

## Cheerleaders and Pirate Money

Written by Bob Turner  
Friday, 06 April 2012 09:12

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What do cheerleaders and pirate money have in common?

Remember the old cheer that goes, “two bit, four bits, six bits, a dollar! All for Brownwood, stand up and holler!” Of course, “two bits” is slang for 25 cents.

Well, some of North America’s earliest money was the Spanish 8 reales coin. These were about the size of our old silver Morgan and peace dollars and were worth 8 reales. However, they were commonly cut into four pieces, with each piece worth 2 reales. One fourth was two bits; two pieces were four bits, and three were six bits. At times, the two bit pieces were even cut into two again, making one bit. “Pieces of 8,” they were called. Does that ring any bells with you from pirate stories you’ve read?

The 8 reales coins of Spain were in circulation beginning in the 1400’s. They were a respected form of money around the world. These coins were an important part of commerce. During these early centuries, because they were so common, they were often part of a pirate’s haul from a raided ship. Ask a coin collector what pirate money is, and he should reply “the 8 reales coin.”

These coins are highly collectible, even cut into pieces of 8. They are readily available from major dealers and are not too expensive. Usually, when you read of a shipwreck being discovered with silver coins on board, those coins are 8 reales coin. Shoot, even today, pieces of 8 still wash up on the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico after storms and hurricanes!

Until 1857, the United States allowed coins from other countries—such as the 8 reales—to be legal tender. Starting a country from scratch, as our founding fathers did, meant there was no circulating coinage. It took nearly 70 years before there was enough circulating money to demonetize foreign coins. Our early years as a nation are quite an interesting topic in regards to coinage and currency!

And, don’t forget—coin collecting is a fascinating hobby. Learn more about it at one of our meetings. The Brown County Coin Club meets on the second Tuesday of each month, at 6:30 pm, at the Family Center of the Austin Avenue Church of Christ. There’s probably at least one

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club member who shares an interest with you and would encourage you. Get involved in making your own unique coin collection!

We hope to see you on Tuesday, May 8 for our next meeting. Call Bill Cooper at 325-642-2128 or me (Bob Turner) at 325-217-4129 for more information.