

“No one much cared:”

Specie Counterfeiting and Community Support in 1780s Hampshire County



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As Shays’ Rebellion was on the lips of the people in western Massachusetts and towns up and down the state were toiling under exploitative economic burdens, a small ring of specie counterfeiters emerged in Hampshire County, Massachusetts. This counterfeiting ring, in full operation by the end of the 1780s, was a direct response to the economic hardships of post-Revolution western Massachusetts. In February and March of 1789, Esq. John Williams, Justice of the Peace in Hampshire County, issued twenty-one warrants for counterfeiters and passers of false specie in Hampshire County. For the most part, the Hampshire County counterfeiters were not criminally-inclined schemers but, rather, were down-and-out citizens of rural early America who were simply trying to produce the specie that they could not acquire any other way. To many rural farmers of 1780s Hampshire County, counterfeiting seemed like a better option than debtor’s prison.

Farmers in the Connecticut River Valley worked within a relatively closed community structure. Since many farmers could not produce subsistence levels of crops through their own farms alone, the community as a whole arrived at subsistence through working together. This community reliance facilitated a lifestyle in which members of communities in western Massachusetts were socially connected and relied on a barter economy that was largely absent of specie. Dual community connection and specie scarcity in 1780s Hampshire County contributed to community indifference towards and, at times, even support for specie counterfeiters. Many counterfeiters and members of their communities understood counterfeiting as a justifiable act of economically-desperate members of a barter economy that suddenly demanded specie.

This paper will review the specie shortage, describe the Hampshire County counterfeiting

operations of 1789, and consider community responses to the individuals involved. Examples of official and community apathy will demonstrate support of, or at least indifference to, specie counterfeiting.

Taxation and the Specie Problem in the 1780s

The post-Revolution United States government operated under the weak Articles of Confederation, which did not grant the government the power to levy taxes on citizenry. Strapped for the cash needed to pay for the significant expenditures related to the American Revolution, the Continental Congress accepted loans from France. In order to pay off those French loans and to meet federal expenses, the early American government had the choice of either printing more money or obtaining more loans. Due to a lack of legal authority and the political caution that balked at alienating the citizens of the fledgling American country who had just gone to war with the British over the very issue of taxation, levying taxes was not an option for most state governments. Moreover, the agrarian citizenry of early America did not have access to specie in significant amounts.

A few state governments, like Massachusetts, required their citizens to pay taxes before the nascent United States government began operating with “the power to levy and collect taxes” in 1789. These states experienced strong, and sometimes violent, protests against the administration of taxation.[1] Hampshire County, Massachusetts in the late-1780s was the scene of economic and social confusion and exploitation, which manifested in political violence and extralegal activity. Historian Paul Jenkins claimed, “The government in Boston experimented with so many fiscal policies between 1780 and 1786 that no one in this part of the state could decide which regulations were in effect.”[2] In the mid-1780s, during a period of economic

recession in the country, the Massachusetts state government heavily increased direct taxation. Creditors in the region simultaneously began to call in debts. Payment of both of taxes and of debts was required to be made in specie.[3] The Courts of Common Pleas in Massachusetts “gave creditors a means to collect specie obligations in rural areas,” where debtors did not have specie to pay.[4] The people of western Massachusetts felt that the gentlemen of the Boston government were out-of-touch with their agrarian brothers in the west of the state and were therefore unfairly exploiting the farmers of western Massachusetts by emphasizing land valuations. “The feeling that western towns were being forced to pay a disproportionate share of outstanding Revolutionary War bills only increased the frustration. A tax structure based on land valuations, authorized by the 1780 State Constitution, fell heavily on farmers and let Boston merchants off lightly. In a sense, it was Revolution all over again. Or, rather, the Revolution has not yet ended, in the minds of western residents of the state.”[5]

Shays’ Rebellion (1786-87) is an example of the type of large-scale armed uprising of western Massachusetts’ citizenry that occurred as a direct response to taxation and to other economic pressures faced by specie-strapped rural farmers.[6] In response to the obligations to pay both taxes and debts, and having no way of doing so, “agrarian reformers armed with guns and clubs” resisted through violence directed at the Massachusetts courts.[7] Shays’ Rebellion, as well as the numerous minor economically-motivated tumults in western Massachusetts that preceded Shays’, set the stage for the moment in western Massachusetts history when rural farmers felt the burden of taxation and debt closing in on them. As a result of the pressure put on the agrarian populace by the out-of-touch Massachusetts government, people who were otherwise law-abiding citizens asserted their rights through extra-legal action in the form of targeted mob violence. It is at this very moment of pressure and political violence when

counterfeiting became a reasonable resort for a small group of desperate and creative rural citizens in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, at the end of the 1780s.

Legal Penalties for Counterfeiting

The severe legal action taken against counterfeiting in Massachusetts emerged based on the harsh verdicts of Britain. The King's government in Britain classified counterfeiting as an act of High Treason that merited severe punishment. Counterfeiting coins in Britain was associated, both philosophically and literally, with a direct attack on the sovereign. A falsified coin was more than just an economic crime; the coins themselves bore an image of the sovereign. British citizens convicted of coining false money were thus hanged, drawn, and quartered, as was common punishment for acts of High Treason.[8] Counterfeiters were considered "traitors" to the crown and, therefore, their bodies were not allowed to be retrieved for Christian burial by their families. Instead, they were buried under the gallows immediately after they were hanged.[9] With this Draconian and most severe treatment levied on counterfeiters in Britain, it is no surprise that the colonial government in America understood counterfeiting as a serious criminal act that deserved harsh punishment. In the August term of the Superior Court of Judicature of the Province of Massachusetts Bay in 1766, Chief Justice Hutchinson charged the Suffolk Grand Jury to, "revive those [laws], which are absolutely necessary for the Safety of the Community and good Order of government," including those laws related to counterfeiting.[10] "Counterfeiting the King's Coin is High Treason at Home, but we have not settled that Point here. We have a particular Province-Law, which makes it a lesser Offence; how far this will operate upon the Law of England, we have never determined." [11] In his order, Hutchinson placed counterfeiting squarely in the same category of "Capital Offences, being extremely

dangerous to society” as murder, blasphemy, and burglary.[12] The staunchly Loyalist Chief Justice Hutchinson and others in the Massachusetts government took the British tradition of treating counterfeiting as a most serious crime to heart. Just as Britain categorized counterfeiting as High Treason, in the same class as that ultimate crime of murder, the government in America categorized counterfeiting as among the group of the most serious capital offences.

The harsh punishments levied on counterfeiters in Britain were one aspect of Britain’s political philosophy that the men of the new American government were still eager to emulate. In a resolution dated January 11, 1779, the Continental Congress in Philadelphia resolved, “That it be recommended to the several states forthwith to adopt such measures as may be effectual for detecting persons employed in making Counterfeit Bills or passing the same, knowing them to be such.”[13] Many states throughout the new country established laws based on the English Common Law practice of treating counterfeiting as the most serious of crimes and therefore responding to it with the most serious of punishments. The State of Pennsylvania, for example, punished the crime of counterfeiting coin with death on the gallows, a punishment not unusual for counterfeiters and passers in many provinces.[14] Even in New England, where punishment for counterfeiting was comparatively lax, “flogging, the pillory, branding, cropping, imprisonment, heavy fines, or, as in Connecticut, confinement in the horrible underground shafts of the copper mines at Newgate” were not “punishments to be taken lightly.”[15]

In 1786, the General Court of Massachusetts passed “An Act Against Counterfeiting, or Uttering Counterfeit Coin,” which set into law the punishments to be handed down to counterfeiters of silver or gold specie. Under Massachusetts law, a person guilty of counterfeiting was one who “wash[ed],” “cas[ed],” or “guild[ed]” a genuine coin with other materials.[16] Counterfeiters could also “clip” coins by trimming small pieces off larger ones

until they developed a stockpile of silver clippings. John Locke wrote that clipping was impossible to stop because, “Clipping is so gainful and so secret a robbery, that penalties cannot restrain it, as we see by experience, for very few, if any body, who gets weighty money into his hands, will part with it, while clipped money is current.”[17] A person engaged in the criminal act of forging or counterfeiting specie in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts could be “fined, at the discretion of the Court; be set in the pillory for the space of one hour, and then have one of his ears cut off; and from thence be drawn to the gallows, and set thereon with a rope about his neck for the space of one hour, and shall be whipped, not exceeding forty stripes, and shall then be sentenced to hard labour for a term of not more than seven years.”[18] Knowingly passing counterfeit money was also a serious crime in Massachusetts and could be punished by a sentence of up to three years’ of hard labor. It was not solely the act of forging or possessing the coin itself that was punishable by severe sentences in Massachusetts. Forging or possessing the tools used in the counterfeiting process was just as serious a crime. Any person who had in his possession “any such engine, press, stamp, mould, pattern, dye, puncheon, or any tool or material whatsoever, used, adapted or designed for the coining, forging, or counterfeiting such silver or gold money, or coin” could be punished as severely as those who knowingly possessed with an intent to pass counterfeit money.[19] The Massachusetts government also provided substantial monetary incentives for informants to come forward with information that would lead to the arrest and conviction of counterfeiters or those passing counterfeit coins. A twenty-five pound reward was given to citizens who provided authorities with enough information to convict a counterfeiter, while a reward of fifteen pounds was given to those with information enough to convict a person who was knowingly uttering counterfeit money.[20]

The severity of the punishments levied on counterfeiters in Massachusetts and across the

United States attests to the seriousness with which the state and federal governments treated the crime of counterfeiting. “Counterfeiting in the colonial period both by individuals and increasingly by organized and co-operating gangs posed a constant threat to the credit and commerce of the provinces.”[21] The harsh reactions of federal and state governments to counterfeiting seem almost sensible when the economic, political, and philosophical humiliation that the crime of counterfeiting places on government is considered.

The Hampshire County Counterfeiting Ring

More than any other area in colonial America, New England needed specie to conduct indirect trade with England. Unlike the colonies to the south, New England was not involved in direct trade with the mother country. Instead of helping to supply this need, England prohibited the exportation of English coin to the colonies.[22] Due to the ongoing issues with lack of specie, the government of Massachusetts developed a history of “improvisation and experimentation” with currency, including such experiments as minting coins and adopting paper currency as a scheme of financing public debt.[23] For a thirty-four year period in the mid-seventeenth century, the colonial government of Massachusetts experimented with its own silver currency, “Oak Tree” and later “Pine Tree” coins. The simple design of the Massachusetts silver coins facilitated clipping and counterfeiting. In October of 1652, just five months after the first Massachusetts coins were issued, the Massachusetts General Court ordered a new batch of coin with a double ring on either side “for the prevention of washing or clipping of all such pieces of money as shall be coined within this jurisdiction.”[24] British Parliament eventually forced the colony of Massachusetts to stop the coining, which was on the borderline of legality in the first place.

The counterfeiters of Hampshire County, like most counterfeiters in early America, focused on replicating the Spanish milled dollar, or “piece of eight,” a silver coin minted in Spain from 1732-1826.[25] The Spanish dollar was widely used by many countries, including the United States, as international currency because of its uniformity in standard and milling characteristics. The Spanish milled dollar was the most common form of specie currency circulated in early America until the nineteenth century and, due to its purchasing power, was the most commonly counterfeit.[26] In the seventeenth century in Massachusetts, criminals both “clipped” the edges off the pieces of eight and used these clippings as a base for making a solution of counterfeit silver that they then poured into molds and used as currency. One such early instance occurred in Boston on August 8, 1679, when Frenchman Peter Lorphelin was found with clippings of Spanish silver coins as well as “three crucibles, a melting pan, a strong pair of shears for clipping money” and “various suspicious instruments.”[27] Lorphelin was sentenced to stand upon the pillory for two hours, to have both of his ears cut off, to pay the costs and fees associated with his arrest and trial, and to provide a 500-pound bond.[28]

Between 1789 and 1801, Hampshire County issued warrants for a total of twenty-nine counterfeiters, twenty-seven of whom were coiners (See Appendix I). In February and March of 1789, Justice John Williams heard twenty-one counterfeiting cases. The number of cases tried within that two-month period in the winter of 1789 indicates that Hampshire County was witnessing the breakup of a counterfeiting ring. The twenty men tried (Noah Barnes was tried twice) were associated with each other, working together either in one large counterfeiting ring or in a series of smaller but inter-connected rings. Considering the legal leniency that incentivized testimony against counterfeiters, it is not surprising that many of the partners-in-crime also testified against each other when they were caught.[29]

Deerfield town historian George Sheldon discovered in 1896 from sources likely only one or two generations removed that the actions of this Hampshire County counterfeiting ring affected the circulating currency significantly enough that it caused “great excitement in town” when the gang of counterfeiters was broken up in March of 1789. The excitement may have stemmed from the fact that the counterfeiting operations in the county “had caused much disturbance in the circulating medium.”[30] Although the Hampshire County counterfeiters were only operating for a short period, it appears that twenty or so men coining at a steady rate produced enough product to affect a rural market.

The Counterfeiting Operation

Turning base metals into valuable precious metals has been a focus of alchemy since ancient times. A third-century papyrus from Thebes in Ancient Egypt, copied from even earlier texts, provides an alchemic scheme for making fake gold and silver through a complex and largely philosophical exercise in wrapping certain minerals in black lye to revive them into precious metals.[31] The alchemy of turning base metals into something resembling silver is, in actuality, a complex and unruly process. Counterfeiters did not learn to counterfeit silver solely through a process of scientific trial and error. Rather, associations such as the Hampshire County counterfeiting ring facilitated the transmission of knowledge of “making money” through their social networks.

There are several different methods to make counterfeit Spanish dollars. Some of these methods are simple and require a low skill level, while others are extremely complex.

Numismatic historian Albert Pradeau, in *The Numismatic History of Mexico*, outlines the most commonly employed counterfeiting techniques used in producing facsimiles of Spanish milled

dollars:

1. Pieces were made of an alloy of silver and copper or other base metals
2. A copper sheet would be veneered on both sides with a thin plate of silver and then passed through a rolling mill until reduced to the required thickness; subsequently, dollar size discs were then stamped out the strip and provided with an edge
3. Silver-plated disks of tin
4. Authentic coins would be submitted to strong pressure, then cut to regulation size and re-struck, thus resulting in a thinner specimen with 80 to 100 grains of silver less than legal[32]

Counterfeit coins could be struck from dies, as the mint would have with genuine silver coins. Or, sometimes, they were cast in molds. Although scholars have hypothesized that the majority of American-made counterfeit coins were cast in molds, the Hampshire County counterfeiters struck, or stamped, their counterfeit coins. Many of the Hampshire County counterfeiters, such as Noah Barnes of Montague, had in their possession when they were arrested, “a certain Engine prep Stamp, {Wedge} Mould pattern, edge and other Tools, & Materials, used adapted & designed for the Coining forging & counterfeiting Silver Money or Coin {of pieces} of coarse Silver & other base Metals in Imitation and likeness of a Spanish milled Dollar, a Silver Coin.”[33]

Two counterfeiters arrested as part of the Hampshire County counterfeiting ring, yeoman David Brown of Bennington, Vermont and silversmith Julius Frary of Sunderland, Massachusetts, were arrested while they possessed recipes that detailed the process of turning

base metals into something resembling silver (See Appendix II and Appendix III). These recipes relied on a small quantity of true silver, which was then melted down and added to various base metals in an effort to dilute the precious metal while retaining elements of the quality of silver. Brown's recipe is several paragraphs long and involves a complex process of mixing ingredients such as sulfur, copper, and mercury with corrosive solutions, and subsequently heating and cooling the mixture several times before pouring it into molds. Brown's recipe notes that the counterfeit silver mixture can be used to make coins or poured into molds to make buckles or spoons that would be traded as currency. Julius Frary's recipe is strikingly similar to Brown's, calling for the same basic ingredients and recommending a similar process of heating and cooling the mixture of chemicals and base metals within a crucible until it is ready to be poured into molds. The complex nature of the recipes and the fact that they call for materials, skills, and tools that were not readily available to the average person indicates that not just anyone could participate in counterfeiting. Rather, it required an expertise transmitted through tight criminal networks and carried-out by skilled artisans.

Julius Frary (1755-1832) of Sunderland, Massachusetts is an example of a member of the Hampshire County counterfeiting ring who was a skilled metalworker before he made the foray into extralegal metalwork. Although the court records refer to him only as "yeoman," Frary was a silversmith by trade.[34] Frary's occupation as a silversmith made his extralegal occupation as a counterfeiter particularly natural, since Frary already owned the necessary tools and had ready access to materials. One might assume that Frary's occupation would mean that he would not raise suspicions even as he carried-out the conspicuous process of producing counterfeit coin, but it seems that Frary was increasingly paranoid about being caught counterfeiting and took precautions to avoid detection by his neighbors who were "too nigh." [35] Frary was so paranoid

that “false Brethren” would turn against him that he installed a press that would stamp coins “without makg a Noise.”[36]

The similarity between the recipes belonging to David Brown and to Julius Frary illustrates that this recipe was successful. It also confirms that the counterfeiters of Hampshire County were transmitting information about their process to each other. David Brown and Julius Frary certainly were in contact; there is indication in Frary’s trial records that Brown asked Frary to lend him some smithing tools for counterfeiting.[37] Frary claimed that he had hidden his tools so well in his barn that he was unable to find them when Brown needed to borrow them. Whether this was an excuse Frary used to eliminate a competitor, or whether Frary truly lost his tools, remains a mystery. Additionally, in the warrant for Frary’s arrest on March 14, 1789, Lee Taylor of Shelburne accused Julius Frary of “uttering and passing to one David Brown” a false coin three days earlier.[38] The Hampshire County counterfeiting ring as an inter-connected group of allies who periodically turned against each other is particularly apparent in the relationship between Frary and Brown.

The recipes and records indicate that counterfeiters did not merely melt down silver coins to make into counterfeit coins, nor did they solely use their counterfeit silver to make coins. Shoe buckles and spoons, as well as various other silver objects, were occasionally used in place of silver coins, both as an ingredient and as a counterfeit product. David Brown’s recipe (Appendix II) advises the maker of the counterfeit silver mixture that the metal made “will Be fit for Spons Bockels or Spoons.”[39] The trial of Aaron Pratt of Whately, Massachusetts, arrested for possessing tools with the intent to coin money on March 16, 1789 and tried on April 27, 1790, reveals that Pratt “bought shoe buckles and other silver and base metal objects for melting into coins.”[40] Ironically, it is Julius Frary who provided this damning testimony against Pratt in

exchange for leniency in his own counterfeiting suit.

Sheldon refers to “Goff’s Mill” as a primary “center of operations” for at least a large group of the coiners operating as part of the larger Hampshire County counterfeiting ring.[41] “Goff’s Mill” was a tract of land in Deerfield, Massachusetts (now Greenfield) belonging to joiner and accused counterfeiter Hezekiah Goff (See Appendix IV). In April of 1792, Goff purchased a four-acre parcel of land from the estate of Samuel Childs. The property, which was in the North End of Deerfield near the Green River, included the frame of a gristmill and a mill-dam. It seems that, although Goff did not officially own the land until 1792, he was connected to it before then; possibly, he maintained a gate on the property. There are references to the mill and dam as “Goff’s Mill” as early as 1789, though it is alternatively referred to as Moore’s Mill.[42] Greenfield town historian Paul Jenkins recounts, “Two counterfeiters named Goffe and Jenks were known to be working out of the basement of William Moore’s mill on the Green River, to remedy their individual cash shortages.”[43] Samuel Graham, who brought charges against Goff on January 30, 1789 for counterfeiting and for possessing the tools necessary to counterfeit, later testified that Goff had a barn on his property with “stamps of Dyes & sundry other Tools for counterfeitg Spanish milld Dollrs” hidden within it.[44]

The second main center of operations for the Hampshire County counterfeiters, according to George Sheldon, was “on an island in Deerfield river, near Conway, where the rushing waters drowned the noise of their stamp mill.”[45] This location is confirmed through unattributed testimony dated March 16, 1789 that mentions two islands on the Deerfield River as connected to counterfeiting operations.[46] According to the testimony, counterfeiters took a canoe down the river from Bennington, Vermont to the two islands in order to drop off tools used in the covert operations. Both the islands on the Deerfield River and Goff’s Mill made ideal places to

conduct small-scale counterfeiting operations because they offered relative privacy and some amount of a noise buffer, since milling coins was not a silent activity.

A third location used with some frequency for counterfeiting coins was the home of Dr. Jerre Lyon, a physician and accused counterfeiter from Colrain, Massachusetts. In several accounts, “witnesses claimed meeting different parties at Lyon’s place and also for ‘makg money on Lyon’s Land.’”[47]

The Hampshire County silver counterfeiters, although semi-skilled, loosely united, and careful, were not particularly successful in the end. A successful product for a counterfeiter was a coin that they were able to pass and that remained in circulation long enough to avoid pointing directly towards the maker. Counterfeiting Spanish silver coins is a difficult task because the successful product must be the right mix of silver and base metals in order to retain the superficial aspects of silver (such as color and weight) while offering a worthwhile return-on-investment for those who put the time and risk into producing the counterfeit. Witnesses sometimes testified that they were able to tell that a coin was counterfeit because it was too lightweight or was discolored in a telltale way. In testimony against Judah Pierce of Colrain, Daniel Clark declared that he knew the Spanish milled dollars given to him by Pierce were not silver because they were simply “too bright.”[48] All of the men arrested in connection with the Hampshire County counterfeiting ring in 1789 ended up appearing before the Supreme Judicial Court, or locked imprisoned in the Hampshire County Jail.

“No one much cared”: Community Sympathy and Apathy

Many early American counterfeiters rationalized their actions by reconciling their experience as part of a rural barter economy with a belief in the largely arbitrary nature of

money. The rural economy of western Massachusetts was one in which currency was not necessary to drive exchange. Lacking experience with currency on a daily exchange level, the people of western Massachusetts saw bills of credit or pieces of silver in terms of their value in a specific situation and not in terms of their value as tools of capitalism. In the memoirs of Stephen Burroughs, a contemporary of the Hampshire County ring from New Hampshire who was counterfeiting paper money, Burroughs rationalized the criminal act of counterfeiting by explaining that “money of itself is of no consequence” until mankind agrees to attach a value to it whereupon “no one is injured by receiving a small insignificant piece of paper for a hundred bushels of wheat.” Burroughs concluded that, “Hence, whoever contributes, really, to increase the quantity of cash, does not only himself, but likewise the community an essential benefit.”[49] This perspective made sense to many rural farmers in western Massachusetts who were not used to producing money in exchange for goods and, therefore, had not developed a strong value-attachment to money. Burroughs’ theory that counterfeiting money is ultimately a community service underscores the justification used by many counterfeiters in Hampshire County and in early America to excuse their illegal actions.

Significant sections of the American populace, including “upon occasion constables, sheriffs, or even magistrates” were sympathetic to the plight of counterfeiters, or were at least indifferent about whether or not they were brought to justice.[50] This indifference stemmed from the economic hardships facing the specie-poor agrarian populace of western Massachusetts. Most rural farmers in Hampshire County were unable to pay the crippling taxes and debts that they owed. In western Massachusetts, there was a “great scarcity of circulating medium” that contributed to a “deplorable condition of the people” in Hampshire County by the late-1780s.[51] While some community members responded to the economic hardships by organizing

in acts of political violence such as Shays' Rebellion, other people in Hampshire County turned to counterfeiting. Perhaps in the minds of the people of Hampshire County, both of these extralegal activities were justifiable assertions of a suffering and long-ignored segment of Massachusetts's citizenry.

The case of Rhode Island silversmith-cum-counterfeiter Samuel Casey exemplifies community empathy for the "crime" of coining as long as the reasons of those participating in the crime were considered justifiable. Samuel Casey, along with his brother Gideon Casey, was a silversmith in South Kingstown, Rhode Island who owned and operated both a silversmith's business and a small shop out of his home and was widely considered "an excellent craftsman." [52] On September 25, 1764, disaster befell Casey when a fire (likely begun in his goldsmith's forge) engulfed his house/silversmith's business/shop, causing him to lose all of his equipment as well as his shop goods and almost all of his property. On October 1, 1764, the *Newport Mercury* announced that "The house of Samuel Casey, Esq.; of South Kingstown, was reduced to Ashes. A large Variety of Furniture, a considerable Quantity of European Goods, with Drugs, Medicines, &c. makes Mr. Casey's Loss, as we are informed, amount to near Two Thousand Pounds Sterling." [53] The fire financially devastated Casey, who had a wife and four children to care for, and he moved his family to Little Rest, Rhode Island (now Kingston) for a fresh start. [54] Unfortunately, Casey's fresh start was not limited to the legitimate silversmith business he began in Little Rest. Cash-strapped and desperate, "Silver Sam" became "the leader of a gang of coiners" that flooded false coins into circulation in Rhode Island in the late-1760s. [55]

Although it is tempting to believe that Samuel Casey turned to counterfeiting only as a desperate act of an unlucky man, it appears that Samuel and his brother became familiar with the

business of counterfeiting through New Hampshire silversmith Joshua Howe some years earlier. Records indicate that the brothers Casey paid 500 dollars to Howe for “instructing them in making money” sometime in the early-1760s.[56] However, when Samuel Casey was convicted of counterfeiting and sentenced to death by hanging in 1770, it seems that the community still associated his counterfeiting with the major loss of property in 1764 and therefore sympathized with him.

Community sympathy towards Samuel Casey was not simply passive. Instead, the concern of Rhode Islanders for Casey’s misfortunes manifested in community action. After Casey was convicted and sentenced, a motivated assembly of a “considerable number” of people gathered at the King’s County jail in which Casey was imprisoned and helped him escape. In an article dated November 13-20, 1770, the Essex Gazette reported that, “Saturday last a considerable Number of People riotously assembled in King's County, and which their Faces black'd proceeded to his Majesty's Goal there, the outer Door of which they broke open with Iron Bars and Pick-Axes; they then violently entered the Goal, broke every Lock therein, and set at Liberty sundry Criminals, viz. William Reynolds, Thomas Clarke, Elisha Reynolds, and Samuel Casey, lately convicted of Money-making, one of whom (Samuel Casey) was under Sentence of Death.”[57] After his escape from jail, Casey fled the colony.

The case of Hezekiah Goff, owner of Goff’s Mill in Greenfield and supposed “ringleader” of at least a large segment of the Hampshire County counterfeiting ring, provides an example of the community indifference towards the 1789 counterfeiting activity in Hampshire County. Goff’s community offered silent support if not complete indifference towards Goff’s criminal operations. Moreover, Greenfield’s constable, Reuben Wells, warned Goff, and subsequently aided his escape. Hezekiah Goff served in the Continental Army beginning on July

3, 1781, when he was twenty-seven years old. The description of Goff given in the list of men raised in Hampshire County to serve in the Continental Army describes him as 5'7", with light hair and light complexion, occupied as a joiner.[58] Goff owned "Goff's Mill" in an area on the border of Deerfield and Greenfield where the Green River meets the Deerfield River.

Greenfield residents saw themselves as "innocent victims of monetary chaos," mistreated by the Boston merchant-led government. The town of Greenfield deliberately refused to pay state taxes in 1785, 1786, and 1787.[59] Warrants were eventually issued for the arrest of the town's tax collector, Reuben Wells, who was also ironically the town constable. Even in the case of the arrest warrants for Wells, the warrant postdates the crime by several years, indicating that "no one in the area was in a hurry to catch up with Wells" because they supported his resistance to pay unfair taxes.[60] It is in the midst of this political climate of discontent that Hezekiah Goff and his compatriots carried-out their counterfeiting operations "to remedy their individual cash shortages." [61] According to Paul Jenkins, "no one seemed to mind," at least until the Massachusetts state authorities became aware of the operation.[62] Members of the community looked the other way as Goff's noisy counterfeiting operation continued. Furthermore, before state authorities could arrest Goff and his accomplice, Greenfield's tax-dodging constable Reuben Wells came to warn Goff of the approaching danger. "Legend has it that one turned state's evidence and the other escaped, after burying a quantity of silver dollars in an out-of-the-way place." [63]

The indifference with which the Greenfield community treated Goff's counterfeiting operation makes sense when the community is considered as an unhappy group of self-activating citizens. These citizens had their own ideas about how a good government should operate and felt wronged by the economic policies of their state government. When viewed through this lens,

it comes as no surprise that a force of at least eighty-five men from Greenfield, varied in class from prominent land-owners to day laborers, took up arms to defend their rights during Shays' Rebellion.[64]

Incentives existed for citizens to report counterfeiters. Massachusetts's courts offered substantial monetary rewards for information leading to the capture of counterfeiters. Although there were some individuals who took advantage of the payout and reported counterfeiters, many more people remained silent. One-third of the almost thirty formal complaints brought to Justice John Williams during the course of the Hampshire County counterfeiting ring were brought by two individuals, Seth Catlin of Deerfield and Caleb Alvord of Greenfield.[65] Catlin and Alvord found the reward for reporting information too rich to refuse. However, the majority of the community in Hampshire County either did not know about the counterfeiting activity happening under their noses or, more likely, were not eager to turn in their fellow townsmen for counterfeiting. Further, many of the Hampshire County counterfeiters, like Hezekiah Goff and Julius Frary, were active in their communities and were veterans of the American Revolution.[66]

Even with the incentive of a monetary reward, the citizens of Hampshire County had reasons to keep quiet about the actions of their counterfeiting neighbors. As illustrated by contemporary economically-motivated moments of political violence such as Shays' Rebellion, the people of 1780s western Massachusetts were angry about their economic situation and felt that they were being unfairly treated by a seaport-facing government of Boston gentlemen. The economy of western Massachusetts lacked an adequate supply of specie, and, when it came to convincing the seaport government of this, western Massachusetts's citizens were out of ideas. In large part, Massachusetts's rural citizenry were at least apathetic to the motivations of the

ordinary men who became criminals in order to produce specie that they could not get any other way.

Even after losing legal bouts, counterfeiters, bolstered by the support of the community and the lax punishments given them by the court, encouraged one another to continue making false coins. After his arrest and punishment for counterfeiting, Gilbert Belcher of New England intended to continue his counterfeiting because of the support given to him by his fellow counterfeiters. “No gain afforded me so much pleasure as that which I acquired by illicit means. Coining and counterfeiting engrossed my attention, and those who first advised me to transgress, persuaded me to continue my iniquitous practices.”[67]

Amy Richardson has hypothesized that community support or indifference to counterfeiting was motivated by the benefit that the addition of false specie had on the economic landscape of rural Massachusetts. Although people understood that the specie was false, coins made even of base metals were sometimes better to have in circulation than no coins at all. The community was willing to take a risk and accept a coin that they knew to be counterfeit. In October of 1785, Springfield tavern owner Aaron Parsons took a French guinea that he knew to be false as payment from Stephen Perrin. Parsons knew that if he could not pass the guinea, he would lose the money that he was rightfully owed by Perrin, but he also knew that, if he could pass the coin, “he bought two extra shillings worth of rum.”[68] “Though they did not counterfeit themselves, [members of the community] might have said, half-serious, that counterfeiters were doing the community ‘an essential benefit.’”[69]

Conclusion

The Hampshire County counterfeiting operations in the winter of 1788-89 were a direct

response to the distressing shortage of specie in western Massachusetts. Whether operating as a formal counterfeiting ring, or merely as interconnected entrepreneurs, individuals involved in counterfeiting activities shared information and techniques. Despite monetary incentives for reporting counterfeiting, few community members provided information to authorities, and some knowingly accepted and transferred counterfeit specie. Hampshire County citizens and officials either ignored the counterfeiting, or intentionally delayed in addressing the crime. This tacit support of, or at least indifference to, the counterfeiting operation mirrors experiences elsewhere in New England. Considering the official severity of the crime, it is remarkable that “no one much cared.”

Appendix I

Accused Coiners

Hampshire County, 1789-1801

Robert Avery, Carpenter/Laborer, of Colrain
Jonathan Ballard of Sunderland
Noah Barnes, Yeoman, of Monatgue (two separate cases)
John Boynton, Yeoman, of Greenfield
David Brown, Yeoman, of Bennington, Vermont
Asa Curtis of Conway
Ebenezer Fisher of Greenwich
Julius Frary of Sunderland
Moses Fulton of Colrain
Hezekiah Goff of Deerfield
Timothy Harrington of Colrain
Isaiah Horley of Greenfield
William Johnson of Pelham
Jerre Lyon of Colrain
John Matthews of Colrain
Jonathan Phillips of Colrain
Eliphalet Pierce of Colrain
Judah Pierce of Colrain
Lebulon Pierce of Colrain
Ephraim Potter of Shelburne
Abel Powers of Greenwich
Aaron Pratt of Whately
Jonathan Safford of Colrain
Aaron Thomas of Colrain
Noah Toby of Conway
Ruel Willard of Greenfield
Benjamin Woodward of Greenfield

Appendix II
Recipe For Counterfeit Silver
Found on David Brown, March 13, 1789
Pocumtuk Valley Memorial Association Library, Counterfeiting Files

take Sulpher or Comon tabel Salt and of the distilled Spirits of Coper and of Quick Silver[70] and of the oyl of gold from the Leaf the Same quantity of aque fortas[71] mixe them all together then to a hundred waite of silver pore these drops of this Liquid and it will Becom pure of take the gold Lef and put into vingor take Coper and put into Sider [a] and stir it and take all above mentied artikles and mix them together and they will make a commcal compound for to take for the Bots

take a small quantity of the spirits of arsnik[72] arsnik Broge and [Salammoniack][73] and parlash[74] and pot ash a small quantity of [cack?] put som of [cack?] of the above artikels and put into your Crusibal[75] Cut your Coper fine and Salt it [] into your Crusibal [alaim?] of [drugs?] and a [alaim?] of [] put it on the fire and Raise your heat graduly and malt it down until it is as thin as Boals Blod and turn it out into hogs fat or talow every time melt it down three times and then Boyl it the space of one our [hour] in wine stone and alom[76] then your mettle will Be fit for Spons Bockels or Spoons

take a bar of old [_art?] and Club and hammer it down as thin as you woant it and heat it [] hot and then put it into the Spirits of mayden til it is cold then heat it again and put it into a Spirit maid of [Salind?] increase [s] and [Salammoniack] gumb mix together til it is Cold then fix it in what Shape you are aiming to have it in [] or Spoons or Spons then [] it again and Cole it in [Cham?] a day and it will anser good purpos and and will ware forever and Bee good

Appendix III
Recipe for Counterfeit Silver
Found on Julius Frary, March 11, 1789
Pocumtuk Valley Memorial Association Library, Counterfeiting Files

take a smal quantity to of the Spirits of arsnack[77] as much Broge and Salamonack[78] Salts
parlash[79] and potash a litel Melt three times pann it in oile Boile it wine stone and alom[80]

Take a band of Steal pound it as thin as you ples [put] it read [red] hot into Spirits of mayden til
it is Cold then heatit putit in Spirit mad of [] inn and Salam[moni]ack salt til it is Cold work it
then heat it and put it in Chamber lye

take sulpher or salte and the distilled spirits of Casin in sider Emlin and Quick Silver and the oile
of gold lef [leaf] mixed in Vinnger and the same quantity aquafortes[81] mix them all to goather
and drope it on Silver

take a small quantity of asuik asrin gum Salamonic parlash Potash[82] some Each Casin wine
stone Alam

Made in Salmidine and Salamon gume Chamber lye[83]

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- [1] Constitution of the United States of America, Article 1, Section 8, Paragraph 1.
- [2] Paul Jenkins, *The Conservative Rebel: A Social History of Greenfield, Massachusetts* (The Town of Greenfield, Massachusetts, 1982), 43.
- [3] Alan Bloom, "The So-Called Shays Rebellion": A Neighborhood Study of Whately, Massachusetts (Historic Deerfield Summer Fellowship Program, 1986), 8.
- [4] David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 66.
- [5] Jenkins, *Conservative Rebel*, 44.
- [6] Robert A. Becker, *Revolution, Reform, and the Politics of American Taxation, 1763 – 1783* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).
- [7] Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion*, 55.
- [8] Rictor Norton, "Coiners and Counterfeiters," *The Georgian Underworld: A Study of Criminal Subcultures in Eighteenth-Century England*, <http://rictornorton.co.uk/gu12.htm> [Accessed 12 July 2012].
- [9] In 1748, British coiner John Dodd was hanged alongside a murderer and a smuggler at Pennenden Heath. Dodd's body was buried beneath the gallows while the bodies of the murderer and smuggler were retrieved by their families and taken for "decent internment." (Ibid.)
- [10] "Charge to the Jury by the Chief Justice," *Portrait of a Patriot: The Major Political and Legal Papers of Josiah Quincy, Jr., Volume 5: The Law Reports, Part II (1765-1772)*, ed. Daniel R. Coquillette and Neil Longley York (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2009), 539.
- [11] Ibid., 539.
- [12] Ibid., 540.
- [13] United States Continental Congress, *Resolves. 1778 Oct. 8* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Dunlap, 1779).
- [14] In 1720 in Philadelphia, for example, silversmith Edward Hunt was hanged for the crime of coining. (Kenneth Scott, *Counterfeiting in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 210 and 252.)
- [15] Ibid., 263.
- [16] The General Court of Massachusetts, "An Act Against Counterfeiting, or Uttering Counterfeit Coin," July 4, 1786, *Special Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts* [Accessed 21 July 2012 from The State Library of Massachusetts Archives, Boston].
- [17] John Locke, "Further Considerations Concerning the Raising Value of Money: Wherein Mr. Lowndes arguments for it, in his late report concerning 'An Essay for the amendment of silver

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[18] "An Act Against Counterfeiting, or Uttering Counterfeit Coin."

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Scott, Counterfeiting, 262.

[22] Leslie V. Brock, The Currency of the American Colonies, 1700-1764: A Study in Colonial Finance and Imperial Relations (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 3-5.

[23] Amy L. Richardson, Doing the Community "An Essential Benefit:" Counterfeiting in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1784-1810 (Undergraduate Thesis, Mount Holyoke College, 1989), 13.

[24] Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England (Volume Four), 19 October 1652, ed. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff (Boston: William White, 1854), 104.

[25] The collection of Historic Deerfield boasts a Spanish milled dollar made in Mexico City circa 1798 with the image of Charles IV, who reigned as King of Spain from 1788 to 1808 (HD 2004. 17).

[26] Marc Mayhugh, "Counterfeit Spanish Milled Dollars," The C4 Newsletter 13.1 (Spring 2005), <http://www.counterfeitcoins.com/marc-8reales/Counterfeit-Spanish-Milled-Dollars.html> [Accessed 29 July 2012].

[27] Scott, Counterfeiting, 16.

[28] Ibid., 16.

[29] Nine counterfeiters testified against their compatriots in exchange for leniency. Letter to the Supreme Judicial Court Justices from John Williams. (Counterfeiting Files, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Manuscript Collection, Deerfield, MA.)

[30] George Sheldon, A History of Deerfield, Massachusetts, Volume II (Deerfield, Massachusetts: E. A. Hall & Co., 1896), 767.

[31] Richard L. Meyers, The Basics of Chemistry (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), 12.

[32] Alberto Francisco Pradeau, Numismatic History of Mexico from the pre-Columbian Epoch to 1823 (Western Printing Company, 1938).

[33] Warrant for the Arrest of Noah Barnes, PVMA Counterfeiting Files.

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[35] PVMA Counterfeiting Files.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

- [40] Youme Yai, *False, Forge, and Counterfeit* (Historic Deerfield Summer Fellowship Program, 2006), 9.
- [41] Sheldon, *History of Deerfield*, 767.
- [42] *Deerfield Family Files: Goff, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Manuscript Collection*, Deerfield, MA.
- [43] Jenkins, *Conservative Rebel*, 44.
- [44] PVMA Counterfeiting Files.
- [45] Sheldon, *History of Deerfield*, 767.
- [46] PVMA Counterfeiting Files.
- [47] Yai, *False, Forge, and Counterfeit*, 7.
- [48] PVMA Counterfeiting Files.
- [49] Stephen Burroughs, *Memoirs of the Notorious Stephen Burroughs of New Hampshire* (New York: Dial Press, 1926), 81-84.
- [50] Scott, *Counterfeiting*, 263.
- [51] Sheldon, *History of Deerfield*, 761.
- [52] A silver cream pot made by Samuel Casey between 1745 and 1760 is in the collection of Historic Deerfield (Accession Number: HD 97.6.5). (Scott, 229.)
- [53] The Rhode Island Furniture Archive at the Yale University Art Gallery, "Samuel Casey, 1723-1773," <http://rifa.art.yale.edu/detail.htm?id=486&type=1> [Accessed 22 July 2012].
- [54] Casey was brought before the Courts of Common Pleas in Newport County and in Providence County for failure to pay debts several times between 1765-1768. (Ibid.)
- [55] Scott, *Counterfeiting*, 230.
- [56] Howe was imprisoned in Springfield for counterfeiting and was likely one of a group of prisoners who "undermined the Springfield jail and then escaped through a tunnel on the night of 15 November 1766." (Ibid., 225 and 228.)
- [57] Rhode Island Furniture Archive at the Yale University Art Gallery.
- [58] *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*, Volume VI (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1899), 536. There is some evidence that Goff also served in the War of 1812, long after his days as a counterfeiter in Hampshire County.
- [59] Jenkins, *Conservative Rebel*, 44.
- [60] Ibid., 44.
- [61] Ibid., 44.
- [62] Ibid., 44.
- [63] Ibid., 44.
- [64] Ibid., 44.
- [65] PVMA Counterfeiting Files.
- [66] Goff would also go on to be a veteran of the War of 1812.
- [67] Scott, *Counterfeiting*, 219.
- [68] Suffolk County Supreme Judicial Court, "The Deposition of Aaron Parsons of Springfield in the County of Hampshire," *Docket Books 1773-1797*, Case 158980 (Massachusetts State

Archives, Boston) as cited in Richardson, *Essential Benefit*, 74-76.

[69] Richardson, *Essential Benefit*, 112.

[70] Quick Silver is more commonly known as Mercury

[71] Aqua fortis, a solution of nitric acid in water, used for dissolving silver

[72] Arsenic

[73] Sal ammoniac, the natural, mineralogical form of the chemical compound ammonium chloride

[74] Pearl ash, the fine white powder of potassium carbonate, made by baking potash in a kiln to remove impurities

[75] Crucible, a cup-shaped vessel used in the melting, refining, and assaying of precious metals

[76] Alum, a sulfate of aluminum containing potassium and used as a flux

[77] Arsenic

[78] Sal ammoniac, the natural, mineralogical form of the chemical compound ammonium chloride

[79] Pearl ash, the fine white powder of potassium carbonate, made by baking potash in a kiln to remove impurities

[80] Alum, a sulfate of aluminum containing potassium and used as a flux

[81] Aqua fortis, a solution of nitric acid in water, used for dissolving silver

[82] Mined salts that contain potassium in water-soluble form

[83] Chamber Lye is an archaic term for urine