." Each of our coins is unique. The coins from the Lasqueti Mint are truly magical and seem to bring joy and happiness to those who are fortunate enough to possess them.

The learning curve involved in using this equipment makes inventing the wheel look like child's play. There were things we needed for some of our presses that haven't been made in the last 80 years. The romance of working with antique machinery only lasts until one of them breaks down. When our ancient equipment breaks down, there are no parts to be ordered: the new parts must be manufactured out in the tractor shed. We now build into our cost estimates for coin production, time to rebuild equipment. The glow of "Hand Made" fades to a glimmer when the coin you are making needs nine blows from the drop hammer to bring up the relief when you hoped two strikes would do the job. We went through six men at the end of the rope on the drop hammer for one of the coins we made. The 25 kg plus iron hammer had to be raised a metre, seven to nine times per

coin, in rapid succession to bring up the relief!

But here we are at one of the last coins we minted when a history ought to start at the beginning.

My story

Numismatics started for me a long time ago in a land far, far, away. During the holiday season of 1953-54 I traveled with my family from my hometown of Salt Lake City, Utah, to the land of tinsel, Hollywood, California. The numismatic mentor for my brother Cliff and me was our "Uncle Bill" (William Demarest). He was a character actor and musician who had a passion for coins. On a day between Christmas and the New Year, he presented us with a gallon jar of Lincoln "wheat ear" and Indian Head "pennies" and two blue Whitman folders each. We were allowed to go through the jar and fill our albums and keep any of the coins we found. This is about as close to heaven as a seven-year-old boy can get, at least until Disneyland opened the next year and "Uncle Bill" gave us passes. This would have been more than enough for one trip to the coast but the next day my brother found a one-arm bandit in the basement that had a key in the money box so the "nickels" could be recovered from the machine and replayed over and over again. I was totally fascinated by the designs on the 5-cent pieces. In among the "Jeffersons" were a fare number of "Buffalos" with Fraser's magnificent designs. I was captivated by the beauty of these coins. In two short days, I had been introduced to a hobby that would become a life-long endeavour for me.

When national Mints removed silver from circulating coinage in the mid to late 1960s, I started to lose interest in collecting from circulation. I realized at that time that the economy and the paper currency it was based on were doomed. The one sure sign that a civilization is ending is the debasement of its coinage. I focused more on the coins of the 19th century and became very selective in my acquisitions. The precious-metal content of coins was always a big draw for me, since the idea of using silver and gold in daily transactions had always held great appeal.

Like so many of my generation, I was an avid collector into my late teens before other life dramas distracted me from

2. Tolling Jennings proudly displays one of Lasqueti Mint's most recent product, a Cascadia piece.





Some of the U.S. coins that got Tolling interested in numismatics: a Morgan Dollar (3) and a Buffalo Nickel (4).

numismatics. I was able to acquire some rare coins at the end of this time, which I still own some 50 years later. I was reintroduced to the hobby in 1992 when I saw an ad on CBC television from the Royal Canadian Mint that offered twelve “provincial” 25-cent pieces in sterling silver in proof. Older and wiser and with a cash flow, I realized I could have this set of coins. I started to investigate the coin market and found, to my delight, that a crash in the market had made many of the rarities previously out of my teenage reach well within my 40-something budget. Between 1993 and 1996 I diverted all my discretionary income into my coin collection. I filled all those holes in my Canadian and US series that I never thought I could. I upgraded and expanded, joined some coin clubs and started to attend shows and conventions. I started meeting some really great people that share this wonderful hobby. It felt like coming home.

Some time in the summer of 1993, I approached my friend Ray Lipovsky about a short-term loan to help finance a sports team I wanted to take on the road. I offered to put up two rolls of Morgan dollars as collateral for the loan. He gave me the loan but refused to take the collateral. I asked him if he would like to see the coins anyway. He said yes and I opened the rolls. These were rolls of dollars from a stash of quarters, dimes and dollars that had come down to me from that same “Uncle Bill” after his death in 1983. When I received the coins, I had opened the top of the rolls

and found the top few dollars to be common circulated coins that were put aside in the 1960s for their bullion value and assumed the rest would be the same. I had put the rolls away thinking of them as a stash of silver with little numismatic value.

As the coins came from the rolls, I realized what a mistake I had made. In with the 1921 Morgans were coins struck at the Carson City, San Francisco, and New Orleans mints - many of them were rare! I was breathless.

A conversation ensued about the beauty and rarity of coins and the state of the world economy. It turned out that both Ray and I held similar world views when it came to economics. We both saw that the faux paper economies in vogue were inflating at a rapid rate and would hit hyperinflation soon. After all, every paper economy in the history of the planet has inflated out of existence sooner or later. We both shared distaste for the high taxes and extortion levels of government fees. We speculated about the return to precious metal coinage that follows every collapse. We also shared a love for the high-relief coins of the past. Somewhere in the conversation Ray mentioned that he had a 19th-century drop hammer that was capable of stamping coins. I took note but did not think too much about it at the time. Later, I could not get the idea out of my head that we could be making precious-metal coins to circulate on our island. We could get a jump on the whole process by supplying bullion to the islanders so that when the time came we would all have a wealth of coins to enter a paper-free economy.

Ray Lipovsky is a renaissance man. He is an artist, entrepreneur, investor, inventor, and an accomplished goldsmith. When I say goldsmith, I am not using the title lightly. Ray was apprenticed at the age of 15 to a goldsmith who trained and taught him all the magic of metals and



5. The furnace in which all metal is melted. 6. The press room.

stones. He is a true metallurgist who knows his way around alloys and the chemical world. He has one of those rare minds that can solve problems and work outside the box. He can be open to other people's ideas and will accept these ideas if they will solve the problem at hand. I consider our partnership to be one of the more precious opportunities in my life and continue to marvel at the good fortune that brought us together. The combination of my numismatic and marketing background and his expertise in metals and machinery are the perfect ingredients to create a successful mint.

The birth of a mint

Our first actual minting experience took place in a garage in Parksville, BC, on February 28, 1997. We had discussed setting up Ray's drop hammer and seeing if it would work. Ray, my son Robyn, and I caught the morning boat from Lasqueti Island and went to the garage to remove the drop hammer from storage, set it up, and see if we could strike designs into a half-dozen of 1 inch (25.4 mm), ¼ oz. silver blanks Ray had prepared. When Ray had bought the drop hammer from a defunct jewellery business in the early 1970s, it came with boxes of used dies. We selected different dies from the hundreds of dies available to strike "coins." After locking the bottom die in place we set a silver blank on top and set another die on top of the blank, and had not placed a collar. Ray pulled up the hammer and let go. We learned our first lesson in minting the second the hammer hit the set of dies: "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." The top die went flying about two feet into the air, landed on the concrete floor and rolled under a packing

crate. The newly minted "coin" went in the opposite direction and would have been lost under another crate if Robyn had not acted quickly and stomped it with his foot. This was hardly what one would call advanced minting procedures.

The coin was broad struck on a thin planchet. The designs had a shallow relief making the coin appear to be in very-good condition even though it was freshly minted! The stomp of a muddy gumboot added some scratches. I thought it was beautiful. We realized we would have to hold the dies together in some way. Robyn suggested using some packing foam as a strap to hold down the top die. We tried this and it worked. We are still using this technique to this day. We each struck a few coins and realized we could actually make coins on this press. The Lasqueti Mint was born.

Our first coin: The Esoterics

The most time-consuming part of the process of coin production is coming up with good artwork. It has taken us as much as two years to create designs that warrant a coin. Our first coin design was inspired by two very spirited aspects of life on Lasqueti Island. The reverse design, created by artist Tony Seamen, is an artistic rendition of the sailing junk *China Cloud* that was built on Lasqueti by Allen and Sharie Farrell and represents a very basic life style adopted by many Lasquetians. The reverse also has a full lunar eclipse and the comet Hale-Bopp that were in the heavens when we minted the coin. This celestial event is the cosmic dating of the coin (1997). The *China Cloud* graced the reverse of most of our coins until 2003 – these consistute the *China Cloud* series. The obverse is the same design that graces the "Frisbee" our Esoterics Ultimate team had printed for our



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7. *China Cloud* 2002 by Allen Farrell. 8. The *China Cloud* on the Esoterics piece.



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touring team back in 1991 and has the inscriptions **LASQUETI ESOTERICS** and **ULTIMATE STATE OF MIND**. Tim Peterson and the Esoterics worked out this design that includes a circle of trees, the earth eclipsing a sunburst and eight phases of the moon. We sent the artwork out to the die sinker, Stjepan Pticek, (engraver of the goose on the 1967 silver dollar), who remarked on returning the dies that the *China Cloud*

side was the most beautiful die he had ever cut. We put out a call to anyone on the islands who would like to trade silver (\$4 an ounce) for finished coin (\$20 each) to get in contact with us. One friend from Denman Island, Geronimo Ben Cochise, had a 100 oz. “door stop” that he was happy to supply to the cause. Other folks had lesser amounts and before the dies arrived we had the silver to do the first run [years later, I bought back the remainder of the Esoterics coins from Geronimo for many times what he had paid for them to fill proof sets of the *China Cloud* series. These currently sell on the secondary market for over \$300 if you can find one].

The striking of the Esoterics commemorative coin was another learning experience. We used a proof process of double striking each coin. This resulted in many strike doubled coins that had to be melted. All of the production was by hand. This included rolling out the bars we had made in a hand-operated rolling mill. This could have been done more easily, but goldsmith Ray insisted that the more we reduced the bars with each pass through the mill, the finer

the blanks would be in the end. So we both turned the crank on the mill at the highest possible setting we could physically do. The thinner the strips get the longer they are so, by the end of rolling, there was much huffing and puffing and a lot of sweat involved. We resolved that the first new machine to be purchased would be an electric rolling mill, which we acquired early in 1998.

We used a hand punch and die to punch the blanks out of the strip! This was very nerve-racking for me because I work with my hands as an acupressure therapist. The strip was fed into a small cutting die and Ray or I would hold the four inch long punch and then hit the punch with a full blow with a three pound sledge hammer.

One missed blow would've resulted in damaged fingers for sure.

We resolved that the second tool we would buy would be a fly press to punch out blanks, which we acquired mid 1998.

I was out of town when the first set of dies arrived at the mint and Ray couldn't wait for me to return before the first coin was struck. He attempted to strike a coin by himself with the same results we experienced in Parksville: flying dies. The Esoterics die went flying and hit the edge of the press, sustaining a cut that

runs from the "A" in "ULTIMATE" to the "A" in "STATE." Every coin except the aluminum test strike Stjephan did and the coin that Ray struck has this raised crescent. This was the first but not the last problem with this run of coins. Because of a poor hardening job, the top of the "Esoterics" die started to expand and jam in the collar about 30 coins into the run. We had to centre the die into a small lathe and take about a ten thousandth of an inch off of the diameter!! This may sound easy but it isn't. We had to continue to do

this every 40 coins or so until there was just the slightest hint of a rim left on the obverse die. We stopped production with coin number 220. Ray called Stjephan and explained the problem and we were promised a new die. We asked to have the frosting that was on the original die left off of the new die, which it was. When the new die arrived we only struck four gold ½ oz. proof coins and four ½ oz. silver proof coins, a total of eight coins from this die!! We are talking rare here. These coins are in private hands and never come up for sale.

As I said earlier, my job at the Mint is to be in charge of marketing, because Ray made

it very clear that he wanted nothing to do with marketing,

which he considers a four-letter word. I delivered

the 30 coins to those who had fronted

the silver and then set out to offer

the coins to the local

islanders. Packaging

was a major issue and remains

so to this day. We are fortunate

to have Wildwood

Works on the island. This

award-winning company prides

itself on it's ability to take waste

products from BC's

forest industry and turn

them into beautiful gifts and functional products. Their

innovative work is shipped internationally and was a

mainstay of employment on the island at the time. We engaged Wildwood to produce packaging for the Mint based on our unique designs. The box that held the "Esoterics" coin and all subsequent proof pieces is made from first-growth fir branches that would otherwise have been burnt. The response was impressive and heart warming. It seemed that everyone wanted one of the coins and they almost immediately started to be used in trade! Eighty coins sold in the first few days on the island.



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9. The Esoterics side of the first piece struck by the Lasqueti Mint.

While sitting under a tree at the Canadian National Ultimate Championships held in Victoria the week before the world championships were to be held in Vancouver, I sold another 100 to the organizers of the world championships. The 100 coins were given out as trophies to the members of the winning teams at the championships and dispersed all over the world. This left ten coins from the original run in our possession three weeks after minting. We tried unsuccessfully to hold onto these coins to be included in future sets.

We decided to do another coin!

Right from the start we intended to enroll other islands into having their own coins. The idea was to encourage inter-island trade and communication, and to establish an economy based on bullion rather than paper. Our research into international and national law uncovered some very interesting tax laws. It is important to consider who deals in large quantities of gold and silver. The folks who deal in and move bullion around are mostly national banks, independent states, and large mining corporations that are often owned or controlled by national governments (or who own and control the governments). It should come as no surprise then that the governments have established a uniform set of laws that deal with bullion in a different way than most other commodities. The tariff laws of both the United States (7118.90.00) and Canada (7118.10.00, 7118.90.00, and 7118.90.19) state that there is no tax or duty to be charged on bullion transactions. Also, there is no tax on bullion transactions within Canada and domestic bullion in the United States. Gold and silver Eagles are exempt from national and local tax. A liberal interpretation of these laws would allow for all transactions involving bullion to be exempt from tax! Welcome to the world of “Hard Money.”

The Gulf islands of British Columbia are for the most part inhabited by a very eccentric crew. It is not unusual to find families living in a house they built and own, off-grid, growing their own food, and home schooling their children.



Most commerce is transacted in cash or trade and no receipts are given. It is possible to live on these islands and run a business without having a bank account, or a phone. The romantic idea of having an island currency based on non-taxable bullion has vast appeal.

The second coin issued by Lasqueti Mint is the silver 1998 “Lasqueti.” This coin has the same specifications as the “Esoterics” coin and shares a common reverse die. The obverse die was designed by Tony Seaman. You may know of Tony’s work: the original Woodstock poster with the two doves sitting on the guitar neck is one of his designs. He is also the postmaster at the Lasqueti Post Office. Tony is the head of the art staff at the Mint. He decided to “test the engraver’s skill” with a design so complex that we had to simplify it before it went to the engraver. The obverse shows a view from Lasqueti’s China Cloud Bay looking toward Vancouver Island’s Mount Arrowsmith. The view is from under an Arbutus tree with the date “1998” at the bottom and the legend LASQUETI in a unique font at the top. This die has four different textures to it! One of these is a frosting in the field behind the date. This was polished to brilliant for

the BU coins to distinguish them from the proofs.

This coin was an instant success. We had started a “subscriber’s list” with the Esoterics coin and this list grew with the issuing of our second coin. A subscriber is someone who takes delivery of one of each of the coins the Mint produces, and has a strike number that is guaranteed by the Mint. Subscribers receive a 10% discount from issue price on current issues and free shipping within Canada. I receive strike # 1 as mintmaster; Ray has strike #2 as Head coiner, and so on. Those who maintained their subscriptions from the start of the *China Cloud* series have realized many times their investment upon sales of their sets. Strike numbers are transferred with the sale of a set.

The coin was so successful that we had to do extra runs to keep up with demand. The 263 BU coins started circulating on and off the island. We did three runs to meet demand. We were so involved in the production of the various 1998 coins and the installation of our new rolling mill and fly press, that 1998 got away from us without a new design for 1999. With 1999 on the calendar and 1998 on the dies we had to do something to maintain our numismatic integrity while striking more coins using the

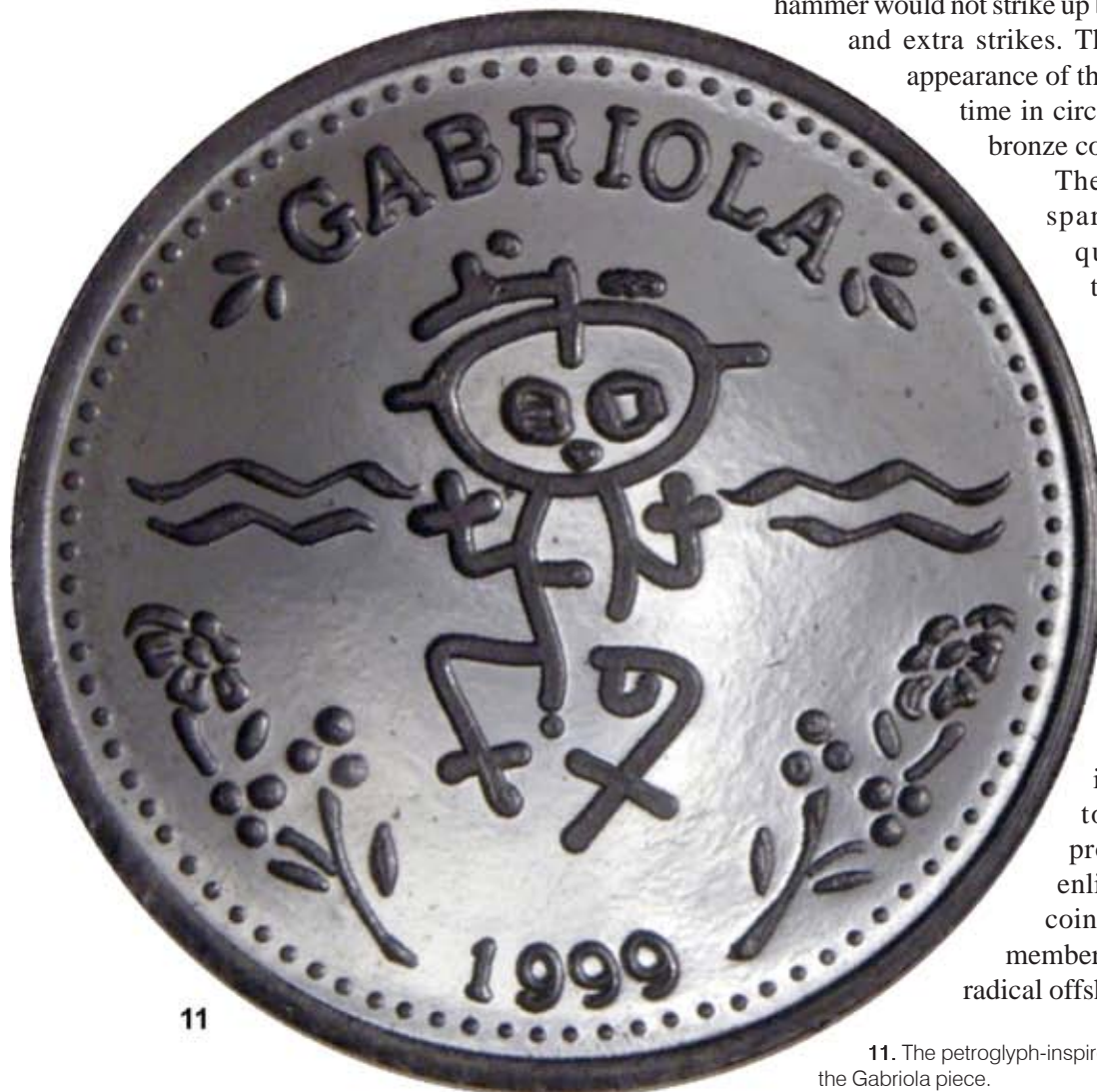
old dies. Ray drilled a dot between the two nines in the date on the obverse die indicating that the coins were struck in a year other than 1998. Visions of a tiny maple leaf danced in my head.

The 1998 proof gold coins used the same dies as the silver coins and were packaged in Wildwood boxes with hand calligraphy on paper made from hemp grown on the island. These certificates are as prized as the coins. These coins are considered patterns.

We introduced copper and bronze coins in 1998. The ½ oz. silver coins were circulating at 20 dollars and we needed a 5-dollar coin to make change and help expand the use of our coinage. The 5-dollar coins were a great hit and became our most popular coin. We produced the first coins from copper salvaged from old houses on Lasqueti. This proved to be untenable as the copper was of inferior quality. We later went to the use of bus bars that were 100 % copper for the 1998 dot coins. This turned out a much better coin. The original 30-plus copper 1998 coins were made on thick blanks and are rare.

The bronze coins were an attempt to come up with a 10-dollar coin, but we found to our surprise that our drop hammer would not strike up bronze without an annealing and extra strikes. The coins also took on the appearance of the copper coins after a short time in circulation. We abandoned the bronze coin after only 110 coins.

The Mint’s second offering sparked interest in many quarters. Articles began to appear in local press and the coins began to circulate on other Gulf islands. Merchants and tradesmen on Lasqueti started to accept Lasqueti coins as part of their payment. The coins became a primary gift and honorarium for locals. It seemed everyone wanted one of our coins. Local resident musician, Daniel S. Rubin, took particular interest in the project and took it upon himself to promote the Mint and start enlisting other islands in the coinage. Dan was a founding member of the “Island Alliance,” a radical offshoot of the Island Trust that



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11. The petroglyph-inspired “Space Man” on the Gabriola piece.

attempted to move the Trust into a more independent sphere. His article "Setting Sail on Silver Clouds: Gulf Islanders Mint Their Own Money," was reprinted in several newspapers and is the introduction to the Mint's 1997-2008 *Production Catalogue*. The article appeared in *Canadian Coin News*. Dan enlisted "Festival Gabriola" of Gabriola Island into the coinage program.

Gabriola joins in

Gabriola Island and Lasqueti Island are two of thirteen islands in the Strait of Georgia that comprise the Islands Trust, a quasi independent governing body whose mandate is to "preserve and protect" the integrity of the islands within the Trust on both physical and social levels. The Trust is based on a very interesting concept - direct representational democracy. "Festival Gabriola" was an island organization devoted to promoting island arts and artists. They agreed to co-sponsor a coin with the Lasqueti Mint.

Every coin is a new adventure. This coin has a new larger diameter and an obverse design by artist Kathy Dennison Burroughs based on a petroglyph found on the south end of Gabriola Island. It is said that the image is that of a "Space Man." The round head appears to be a helmet and the symbols that come from the helmet might be antenna. This is the only image of a "man" to be found on the BC coast in any petroglyph. Whatever the origin of the inspiration for the design, it works well as a coin design and was accepted with enthusiasm on Gabriola. One of the frustrating aspects of working with outside organizations is their inability to accept knowledgeable input. We recommended the sale of proof coins to finance the BU run and raise funds for the organization. We explained that we had to strike the proofs first and that collectors would be more apt to buy packaged proofs for more money than BUs. They wanted to offer the BUs first and take delivery of the proofs later. The BUs sold out but unfortunately the staff of "Festival Gabriola" changed at the same time that the Nanaimo First Nations Band informed them that they had

taken out copyright on the 4000-year old "Dancing Man" design two years before! Negotiations ensued without resolution. We saw no other option and stopped production of the coin. This created yet another rarity for the Mint. The BU coins are distributed widely and the proofs the Mint holds that were not sold at issue time now have a high premium.

"These are the times that try men's souls"

One never knows why some things happen, much less what the long-term results. We had two new dies cut for the 1999 coin. Ray's research found that in order to qualify as bullion coins we would have to state the purity, weight, and supply a trade mark (mint mark) on each coin. This information was added to the new reverse die that would become the common reverse for the rest of the *China Cloud* series. The weight would have to be no less than .0125 gram of stated weight and the purity could not vary from that stated or the issuer would be subject to a \$500 fine, per item! We weigh every blank we use. They are all right on or over the stated weight. All our metals are purchased from reputable suppliers and are treated with the utmost care to



12. Coin struck from the second 1999 Lasqueti Island die.

insure their purity. With this new knowledge we had all the required information placed at the bottom of the reverse die that features the same *China Cloud* design of the previous coins. We also increased the diameter to 29.7 mm. The diameter was increased to accommodate available packaging (silver 50-cent capsules), allow more design space and to create a coin that would “ring” when flipped. The obverse die was a modification of the 1998 design with less detail and new font. The end result is a cleaner looking coin that is easier to comprehend.

We were ready to start production with blanks rolled on our new rolling mill and punched out from our fly press. Ray, Robyn, and I were present to do the minting and packaging. Wildwood wooden boxes, plastic capsules, wet signed parchment certificates and cardboard shipping boxes were all ready to go. We started to mint and everything was going well until strike #17 when I didn't notice that between the first and second blows from the hammer the collar had jumped up onto the obverse die. The next blow from the drop hammer smashed a large crescent into the edge of the obverse die! Gasp! This is one of those times when it is rather easy to look to establishing blame. The die was

destroyed, totally beyond repair. This was viewed as a complete disaster by all concerned. We did not know it at the time, but this unfortunate event would create one of our rarest and most valuable coins.

The “1999 Die 1” had rather pronounced clouds over Mount Arrowsmith. Ray and I had wished for something a little more subtle. When we spoke to Stjepan about cutting a new die, we asked to have finer more wispy clouds. Stjepan agreed and was kind enough to cut a new die for us at no cost. Stjepan was very supportive of the Mint for the entire time he was involved.

When “Die 2” arrived, we set out again to complete our proof run. The same cast of participants assembled with a new die and a deeper respect for the forces involved in this minting business. We were pleased with the progress of the run until at some point Quality Control noticed that a die crack was developing at the edge of the die. It seemed that when Stjepan cut the top off of “Die 1” he did not cut away enough material to get below the damage to the steel. The crack became more noticeable as the run continued. When we reached coin number 165 we had to halt production again due to a damaged die. We were able to ship these coins to our subscribers and fill orders to dealers and shops, but we had no BU coins.

“Die 3” arrived with yet another modification. We removed the clouds over Mount Arrowsmith altogether. The silver mintage was completed with 25 proofs and 51 BU coins struck from “Die 3.” There was interest from our subscribers and others in our ½ oz. gold coins so we struck 27 gold proof coins from “Die 3” to fill our subscribers’ orders. These coins are prized and sell for many times their issue price of \$290.

One side effect of the three dies is that when the three coins are laid out side by side in order of creation, the clouds appear to clear over Mount Arrowsmith.

This entire run was plagued with spotting problems on the coins. It took us far too long to find the problem. It turned out the lubrication on the rails of the drop hammer was turning into a fine mist



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13. Coin struck with the third 1999 Lasqueti Island die.

when the hammer caused vibrations upon striking the dies. This mist would then slowly settle on to the blanks waiting to be struck causing spots in the fields. All blanks are now kept isolated from the press until striking and the problem has been solved. Consequently it is a challenge to find a pristine 1999 coin.

It became obvious that we needed a dedicated sales and promotion person to look after expansion of our market. Dan had enlisted Gabriola in the project but he had other interests, so a full-time person was needed. Joe Iorio of J&M Coin and Jewellery Ltd. liked our coins and was willing to add them to his stock. J&M became our largest customer. We ran an ad in *Canadian Coin News* under J&M's banner and enjoyed a five year run of good sales. The Mint has engaged other distributors over the years, with Lynn Balmer of Balmoral Coins now doing the lion's share of our sales on eBay and at coin shows, outside of our in-house sales.

The Cariboo Gold Project

My family was involved in the hard-rock mining industry in Utah, Colorado, and Nevada during the 19th and 20th centuries. What fortunes were not lost in the crash of 1893 were wiped out in the crash of 1929! Some of the silver that is found in the coinage of the United States from this era was from mines my family was involved in. My father personally hand-mined galena in mines that had been abandoned, and condemned for safety reasons, in the late 1920s. One such operation was in Nevada in a mine so shaky that one could actually see the mountain move on the pilings. John L. Lewis happened upon my father and his partner at



14. Eve Lyndorah's dragon design was used several years.

the mine site as they were outside the mine having an early morning coffee. Lewis not only enrolled them in the United Mine Workers of America Union but also told them not to go back into the mine after lunch. They went back into the mine for one more shift, tiptoeing on kid boots, using hand held rock hammers to loosen foot long crystals of galena that they then put into chamois shoulder bags before they came back out for lunch. After lunch they did not go back into the mine and started to pack up their gear. Before they had their truck packed, the entire mountain collapsed with a rumble and a huge dust cloud.

In an attempt to establish a supply of British Columbia gold and silver for our coinage, the Mint became involved with International Wayside Gold Mines (IWA). Our main focus was to create a ½ oz. gold coin made from Canadian gold coming from the mine in the Cariboo District of British Columbia.

We made two coins for IWA: The coins have a conjoined bust of Billy Barker and Fred Wells on the obverse with the date 2000 and the legend **BARKER WELLS FOUNDERS**. The reverse has a device of a caribou and the legend either **CARIBOO GOLD** or **CARIBOO GOLD PROJECT** and the IWA logo, weight, fineness, and our mint mark.

We had grand plans that only partly materialized. The idea was to mint and package 500 gold coins that would then be sold out of Barkerville/Wells and other towns along the British Columbia "Cariboo Gold Rush Trail." We ordered and paid for packaging and all other materials to do 500 coins. It was decided to do a proof run of 56 coins to test the market and have the directors of IWA approve the final coin.

The original legend read **CARIBOO GOLD**.

One of the directors had produced

a coin for the Mosquito Gold

mine and knew that the

company could not call

the coin “Cariboo

Gold” unless the

gold came from

the mine, so we

had to change

the original

obverse die

to read

“Cariboo

Gold

Project.”

The first 56

coins were

distributed

in a few

weeks. Most

of them were

given away to

investors and

backers. Eight

of the coins went to

Mint subscribers and

12 were sold to a gold

enthusiast in Germany who

said it was the finest example

of a “Gold Rush” coin he had ever come

across. The four coins struck with the “Cariboo

Gold Project” legend disappeared into the

management of IWA. One of these coins was

heavily double struck. The company fell onto hard times

before we were able to produce the rest of the coins

One of the great benefits of this project was the enlistment

of Eve Llyndorah as a member of the Mint’s art staff. The

truly amazing art for the obverse of the IWA coin came as a

result of Eve’s talent, working from a face on photo of Fred

Wells and interpreting a side view of the old boy. Eve became

an indispensable member of the Mint’s art staff creating the

most popular of the Lasqueti designs, the 2000 “Dragon.”

Enters the Dragon

Everyone loves a dragon, and 2000 was the Chinese year

of the dragon. The Mint staff decided to use Eve Llyndorah’s

dragon design as the main device on the obverse of what

would prove to be the last coin in the *China Cloud Series*.

With the addition of dots in the zeros of the date, this design

would grace the obverse of our silver coins through the year

2003. A dot was added to the appropriate zero for each

ensuing year post 2000... I had more visions of tiny maple



15. Rand Holmes's "pot" design.

leaves. The royal sea dragon clutching the pearl of wisdom with the fan tail of inspiration proved to be the most popular coin design of the entire series. A problem with a really great design is coming up with another great design to follow it.

All our coins are high relief in comparison to modern production coinage. The “Gold Dragon” coin was our first attempt at an ultra high relief coin. The design is similar to

the silver coin, except the designs on both sides of the coin are simplified and refined.

The dies are cut so deep that it takes two or three blows from the hammer to bring up the incredible detail of the scales on the obverse dragon and the sails

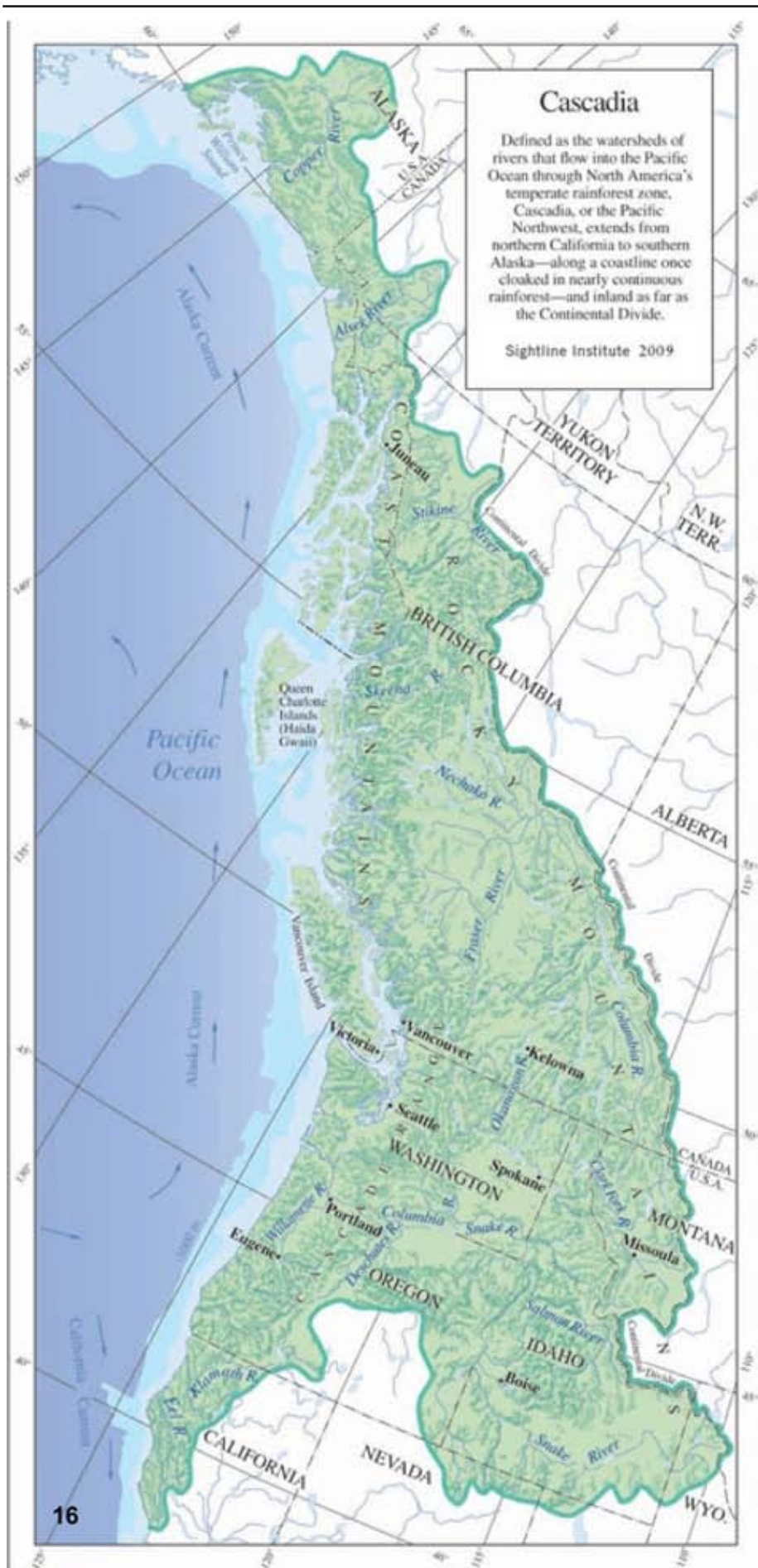
on the *China Cloud* on the reverse. Ray spent many hours working with Stjephan to finish the dies that would become the final design for our ½ oz. gold coin. With the addition of yet another dot to the side of the date, we still use these dies to make our ½ oz. proof gold coins. There are those who feel the “Gold Dragon” is our finest work. The ratio of mirror fields to devices and the detail of the artwork as well as the execution of the final engraving combine to produce a magnificent coin.

That stated, it is important to know that Lasqueti Island was known as “Pot Island” from the 1970s through the 1990s because of the quality and quantity of pot coming from the Island. The RCMP’s assistance with the annual pot harvest

Let’s get something straight right from the start: neither myself nor my business partner has anything to do with the marijuana trade. We are both too old and sensitive to put anything into our bodies that is not of the utmost benefit. The RCMP’s assistance with the annual pot harvest

An non-traditional commemorative

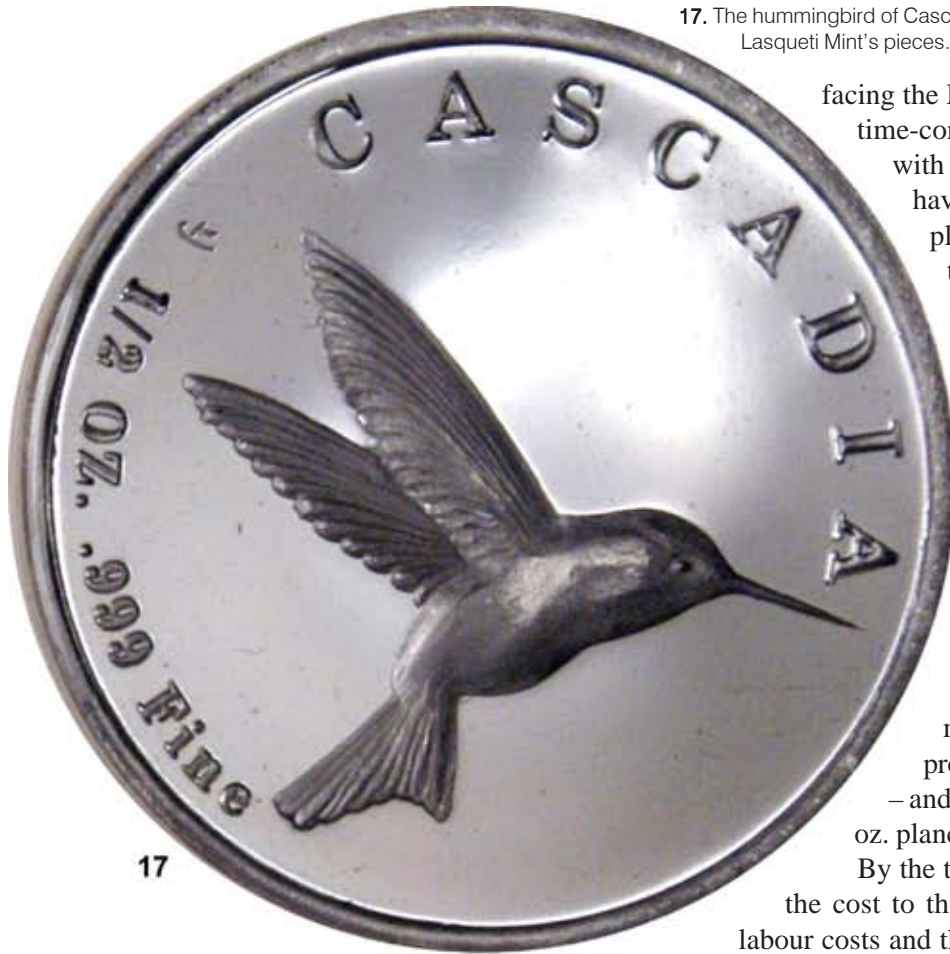
Let’s get something straight right from the start: neither myself nor my business partner has anything to do with the marijuana trade. We are both too old and sensitive to put anything into our bodies that is not of the utmost benefit. That stated, it is important to know that Lasqueti Island was known as “Pot Island” from the 1970s through the 1990s because of the quality and quantity of pot coming from the Island. The RCMP’s assistance with the annual pot harvest



is legendary. The media had a field day with the opportunity to help spread the reputation of “Lasqueti Grown” pot. The horticulturists of Lasqueti developed new seed strains that have international reputations. The RCMP estimated in 2006 that one of every six houses in the lower mainland of BC has some sort of marijuana “grow show” on the premises. It is estimated that 5 to 6 billion dollars are generated annually by the BC pot industry. This makes it the number one industry in BC in terms of dollars generated.

It is customary for government mints to incorporate the agricultural products of their countries into their coinage. The Lasqueti Mint continued this tradition with the subtle incorporation of images of various parts of the marijuana plant into the detail of the early Lasqueti coins. I will leave it up to you to “find Mary” on our early coinage. At some point in 2000, I suggested to Ray that we should come out of the closet with our marijuana theme and issue a coin that had a full marijuana design on the reverse. We had decided to issue a 1/10 oz. gold coin and chose this coin to carry this design. He said he would go along with the design only if it was “classy.” We asked internationally recognized artist Rand Holmes to do a pen and ink drawing of a wreath of marijuana female buds to grace the reverse of this coin. This would prove to be Rand’s last commercial drawing as he died a short time later. The obverse carries the art of Tony Seaman in the form of the “Lasqueti Dory.” This boat was designed by Allen Farrell and was a mainstay of Lasqueti transportation in the 1960s and 1970s when the population of Lasqueti was oriented to water transport.

We sent the artwork off to our die sinker and prepared to issue a new coin. The day after we received the dies back the then Minister of Health for Canada, Allen Rock, announced that the Liberal government had legalized marijuana for medicinal use in Canada! We issued the



coin days later, much to the surprise of the numismatic community. This coin has proven to be one of our most popular issues.

The silver 5-dollar coin

The creation of the silver 1/10 oz. coin is a story in itself. The Mint issued a 5-dollar copper coin for many years using the 1998 dot dies. Head Coiner Ray, being a goldsmith, eventually refused to work with copper, saying that “copper is good for cooking pots and wire.” This meant that the Mint would have to come up with a gold or silver 5-dollar coin. Gold was out of the question so silver was the contender. I was faced with an obvious problem: how to make dies and planchets out of silver, mint them, and get them into circulation for 5 dollars? The only reason we were able to put out a 5-dollar copper coin was that we could use the dies we had for the 1998 silver coin. This meant we had no die cost. I realized that we could issue a 5-dollar coin if we could use our 1/10 oz. gold dies to strike the coins.

The gold coin's reverse has the fineness “.9999” included in the engraving at the bottom of the coin. This is a problem because silver is marked “.999.” If we were to make the silver coin using the gold dies, we would need .9999 silver. This required melting down Silver Maple Leafs (which is illegal) or finding a source for .9999 silver. Another problem

facing the Mint was planchet production. This is a time-consuming task that is just cost efficient with 1/2 oz. silver coins. The Mint would also have to find someone to manufacture our planchets at a reasonable cost. God bless the Internet. After a somewhat extended search on the net, I found a mint that was willing to make the planchets but could not guarantee silver at .9999. It seems that even though they ran .9999 silver, they also used the odd amount of .999 silver and therefore could not promise .9999. I asked them to try to see what they could do and get back to me. Several weeks later I received a call back and was informed that the mint was cleaning their kiln, replacing their graphite ingot molds, and thus were going to be able to produce .9999 silver — on the first run only — and that they would be happy to do our 1/10 oz. planchets.

By the time we landed the planchets in Canada the cost to the Mint was \$2.64 each. With reduced labour costs and the use of the gold dies we were able to put out a silver 5-dollar coin. This coinage will be limited to the amount of planchets on hand as the cost of silver has made the replacement and continuation of this coinage economically unfeasible.

“Everything changes, nothing remains the same”

With the inevitable collapse of all political and national systems, something else always emerges to take the place of the former system. More and more, what emerges from the collapse of nations are states based on geopolitical or bioregional boundaries. North America is divided into many bioregions. The one on the northwest coast is called Cascadia. This bioregion encompasses the area from Juno, Alaska, in the north to Santa Cruz, California, in the south and runs from the Pacific Ocean to the crest of the Coast Mountain range. Lasqueti Island is in the Cascadia bioregion. Part of our original intent was to make gold and silver available to the population of the Gulf islands to form an economy after the end of the paper economy. We decided to expand this expectation to include the entire bioregion. There are more and more people and businesses that are recognizing the existence of Cascadia as a trading reality. The minting of our first “Cascadia” coin on July 18, 2005, marked the end of the *China Cloud* series and the end of the early history of the Lasqueti Mint. ❖