

Presbyterian Heritage Sunday

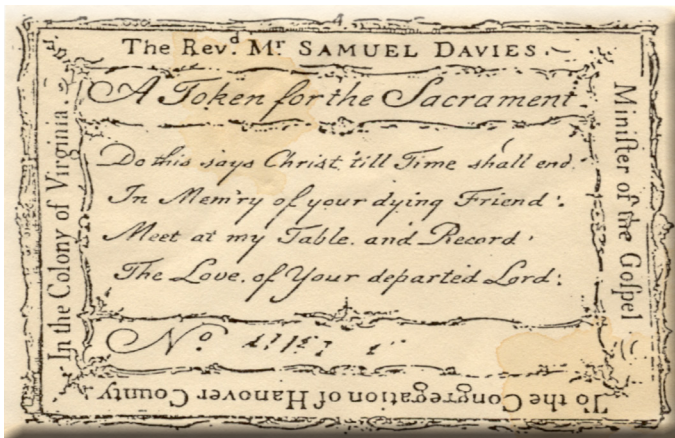
May 26, 2013

Communion Tokens

Communion tokens were a familiar feature of Presbyterian worship in past centuries. The practice was brought to colonial America from Scotland. Most colonial congregations celebrated the Lord's Supper once or twice a year. A day or more before the communion service, the pastor and elders questioned the members of their congregation about their beliefs and behavior. Only those who showed adequate knowledge of the faith and were deemed to be living upright lives received tokens. During the communion service, communicants came forward and sat at long tables where they turned in their tokens and received the elements.



A Communion Gathering in the Olden Time.



Most tokens were cast or stamped out of lead or pewter, but other materials were used including printed paper, ceramic, and wood. Tokens of the 1700s tended to be plain – even crude – and were marked with the initials of the church or the pastor. An exception is the card token used by Reverend Samuel Davies in his Virginia congregations, one of the few known paper tokens of that era. In the 1800s some churches adopted more elaborate designs, including Biblical references and symbols.

In the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the use of tokens began to decline after 1825. By 1860 most congregations no longer used them. More conservative denominations – such as the United Presbyterian Church of North America and Reformed Presbyterians – often used tokens into the late 1800s and early 1900s. In recent decades many churches have minted tokens as souvenirs for special celebrations and anniversary observances.



The Presbyterian Historical Society provides resources for Heritage Sunday, a day set aside by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to celebrate and learn more about the rich history of Presbyterianism in America.

Visit our website www.history.pcusa.org where additional information and resources are available.