

# Fantasy Tokens Plague Internet Auctions

*It's easier than you might think to fool online bidders into believing that these deceptive items are real.*

LIKE MOST serious collectors of tokens and medals, I follow Internet auctions carefully. It is a great way to make interesting additions to a collection, no matter what your specialty. Very often the problem I have is finding enough time to check all the new offerings.

I don't think a day goes by that I don't see at least a few "fantasy" tokens offered for sale. For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the term, a fantasy is an item created by some enterprising individual, usually for just one purpose: to cheat the unsuspecting buyer. That's the bad news. The good news is that most of these fantasies are not difficult to spot once you become familiar with their styles and appearance. I'll briefly describe the two types I see most frequently.

First we have the seemingly never-ending bawdy-house fantasies. These pesky items first appeared in the marketplace as far back as the 1960s, and more and more varieties were produced as years went by. Usually they are silver-dollar size, or larger, and the majority I've seen have incuse lettering. The inscriptions are racy, as you might imagine for tokens of this type.

For those interested in the topic, Nolan Tucker

published the catalog *Fantasy Brothel Tokens: A History and Catalog* in 1997. A large number of these tokens are illustrated and described. Suffice it to say, if the subject matter is bawdy, the item in question probably is neither old nor legitimate.

The second type is what collectors refer to as the "L.A. STAMP" fantasies. If you collect tokens, you are probably aware of the Los Angeles Rubber Stamp Company. This large manufacturer, which went into business in 1884, struck thousands of trade tokens for merchants, and many of them were "signed" with the firm's name or an abbreviation thereof (for example, L.A. RUB. STAMP CO.). Because the company was so well known, the idea of manufacturing fantasy tokens and "signing" them L.A. STAMP was most ingenious. This gave them the appearance of authenticity, and indeed, even experienced collectors have purchased them as genuine. Of course, once you are aware of what they really are, you'll never have to worry about being cheated.

The topics found on these Los Angeles Rubber Stamp Company tokens are enticing. In the Token and Medal Society's (TAMS) reference collection are six different Union Pacific Railroad pieces; some of these also mention Wells Fargo. Another prevalent theme is whiskey; Hollywood and Green River are two of the brands noted.



▲ L.A. STAMP fantasies often incorporate popular themes such as railroads, as illustrated by these Union Pacific items. Not Actual Size  
▼ Whiskey, another common fantasy theme, is found on these pieces supposedly promoting the Green River and Hollywood brands. Not Actual Size



One square brass token reads HAND THIS TO BARTENDER AT ANY BAR IN THE GROUNDS OF THE TRACK. VALUE 15 CENTS. KENTUCKY DERBY. The piece is dated 1903, and not surprisingly, it has been artificially aged to lend an air of authenticity. Military, Indian affairs and stage lines are topics sure to catch the eye of prospective buyers, and they were all used extensively by the maker of the L.A. STAMP tokens.

And, there are the omnipresent Coca-Cola fantasies. The TAMS collection has nine different variations, and undoubtedly there are others. I'm always amused by the creative stories that accompany the listings of these tokens for sale. As I write this, an Internet auction is offering two examples of a Coca-Cola fantasy, the type ©



▲ Fantasy bawdy-house tokens find an easy market in online auctions.

Not Actual Size



▲ Two examples of this type of Coca-Cola fantasy were described in an online auction as pieces “given to the American soldiers for a free coke” or “used at the Army-Navy football game.”

Not Actual Size

▼ Tokens supposedly related to Indian affairs can find their way into the marketplace.

Not Actual Size



that reads ARMY & NAVY/DRINK/COCA•COLA/L.A. STAMP [this line in small letters]/FREE BOTTLE on an oval planchet, the reverse of which depicts a bottle of the beverage. According to one imaginative seller, “this token was given to the American soldiers for a free coke. This is from the Korean war.” The other seller, not to be outdone, proclaimed that “this was a token used at the Army-Navy football game.”

Remember, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. Your best protection is to study examples of these tokens and become familiar with the styles. And, if you still have doubts, get another opinion before getting out your checkbook.

I should mention that not all L.A. STAMP type fantasies actually carry that wording. They are easily recognized for what they are, since they are similar to the “signed” fantasies.

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