

NJS Presents***Museums, Archives, Artifacts, and Documents*****In This Issue:*****Joseph Bonaparte and the Jersey Devil: A Numismatic Odyssey*****By Richard Veit****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v7i1.229>**

Archaeological excavations at Cedar Bridge Tavern in Barnegat, New Jersey resulted in the recovery of a four reale coin minted by Joseph Bonaparte while King of Spain. This article examines the coin in its historical context, with particular emphasis on a legendary encounter between Bonaparte and the Jersey Devil.

Although the general public believes that archaeologists spend much of their time searching for lost treasures; the treasures we seek are not coins or jewels but information about past societies. Indeed, coins are relatively infrequent finds on archaeological sites, especially compared to fragments of ceramic vessels and shards of broken glass. This brief article describes and interprets a silver coin of Joseph Bonaparte, former King of Naples (1806-1808) and later Spain (1808-1813), discovered during an archaeological excavation at Cedar Bridge Tavern in Barnegat, New Jersey, in its historical and cultural contexts. The coin reveals much about trade, travel, and the folklore of New Jersey's storied Pine Barrens.

Joseph Bonaparte is a significant historical figure, though overshadowed by his legendary younger brother Napoleon. Joseph was born in Corsica on January 7, 1768. He was the first child of Count Carlo de Buonoparte and Letizia Buonoparte to survive infancy. His brother Napoleon was born the following year. In short order, several other siblings followed: Lucien, Elisa, Louis, Pauline, Caroline, and Jérôme. Joseph studied law and would marry Julie Clary, the daughter of

millionaire merchant and soapmaker Francois Clary.¹ Together Julie and Joseph had two daughters, Zenaide and Charlotte. Before his brother Napoleon's rise to fame, Joseph supported himself primarily through law, though he also acted as a merchant.² He was also a man of letters and wrote a successful novel.³ Respected for his legal acumen and diplomatic skills, during the earliest phase of the French Revolution he served on the Council of the Five Hundred. A successful diplomat, he helped negotiate an end to the Quasi War with France in 1803.⁴

During Napoleon's meteoric rise to power, Joseph was made King of Naples. He served in this position from 1806-1808. He was warmly received by the Neapolitans and reformed the Kingdom's archaic government. He is remembered for having improved roads, built schools, and completing a topographic survey of the Kingdom.⁵ He also built new fortresses and reformed both the justice and the prison systems. Overall, he was considered a progressive, enlightened, and successful monarch.⁶

In 1808, Napoleon removed Joseph as King of Naples and made him King of Spain. However, Joseph was reluctant to take on this new duty. He found Spain very hard to govern and was beset with guerilla warfare almost from his arrival. He ruled as King of Spain and the Indies from June 6, 1808 until December 11, 1813. Joseph's reign in Spain was troubled. Never fully accepted by his subjects, he faced internal insurrections, and his brother's criticism. Then, in 1809, the Duke of Wellington with an army of 70,000 English and Portuguese troops invaded the country. At the Battle of Vittoria in 1813, Joseph's army was overwhelmed by Wellington's forces

¹ Owen Connelly, *The Gentle Bonaparte: The Story of Napoleon's Older Brother* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 27.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴ Patricia Tyson Stroud, *The Man Who Had Been King: The American Exile of Napoleon's Brother Joseph* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 9.

⁵ Michael Ross, *The Reluctant King: Joseph Bonaparte King of the Two Sicilies and Spain* (New York: Mason/Charter, 1977), 127.

⁶ John S. C. Abbott, *History of Joseph Bonaparte, King of Naples and Spain* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1869), 93-134.

and he fled to France. Napoleon's forces soon collapsed, and he was sent into exile on the Island of Elba, while Joseph retired to his country estate Prangins, on the shores of Lake Geneva. In 1815, Napoleon returned from exile during what is known as the Hundred Days. After his defeat at Waterloo, he was exiled to St. Helena, a small island off the coast of Africa. There he would die, likely of stomach cancer, in 1821.

Joseph's story took a different turn. After Waterloo, he fled to America on the brig *Commerce*. In America, Joseph lived at the center of a significant community of French expatriates. A world leader, he was also an unofficial cultural attaché, who brought art and culture to the young American Republic. His art collection and library were among the largest in America and he supported a wide range of cultural and scientific organizations, including the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. Joseph split his time between a townhouse in Philadelphia, a grand country estate at Point Breeze in Bordentown, New Jersey, and a hunting lodge in upstate New York. He became a beloved member of Delaware Valley society and gained a reputation for his amorous adventures, fathering several children during his American sojourn.⁷ Joseph remained in exile until 1832, when he returned to Europe, hoping to support his nephew Napoleon II, the Duke of Reichstadt, in his political aspirations.⁸ However, while Joseph was in transit, the Duke died of tuberculosis. Prevented from visiting France, Joseph lived in London until 1835, when he returned to Point Breeze.⁹ His mother Madame Letizia's death the following year prompted another voyage to Europe to settle her estate. Following this travail, he returned again to Point Breeze, only to learn that his uncle Cardinal Fesch and his beloved daughter Charlotte had died in

⁷ Stroud, *The Man Who Had Been King*, 56.

⁸ Connelly, *The Gentle Bonaparte*, 279.

⁹ *Ibid*, 288.

1839. Joseph again returned to Europe, but now he appeared to be aged and unwell.¹⁰ He died in Florence in 1844, and was buried at the Hotel des Invalides in Paris near his famous young brother.

A larger than life figure, Joseph's activities were the focus of much gossip. Perhaps the most curious story recounts that during his American sojourn he went hunting in the Pine Barrens and encountered the Jersey Devil.¹¹ This reportedly occurred on a trip to Tuckerton, an important early shore resort in Ocean County. The main road from Philadelphia to Tuckerton crossed the Pine Barrens. At relatively regular intervals along the road, taverns were found which provided accommodation for travelers and a place to rest their horses. One of these was Cedar Bridge Tavern in Barnegat. Constructed in the late 18th century, it is purported to be the site of one of the last skirmishes of the American Revolution.¹² On his trip to Tuckerton, if Joseph took the most direct route, he would have passed Cedar Bridge Tavern. Folklore recounts that on his trip to the shore, Joseph had an encounter with a mythical beast, the Jersey Devil.

The Jersey Devil is a fictional creature purported to live in the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey. Both the Pine Barrens and the Jersey Devil have accumulated a rich store of folklore. The Pine Barrens is a roughly 1.1-million-acre area of southern New Jersey, formally designated as the Pinelands National Reserve, and consisting of an enormous stretch of scrub pine forest.¹³ It was once home to substantial iron, glass, and paper making communities, but now is largely deindustrialized. Recognized as a National Heritage Preserve, it is a unique ecosystem and the largest natural area in the Boston-Washington megalopolis. The Pine Barrens have long been the

¹⁰ Ross, *The Reluctant King*, 273.

¹¹ Henry C. Beck, *Jersey Genesis: The Story of the Mullica River* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1936), 246; S. E. Schlosser, *Spooky New Jersey: Tales of Hauntings, Strange Happenings, and Other Local Lore* (Guilford, Connecticut: Globe Pequot Press, 2016), 150-162.

¹² Karen F. Riley, *The Pine Barrens of New Jersey* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 106.

¹³ Riley, *The Pine Barrens of New Jersey*, 9.

focus of journalistic, folkloric, and scholarly studies.¹⁴ The Jersey Devil is its most famous fictional denizen.

Stories of the Jersey Devil vary, and the version presented here is an amalgam of the most common. A woman known as mother Leeds, living near present-day Leeds Point, had given birth to twelve children and was about to deliver her 13th. The delivery was challenging and mother Leeds, frustrated and in great pain, said that the devil could take this child. When the infant was finally delivered, it proved to be a beautiful baby boy. However, in the presence of the horrified onlookers, it underwent a transformation, growing hooved feet, a horse-like head, bat-like wings, and claws. Then, making a terrible sound it flew around the Leeds cottage before escaping out the chimney, only to return at irregular intervals to the great terror of the region's inhabitants.¹⁵ Apparently quite long lived, the Leeds Devil or Jersey Devil as it is more commonly known, appeared and reappeared through the 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁶ Historians and folklorists have documented its avian adventures, which are recounted in numerous newspaper articles. In 1909, it seems to have come out of hibernation. A series of sightings occurred in South Jersey and Philadelphia. Hoof prints were found on the roofs of numerous buildings and a captured Jersey Devil, apparently a kangaroo painted with stripes and wearing fake wings, was displayed by an unscrupulous Philadelphia businessman.¹⁷ Today, New Jersey's professional hockey team the Devils celebrates this mysterious denizen of the Pine Barrens and popular magazines like *Weird New Jersey* regularly carry articles about his exploits.¹⁸

¹⁴ Beck, *Jersey Genesis*, 246; John McPhee, *The Pine Barrens* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1967); Rita Moonsammy, David Steven Cohen, and Lorraine Williams editors, *Pinelands Folklife* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ James F. McCloy and Ray Miller, *The Jersey Devil*. (Wallingford, P.A.: Middle Atlantic Press, 1976), 24-25.

¹⁶ Schlosser, *Spooky New Jersey*, 150-163.

¹⁷ McCloy and Miller, *The Jersey Devil*, 73-84.

¹⁸ *Weird New Jersey*, The Jersey Devil, accessed December 24, 2020, <https://weirdnj.com/stories/jersey-devil/>.

More recently scholars have deployed logic, critical thinking, and science to better understand the creature. Some have argued that the Jersey Devil is actually a Sand Hill Crane, a magnificent bird with a five-foot wingspan that makes a terrible caw. In what is arguably the most detailed investigation of the fabled creature, historians Brian Regal and Frank Esposito have proposed that the Jersey Devil is actually an invention of Benjamin Franklin, promulgated in order to disparage Daniel Leeds, his competitor in the cutthroat 18th-century business of publishing almanacs.¹⁹ Curiously, the Leeds family's crest is a winged griffin.

The folkloric Jersey Devil, the famous émigré Joseph Bonaparte, and Cedar Bridge Tavern are linked by the archaeological excavation of a countermarked four *real* coin of Joseph Bonaparte. Cedar Bridge Tavern in Barnegat, New Jersey is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places under Criteria C and D as “A well-preserved example of an early 19th-century tavern,” and because “the archaeological deposits present on the site have the ability to provide information on 19th-century farmsteads, taverns, consumerism, entertainment, Native American lifeways, and foodways in the New Jersey Pinelands region.”²⁰ Constructed in the 18th century, it was expanded in the early 19th century, and served as a tavern on the main road from Philadelphia to Tuckerton. It was transferred from its last private owner, Rudolph Koenig, to Ocean County in 2012.²¹ As part of a major restoration and interpretation project, extensive archaeological excavations were carried out on the property. These excavations included Monmouth University archaeological field schools in 2010 and 2014,²² an informal metal-detector survey for the National

¹⁹ Brian Regal and Frank Esposito, *The Secret History of the Jersey Devil: How Quakers, Hucksters, and Benjamin Franklin Created a Monster* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2018).

²⁰ Joan Berkey, Cedar Bridge Tavern National Register Nomination, Barnegat, Ocean County, New Jersey, 2013, NRIS Reference Number: 13000586, pp. 7, accessed December 24, 2020, https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/R_A_13000586.pdf.

²¹ Berkey, Cedar Bridge Tavern, 10.

²² Michael J. Gall and Brock Giordano Phase I and Extended Phase I Archaeological Investigation, Cedar Bridge Tavern (28-Oc-162), 200 Old Halfway Road, Block 51, Lot 4.02, Barnegat Township, Ocean County, New Jersey. (Report prepared for Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Toms River, New Jersey, 2011); Richard F.

Geographic television program “Diggers” on October 9 and 10, 2012,²³ and professional CRM excavations by Richard Grubb and Associates in 2014, 2015, and 2017.²⁴ The archaeological excavations revealed rich 19th-century deposits associated with the tavern’s occupation and numerous features including a 19th-century outkitchen, a 20th-century privy, two wells, a range of outbuildings, and an earthfast 18th-century building.

During the 2017 excavations a 2.0 by 2.8 foot-wide excavation unit (EU 25) was placed abutting the foundation of the tavern roughly 8.0 feet east of the front door in the oldest section of the building. The EU was excavated to further investigate an artifact-rich refuse pit identified in EU 23. The stratigraphy consisted of four fill deposits.²⁵ From these four deposits a total of 82 artifacts were recovered.²⁶ In Fill II, a mixed deposit containing 18th- and 19th-century material, the coin was recovered.

The coin is a Spanish four *reales*²⁷ minted in 1809 which bears the profile of Joseph Bonaparte. Joseph had minted coins as King of Naples and Sicily, or the two Sicilies as it was called, and later as King of Spain. In Sicily, he minted coins in 1806, 1807, and 1808 including silver 120-*Grana* coins. In Spain, he instituted major monetary reforms. “Prior to this period, Spain had a debased coinage, known as the *vellón* (an alloy of silver and copper), which was a

Veit, Sean McHugh, Andrew Martin, Jamie Ancheta, and Evan Mydlowski, Cedar Bridge Tavern, 28-OC-162, Block 51, Lot 4.02, 200 Old Halfway Road, Barnegat Township, Ocean County, New Jersey. (Report prepared by Monmouth University, West Long Branch, New Jersey for Ocean County Parks and Recreation, Toms River, New Jersey, 2015).

²³ Personal Communication, Timothy Hart, August 16, 2016.

²⁴ Adam R. Heinrich and Michael J. Gall, Stage I Cultural Resources Survey, Improvements to the Cedar Bridge Tavern (28-OC-162), Barnegat Township, Ocean County, New Jersey. (Report prepared by RGA, Inc., Cranbury, New Jersey for Historic Building Architects, LLC, Trenton, New Jersey, 2015); Adam R. Heinrich and Michael J. Gall, Stage III Cultural Resources Survey/ Phase III Archaeological Data Recovery, Improvements to the Cedar Bridge Tavern (28-OC-162), Barnegat Township, Ocean County, New Jersey, 2016); Michael J. Gall, Supplemental Phase I Archaeological Investigation Front Porch Area Cedar Bridge Tavern (28-OC-162) July 21, 2017. (Report prepared by RGA, Inc., Cranbury, New Jersey for Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Toms River, New Jersey, 2017).

²⁵ Gall, Supplemental Phase I Archaeological Investigation, 21.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Numismatists use the terms “reales” and “reals” interchangeably when referring to these coins.

continuing source of confusion in Spanish finance.”²⁸ Under Joseph’s reforms, coins were minted in 1, 2, 4, 8, 10, and 20 *reales* denominations. These coins were 90% silver. Eighty, 160, and 320 *real* coins were minted from 21 karat gold. The coins were minted in Seville and Madrid and were meant to circulate in Spain.

The obverse of Joseph’s Spanish coins featured his bust facing left. The date was also displayed as was the legend, “JOSEPH. NAP. DEI. GRATIA” a Latin phrase meaning “Joseph Napoleon, by the grace of God.” The coin’s reverse displays the arms of Spain flanked by the denomination on the left and “R” on the right denoting *reales*. As noted by Bonaparte historian, Peter Tucci:

The Spanish coat of arms is comprised of the arms of the six kingdoms which comprised Spain: (1) Castile; (2) Leon; (3) Aragon; (4) Navarra; (5) Granada; and (6) the Indies (the old and the new world are depicted as between the Pillars of Hercules). King Joseph replaced the Bourbon escutcheon containing fleurs-de-lis located in the center with an escutcheon depicting the French Imperial Eagle. Around the edge of the coin is the legend “HISPANIARUM ET IND. REX. M.A.I.” which is a Latin phrase meaning “King of Spain and the Indies.”²⁹

Although obscured on the Cedar Bridge specimen, Bonaparte’s coins also featured mintmarks and assay marks, indicating where the coins were struck, and the initials of the assayers who were responsible for ensuring that the coin met established standards for size and weight. Although unclear on the current specimen, it seems likely that the mintmark was “M” signifying Madrid, Spain and the initials “A.I.” are for the assayers Antonio Rafael Narváez and Isidoro Ramos del Manzano, who worked together 1808-1812.³⁰ Assayers played a critical role in assuming the quality, weight, and purity of the precious metal in the coin. The silver coin is heavily worn and somewhat corroded. Its numismatic grade would be fair to good.

²⁸ Personal communication, Peter Tucci, 2020.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

The coin also bears a counterstamp. Counterstamps have been used since Roman times to indicate a change in the value of a coin or to legitimize coins during political regime changes. The countermark on the Spanish four *reales* appears to be a grill or lattice, also called a *rejilla*, with a single central star. This design is associated with coins minted in Spain that circulated in the Americas, and particularly the Caribbean. In 1842, this countermark was specified for Spanish coins introduced into Cuba from Spain which weighed less than similar coins minted at Spanish mints in the Americas.³¹ The grill mark indicated that they were indeed legitimate coins minted in Spain and could circulate at face value. However, there is some evidence that the mark was used even earlier. Foreign coins circulated as legal tender in the United States from 1793 until 1857, with some interregna and exceptions.³² During this period, the United States was beset by a lack of hard currency and Spanish silver coins were particularly sought after.³³

This countermarked Spanish coin of Joseph Bonaparte reflects his brief and troubled reign as King of Spain. At some point, possibly 1841, it was countermarked and likely circulated in the Caribbean. Used in New Jersey, it was lost at Cedar Bridge Tavern, a hostelry on a route almost certainly employed by Joseph as he went gunning in Tuckerton. It was on one of these excursions that Joseph, according to local folklore, chanced to meet that most famous of all local denizens, the Jersey Devil.³⁴ While the countermark's likely date, 1841, makes it unlikely that Joseph lost this coin, Cedar Bridge Tavern was an early rest stop on a major road across the mysterious and lightly populated Pine Barrens. It was frequented by travelers.

³¹ Numista, 4 Reales Countermark on Spanish - Madrid Proclamation medal of Charles IV. Accessed August 25, 2020, <https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces109077.html>.

³² Kenneth H. Gossard, *Thalers and Pence: Foreign Coins in America. 1607-1857*. Kenneth Gossard, Privately Printed, 2019), 74.

³³ Gossard, *Thalers and Pence*, 76.

³⁴ S. E. Schlosser, Joseph Bonaparte and the Jersey Devil, Access August 25, 2020, https://americanfolklore.net/folklore/2010/07/joseph_bonaparte_and_the_jerse.html.

Later, Constantine Rafinesque, a prominent French naturalist, and the “translator” of the *Walum Olum*, a purported record of Delaware Indian migrations,³⁵ visited the site. According to his diary, in 1833, “Rafinesque took a 15-day tour through New Jersey to the sea. At some point during his journey, he visited Cedar Bridge ‘to botanize and found many plants.’”³⁶

While the circumstances of its loss remain enigmatic, the coin remains as a reminder of Joseph’s brief reign as King of Spain, his time as an émigré in New Jersey, who became a storied member of local society and saw all the sights, both real and fictional, and even came to be associated with an even more legendary local resident. It also speaks to issues of world trade and currency issues in early 19th century America, when foreign coins of various qualities circulated alongside coins minted in the United States. Finally, this worn and corroded four *reales* coin associated with a long forgotten king, stands as a reminder of what historical archaeologist Jim Deetz wrote so long ago. It is from these “small things forgotten” that we, as archaeologists, are able to enliven and interpret the past.³⁷

(scroll for images)

³⁵ David M. Oestereicher, Unmasking the Walum Olum: A 19th-Century Hoax. *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey*, 1994 49:1-44.

³⁶ Rafinesque 1836 in Gall, Supplemental Phase I Archaeological Investigation, 21.

³⁷ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, (New York: Doubleday).

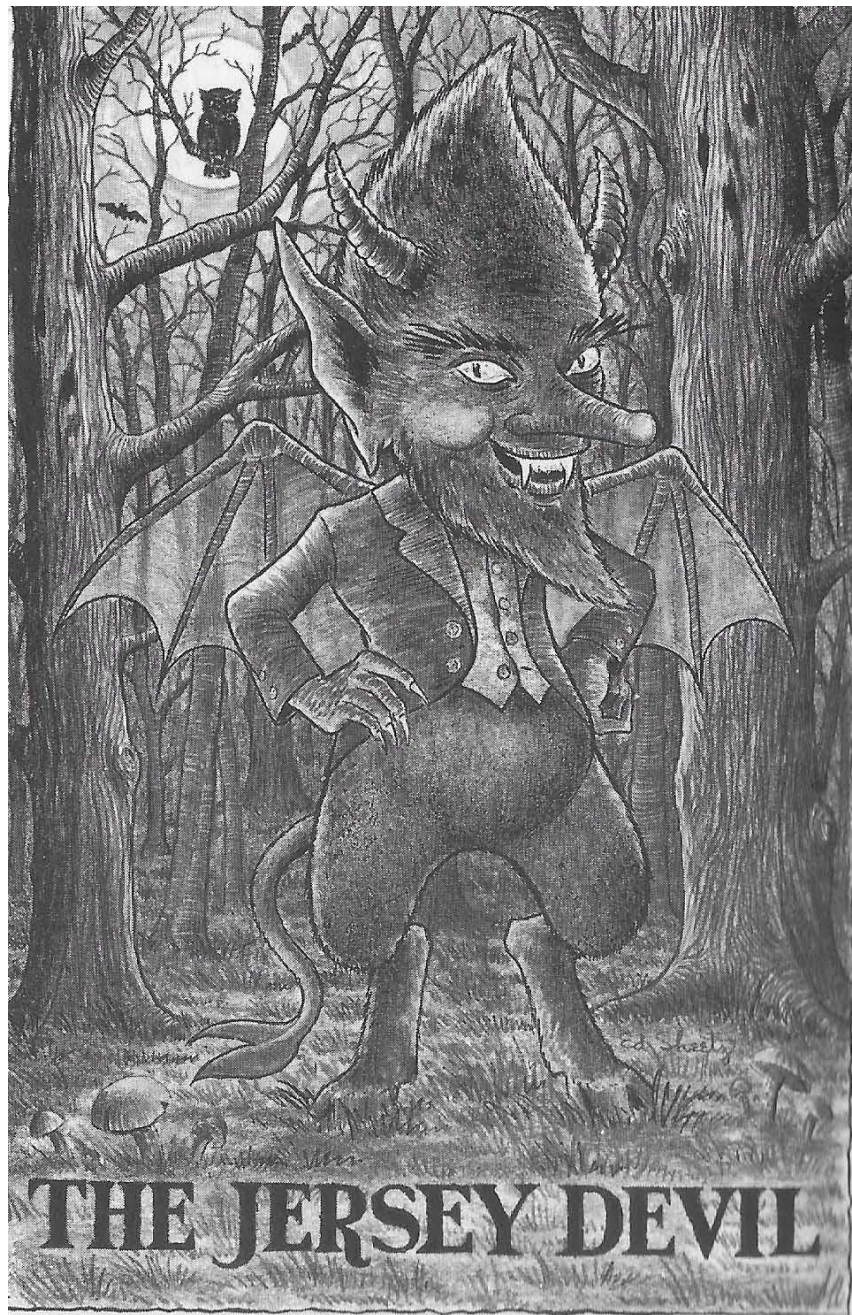


Joseph Bonaparte as King of Spain by François Gérard, c. 1810, Musée National de Château de Fontainebleau.³⁸ Here he is depicted in his royal robes. The painting is by his court painter Jacques Louis David.

³⁸ Stroud, *The Man who had been King*, 2005.

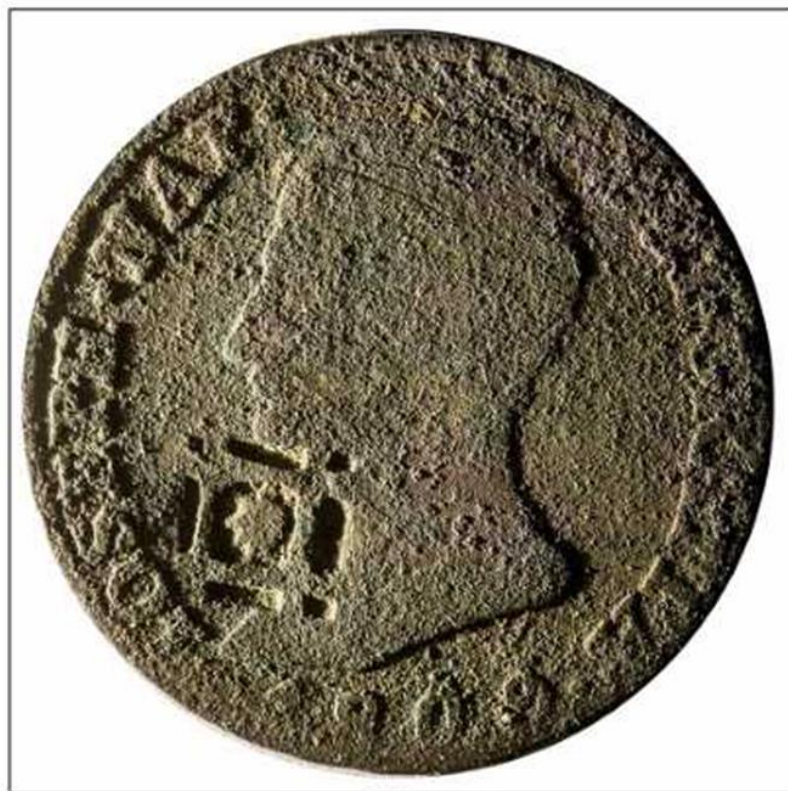


Cedar Bridge Tavern post restoration. Courtesy Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission. The feature from which the coin was recovered was on the side of the building facing the reader.

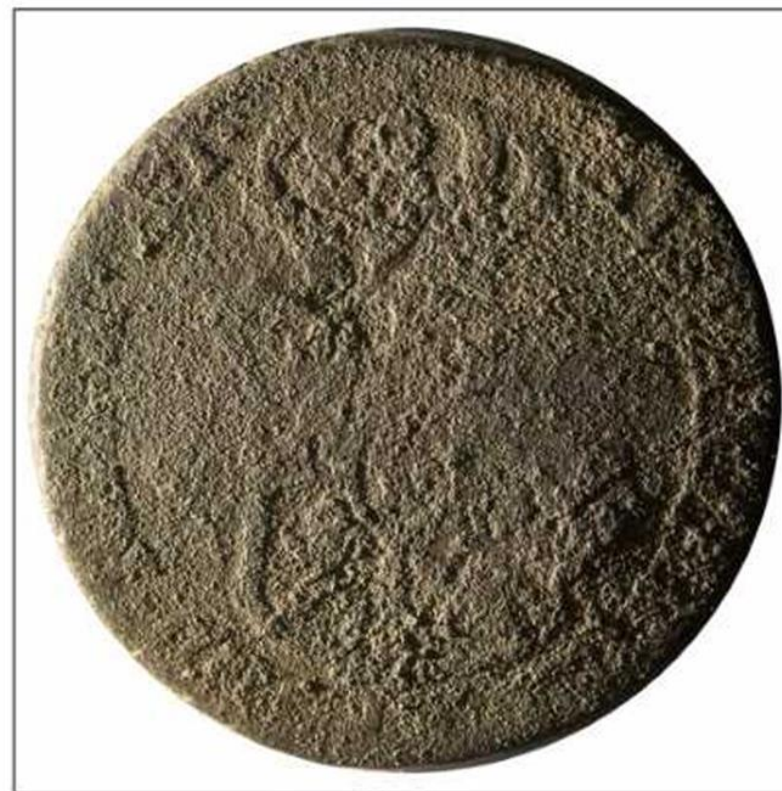


The Jersey Devil as depicted by artist Ed Sheetz. This is likely the most widely distributed lines of the Jersey Devil.³⁹ Here he appears to be a dapper bearded 18th-century Devil, complete with waistcoat.

³⁹ McCloy and Miller, *The Jersey Devil*, 72.



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The Spanish four *real* recovered from Cedar Bridge Tavern. Note the countermark on the obverse. Collections of the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

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