MONEY TALKS

A NUMISMATIC ANTHOLOGY SELECTED FROM CALCOIN NEWS

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California State Numismatic Association

This is copy number 477

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Irvine, California, U.S.A.

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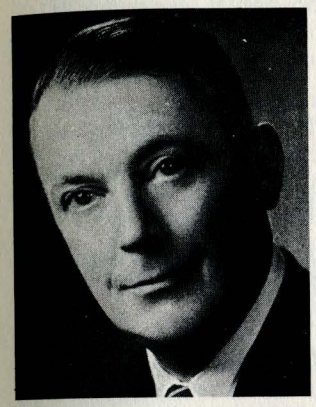

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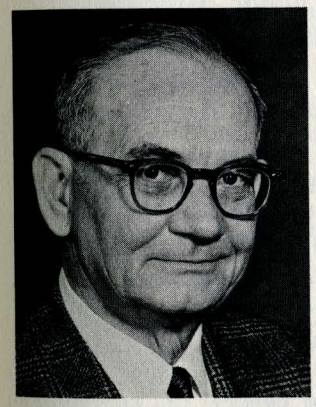

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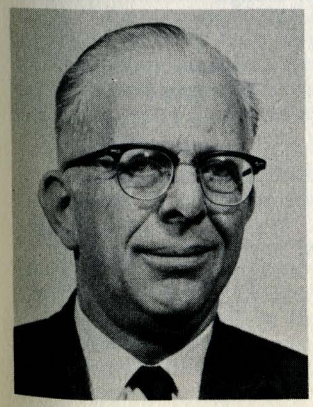

LESLEY G. LODGE
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1962-Date

'TO THE RULER OF THE SANDWICH ISLANDS'

A Russian Medal

By JAMES TODOROVIC, Berkeley

While checking the Russian coins and medals which once belonged to the late Grand Duke Georgii Mikhailovich[1], the writer noticed the bronze medal reproduced here.

The obverse bears the portrait of Tsar Alexander I and the year 1814. What was most intriguing was the inscription on the reverse. When translated, this reads as follows: "To the Ruler of the Sandwich Islands Tamaree as a token of his friendship to the Russians".

Why did the Russian Tsar have this medal struck for somebody named "Tamaree"? Why was this person addressed as the ruler of the Sandwich Islands when it is known that, at least from 1810 to his death on May 5, 1819, King Kamehameha I was ruler of the Sandwich (i.e. Hawaiian) Islands? Why would the Tsar of Russia bother with such matters as having a "friendship" medal struck for someone in the Hawaiian Islands while Russia was engaged in a war with Napoleon I and together with other European nations was concerned with driving Napoleon out of France and ultimately into the Atlantic Ocean?

* * *

In the latter part of the eighteenth century the Sandwich Islands were divided into four separate kingdoms. By the turn of the nineteenth century, and more specifically, by 1810, King Kamehameha I became the actual ruler of all the Hawaiian Islands. He did, however, allow Kaumualii to remain as feudal king of the island of Kauai, paying allegiance and tribute to Kamehameha I.

At about the same time, the Russian American Fur Co., which was chartered by the Tsar of Russia and which had a monopoly of the fur trade in Alaska, found it difficult to obtain food supplies. There were times when the Russian colonists in Alaska were on the verge of starvation, so that it was quite evident to Baranoff, the resident agent of the company and governor of the colony, that unless he could tap a better source of supplies than Siberia, the colony would have to be abandoned. Baranoff therefore hoped to establish trading posts both in California and the Hawaiian Islands. In fact, it is for this reason that in 1812 the Russians, in open defiance of the Spanish governor, established their fortified post, Fort Ross, on the coast of California north of San Francisco.

The immediate results of the agricultural experiments at Fort Ross were not sufficient to feed the hungry Alaskans, and Baranoff was forced in January 1814 to send a ship to the Hawaiian Islands to acquire the necessary supplies. A cargo was secured at Oahu. However, as the ship sailed for its home port in Alaska, it sprang a leak and had to put into Waimei Bay, Kauai, where it was wrecked by a sudden storm. A large portion of the cargo was saved by King Kaumualii and his men, who, however, refused to turn it over to the ship's captain. The latter, upon his return to Sitka, urged Baranoff to send an expeditionary force against Kaumualii. Instead, Baranoff sent a Dr. Georg Anton Scheffer, who was a surgeon on one of the company's ships. It appears that the main object for Scheffer's trip to the Islands was to persuade King Kamehameha I either to return the cargo from the wrecked ship, or, if it were no longer available, to request payment for it in sandalwood. This would be loaded on two of the company's ships which were to follow Scheffer to the Islands. Scheffer also was instructed to try to arrange for permanent trade relations between the company and Hawaii.

Scheffer was very successful, at least with the first part of his mission. Both Kamehameha I and Kaumualii agreed to return the Russian cargo. The ease with which Scheffer gained his points probably went to his head. While on the island of Kauai, he induced Kaumualii to grant him a lease to the Hanalei valley (on Kauai), and also suggested that Kaumualii declare his independence from Kamehameha and, at the same time, place himself under the protection of the Russian Tsar.[2] Scheffer then erected a fort at Waimei, and raised the Russian flag thereon.

As soon as this came to the attention of Kamehameha, the latter sent a messenger to Kaumualii with orders to expel Scheffer. By this time Kaumualii was convinced (by the American and English traders) of the dangerous position into which he had placed himself. He, therefore, requested Scheffer and his men to leave Kauai. Seeing that everyone was against him, Scheffer shipped his men to Sitka, while he himself fled to China.

In the meantime, immediately after his first success with Kamehameha and Kaumualii, Scheffer sent a report to the officials of the Russian American Fur Co. in St. Petersburg. In this report, Scheffer gave a glowing account of the possible riches. This dazzled the Russian officials to such a degree that they appealed to Tsar Alexander I to send troops to the Hawaiian Islands to occupy at least the islands of Kauai and Oahu which, according to them, were turned over to Russia by King Kaumualii. The Tsar, however, was not convinced that the handing over (even if true) was done willingly and voluntarily. He, therefore decided to have this matter investigated.[3] In the meantime, he ordered that various presents be sent to Kaumualii, and that a medal be struck and delivered to him — this medal to be addressed to the "ruler of the Sandwich Islands."[4] According to Dr. Frank A. Golder, late professor of history at Stanford University, "Tomaree" was one of King Kaumualii's names.[5] It is for this reason that the medal was thus addressed to "Tamaree", as ruler of the Sandwich Islands, which latter title may have been a deliberate, but expedient, exaggeration.

* * *

The three questions which originally beset the author have thus been answered. The fact that Dr. Scheffer exceeded his authority when he tried (with apparent success) to induce Kaumualii (i.e., Tomaree) to break away from King Kamehameha should be conceded. The records show that Baranoff and the directors of the Russian American Fur Co., as well as the Russian government, all repudiated Scheffer's actions.[6]

However, at least one point still remains unanswered: Did Tomaree actually try to hand over the Hawaiian Islands to Russia, and thus be one of the early Quislings?

* * *

(Written for the East Bay Coin Club's 1957 Numismatic Article Contest)

[1] *The Numismatist*, July 1957, page 790.

[2] *Life of Baranoff* (St. Petersburg, 1835), pages 164-165.

[3] Archives of the Russian Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1817, No. 350.

[4] Ibid., 1844, No. 1501.

[5] "*Hawaii — Early Relations With England, Russia and France*", edited by A. P. Taylor and R. S. Kuykendall.

[6] "*A History of Hawaii*" (1926), by Ralph S. Kuykendall, pages 94-96.