

Lever Potato Chips Ltd. Coin Cards

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Lever Potato Chips Ltd. was a small family-owned business in St. Catharines, Ontario, started in 1953 by Norman Lever. Lever developed the recipes and also designed the manufacturing equipment.

The company offered promotional items with its chips: pencils, money clips, moving majorette pens, rain bonnets, and one item of particular interest to numismatists: a series of cards about Canadian coins and paper money.

Each 2¼" x 3¼" wax coated orange pasteboard card is numbered and highlights a different coin, token or banknote chosen for its numismatic importance. The front includes an approximate value, and the name and address of James Charlton's Canada Coin Exchange. The back discusses the coin on the front, and has Lever Potato Chips' logo: a majorette and the slogan, "Out in Front."

A set of cards may comprise 60 pieces. More than one printing of the series is evident, revealed by variations in the printing on the cards.

Some card backs say "COIN CARDS – an easy reference to fun and profit" and others, "SERIES 'A' 100 COIN CARDS." There doesn't appear to have been a series "B."

The St. Catharines Standard newspaper (www.scstandard.com) ran a feature article on Lever Potato Chips Ltd. and the bags where the orange coin cards are found. According to

Christine Lever, the daughter of Lever Potato Chips inventor Norman Lever:

"The business started off as a mom-and-pop operation in the garage at the family's home... with conveyor belts set up around the cars. Women [culled] imperfect chips [to] be sent [by] conveyor belt, boxed up and placed outside the company's Grote St. door for anyone to pick up free of charge. Lever remembers people pulling up to the building and packing their cars with the complementary chips.

The chips came in [several] flavours [packed] in 10-cent bags or one pound tins. They were distributed as far as Sudbury.

[Bags advertised] "Lever's Potato Chips are made fresh daily in St. Catharines employing a modern processing method which extracts more of the starch and are cooked in pure vegetable oil, making them a nutritious and delicious food product. Packed in moisture-proof bags for your protection."

Lever remembers kids breaking those bags open sideways and, after finishing off the chips, wearing the bags as hats.

Norman Lever eventually sold the company in 1967 to Granny Goose, a division of Del Monte. The chip company closed in 1969. He died in 1992.



Christine Lever said she was proud to grow up in the potato chip family. "My father wanted to promote his product to make it the best it could be for the community. He was a very kind, caring, gentle man. And he was a snacker, of course, trying out different foods on family trips. His love for snack foods is how it started."

Over time Mr. Charlton received 11 separate cards in the mail, along with the coin each showed, which he purchased. London Coin and Collectables once owned a framed grouping of 60 cards. Card 7 was repeated in the spot where card 44 belonged. Both card 7s are from series A, one features the

1945 dollar; the other the 1948 50-cent piece. (See all at www.gosling.ca/lever)

Trading cards have a long history as merchandise premiums. But trading cards coming with potato chips seem unusual and even more so because these traders are different from most: they show important Canadian numismatic items and offer detailed information written for serious collectors of such material.

Did Norman Lever hope to turn chip lovers into numismatists, or numismatists into chip lovers? Likely neither. Lever must have had an admiration for Canadian coins and a desire to share his enthusiasm with his like-minded customers.

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