

As “numismatics” and “philately” are the proper appellations for the collection of coins or stamps, “exonomia” describes the collecting of non-U.S. government coinage—also called mercantile or municipal trade tokens, depending on who issues them.

Throughout the United States, and since colonial days, there have been many thousands of privately minted coins, most of denominations less than \$1, most used instead of legal tender in trade for a drink at a bar, for merchandise at a market—I’ve seen one 19th century coin good for trade at a brothel!

West Marin’s coin is one of only three trade tokens ever to carry a \$3 value—Mobridge, South Carolina minted a \$3 coin; and with West Marin’s coin as its example, the chamber of commerce of our neighboring town, Fairfax, minted another just recently.

Trade tokens reached their pinnacle of popularity in the 19th century. Today, West Marin currency is one of only six tokens still in circulation. Maui has its own money, so do Emmetsburg and Pella, Iowa; Lake Havasu, Colorado; Fairfax, California; and the 10 villages of West Marin. And West Marin money is the only currency ever used expressly to raise funds for community nonprofits.

Last year, at the West’s Trade Token Jamboree in Sacramento, West Marin’s coin made its debut among exonomists. Our welcome expanded dramatically when we were taken under the wing of Merle Avila, a Rohnert Park architect with one of the world’s most complete collections of California trade tokens. He showed us a list of the coins in his own personal collection. About 350 coins were from Marin County alone. Avila owns three coins from Olema, one from Bolinas, four from Marshall, and nine from Point Reyes Station. And his collection, he assured us, was far from complete.

But it was the value of some of these local tokens that

was most amazing. One turn-of-the-century coin from Point Reyes, issued by P.F. Scilicci, worth just 10 cents at the time and good for either “one drink” or “one cigar,” sold recently at auction for \$840. In 2008 another coin issued in Olema by O.E. Martinelli sold for \$600. (These were not coins made of gold or silver, but brass!) Local old timers take notice: there may be hidden treasure in that old shoebox of cufflinks and coins you put away years ago.

West Marin’s 100 percent brass coin is the size of a silver dollar. It carries the iconic images of this area—that’s the actual Point Reyes lighthouse on the coin’s headside, along with a map of the Point Reyes peninsula, a coho salmon, a steer representing community ranches, the California poppy, a native American arrowhead, fruits and vegetables of local farms, a tule elk—and our motto, “Strength in community.” On the other side, an osprey with a sand dollar breastplate holds the pens of West



Marin writers and brushes of local artists.

The coins are accepted as currency at many establishments in the several villages of West Marin, and most cash registers have a few to offer as change for a purchase, or to trade for three U.S. dollars. Visitors are encouraged to ask for one or more in change where they shop or dine. Coin collectors’ boxes of 25 coins are also available for \$75.

The coin project is the brainchild of Coastal Marin Fund. While the coins can be and are used as currency in the villages of coastal Marin, their real purpose is to find a visitor who will take one or two home as a souvenir, thus removing the coins from circulation here. For every coin that drops out of local circulation, \$2 becomes available for a local charity or other community nonprofit. See [www.coastalmarinfund.org](http://www.coastalmarinfund.org) for details. — *Richard Kirschman, Point Reyes Station*