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Gold Coins
of the Transvaal

HISTORIC GOLD COINS

of the Transvaal Republic

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AT THE TIME OF THE GREAT TREK, and in the early days of the young Transvaal and Orange Free State republics, the Voortrekkers had little need for money. Their books were still kept in rix-dollars. Such coins as they had were those then in use at the Cape – the sovereigns, half-crowns, shillings, and pennies of England. By the 1860's "blue-back" notes, card "good fors", and privately issued traders' tokens in the sterling system began to make their appearance in Bloemfontein, Potchefstroom, and Pretoria, but commercial activity was still very limited.

Then, in 1873, came the momentous discovery of alluvial gold at Pilgrims' Rest in the Lydenberg district of the North-Eastern Transvaal. T. F. Burgers, State President of the South African Republic, hurried to make an official tour of the new goldfield. He was impressed by what he saw, and was convinced that a new era of wealth and prosperity was dawning for his country.

Burgers's "Staatspond"

Here, he thought, is the opportunity for the Transvaal to establish its own domestic currency – a move which he felt would not only improve the economy of the country but also foster a spirit of unity and nationhood amongst its people. On his own initiative he bought some 300 ounces of nuggets and gold-dust, and sent instructions post-haste to Mr. J. J. Pratt the Transvaal Consul-General in London to have gold coins struck "of the value of the English sovereign". If possible, the coins were to be ready for the next session of the Volksraad scheduled for May, 1874.

Pratt encountered many problems and failed to meet the President's deadline. He persevered, however, and eventually 837 of these Burgers "Staatsponden" (I)

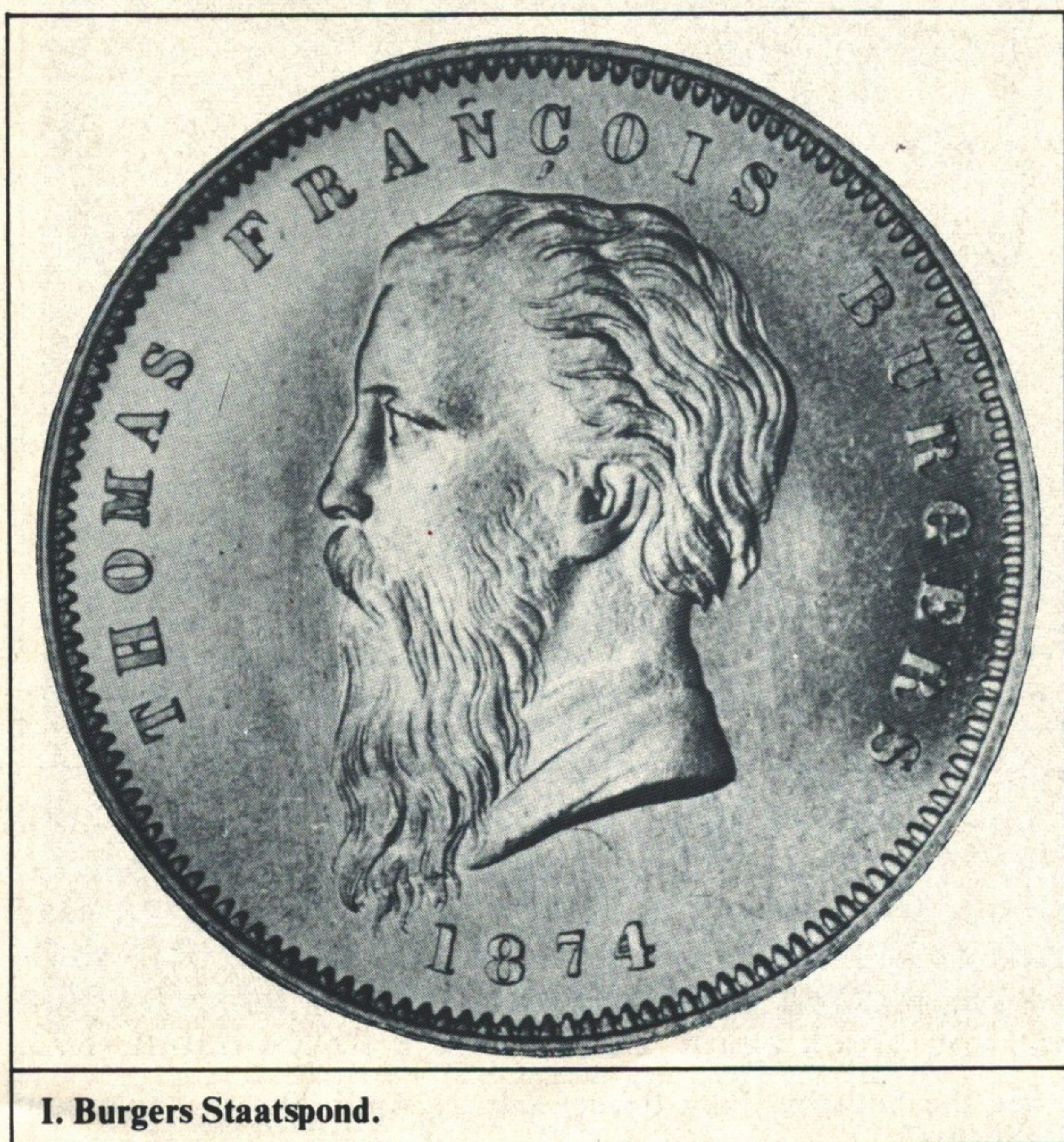
were manufactured by Heaton and Sons of Birmingham, using two slightly different obverse dies which had been engraved by L. C. Wyon, engraver at the Royal Mint. At last, on 22 September, 1874, Burgers was able to hand fifty pounds in Transvaal gold coin to the chairman of the Volksraad and to seek a formal resolution that they should be declared legal tender. To his surprise he faced a storm of criticism, particularly because he had allowed his own likeness to appear on the coins. Only after a long and acrimonious debate was a resolution eventually passed declaring these *Staatsponden* legal tender. Burgers had intended to introduce a full series of coins and is believed to have made preliminary arrangements for the establishment of a mint at Pretoria, but he was discouraged and did not pursue his plans.

The Burgers Staatspond has pride of place in the eyes of every South African numismatist. It was the first coin ever struck for a South African Government. It was made from some of the first gold ever found in the country which was to become the world's richest source of this precious metal. And it has the additional attraction of rarity. Of the small number of 837 originally struck, many have disappeared. Of those that remain the majority have been spoilt and worn by mounting as brooch or watch-chain ornament. Only a very few of the so-called "fine beard" variety, and fewer still of the even rarer "coarse-beards" remain in their pristine state to grace the cabinets of fastidious collectors.

The discovery of reef gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 led to accelerated economic expansion, and revived the idea of a domestic coinage for the Transvaal. In 1890, as a condition of its Concession from the Government, the "National Bank of the South African Republic" undertook to establish a Mint in Pretoria and to manufacture coins for the Government. The foundation-stone of this Mint, which was built on the site of the present General Post Office building in Church Square, Pretoria, was laid by President Kruger on 6 July, 1892 (II). Arrangements had already been made for minting machinery, trained staff, and coinage dies to be imported from Germany. Kruger was impatient, however, to get his coins into circulation before his imminent election campaign. He had therefore arranged for a preliminary consignment of the new coins dated 1892 to be struck at the Royal Prussian Mint in Berlin. For the obverse the engraver, Otto Schultz, produced dies showing the bust of Kruger, facing left. The full series was to consist of the pond and half-pond in gold; 5 shillings, 2½ shillings, 2 shillings, 1 shilling, sixpence, and threepence in silver; and the penny in bronze.

The "Double-Shaft" Controversy

Quickly the first batch of gold coins and five-shilling pieces arrived in Pretoria and were put into circulation. Immediately a storm broke. As model for the Voortrekker waggon in the central shield of the Transvaal coat of arms on the reverse (with the National motto "Eendragt maakt magt") the German designer had used a German waggon, with two shafts and with



I. Burgers Staatspond.

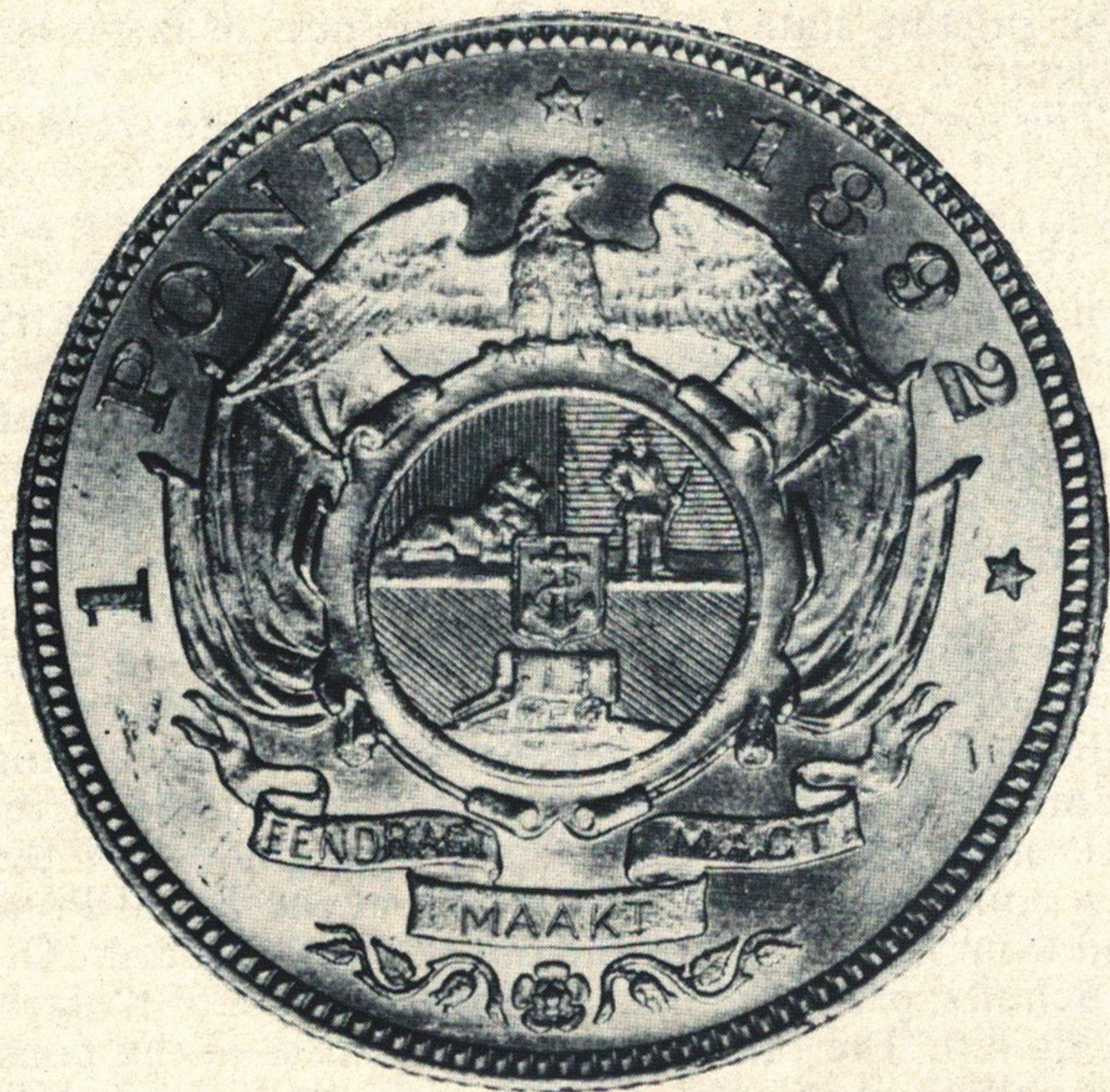
II. The Mint of the South African Republic, with (insert) the reverse of a silver medallion commemorating the completion of the Pretoria - Delagoa Bay railway - "the lifeline of the Transvaal". Many lives were lost through malaria during its construction. The obverse of the commemorative medallion is the same as the half-crown piece and bears the head of President Kruger.



By courtesy of Barclay's National Bank, Ltd.

front and rear wheels of the same diameter (III) instead of the familiar single-shafted waggon of the Voortrekkers. The bitter presidential campaign of 1893 was under way, and Comdt.-Gen. Joubert's supporters were quick to take advantage of this trump card which had been placed so unexpectedly in their hands. In particular they seized on the fact that the designer's initials O.S., which had been placed in accordance with minting tradition on Kruger's bust on the obverse of the gold coin (IV), spelt the Dutch word for ox. Their candidate, they cried, would surely beat this "os" Kruger in the race for the Presidency!

later in the same year by coins struck at the Pretoria Mint. The erroneous double shaft is found only on coins dated 1892 and only in three denominations, the pound, half-pound and five-shilling. Strangely enough, the corrected single-shaft pound dated 1892 is considerably scarcer than its double-shafted predecessor, and only one example of the 1892 single-shaft half-pound - the so-called Menné half-pond* - has come to light. Presumably the election-time publicity caused the double-shaft "errors" to be put away as souvenirs, while the single-shafts were allowed to pass unnoticed into circulation.



III. A "double-shaft" Kruger Pound, (reverse) minted in Berlin.

Consternation reigned in the Kruger camp. Immediate orders were issued for the withdrawal of the coins, and instructions were passed to Berlin that new dies were to be prepared at once, showing the correct South African single-shafted tented waggon (V). Above all, the offending initials were to be removed. In the event, Kruger beat Joubert by a narrow margin; and in due course new coins bearing the corrected coat of arms arrived from Germany, to be followed



IV. The obverse of no. III, showing Otto Schultz, the engraver's initials, which, unfortunately for the Republicans, spell the Dutch word for "ox".

Operations at the Pretoria Mint continued until 1897. The two gold coins and the five silver pieces, from half-crown to threepence, were struck each year from 1892 to 1897. A corrected single-shaft five-shilling piece dated 1892 appeared, but this denomination was not struck again. Pennies were struck dated 1892,

* See the Sotheby, Park-Bernet sale of April 20th in "Saleroom Highlights".



V. The correct "single shaft" Krugger Pond (reverse).

1893 and 1894. The Mint was closed early in 1898, but was reopened when war clouds loomed at the end of September, 1899. At that stage it was decided to strike a considerable quantity of gold pounds, but because the 1899 dies had not arrived from Germany, dies which had been prepared for 1898 had to be used. Be-

tween October 1899 and the beginning of June 1900, when the Government evacuated Pretoria, almost a million gold pounds were struck, but all were dated either 1898 or 1900. A quantity of pennies, too, were minted, all dated 1898.

To mark the war-time reopening of the Mint and to record that it was operating in 1899, a Mint official was instructed to overstamp a few of the pounds. He took a tiny punch of the number "9" and struck "99" just under the bust on the obverse of 130 of the pounds dated 1898. These historic pieces are very valuable today.

During this period special permission was given to Samuel Marks, one of the financial giants of the early days of the Witwatersrand gold-fields and a friend of Kruger, to have some threepenny pieces ("tickeys") struck in gold. Dies dated 1898 for the complete series of Transvaal coins had previously been received from Germany but not used. The obverse and reverse dies for the silver threepence were taken out of stock and 215 of what are known as "Sammy Marks tickey" dated 1898 were struck in gold for Marks. They were not, of course, legal tender and did not circulate, but are rare and interesting pattern coins. (Pattern strikings in gold of the half-crown and sixpence of 1892 and of the tickey of 1894 are also known to exist. Their origin is obscure).

The planned programme for the production of Kruger pounds in 1900 had not yet been completed when the Transvaal Government evacuated Pretoria on 4 June 1900, ahead of the advancing British army. At the last minute trusted officials went to the Mint, and, in the name of the Government, removed all gold



By courtesy of the Africana Museum, Johannesburg.

VI. The Field Mint at Pilgrims' Rest. From l. to r. P. A. Kloppers, a Native, W. Reid, Veld-Cornet A. Pienaar, D. Graham.

and silver coins still in the Mint office. They also took the small amount of bar gold still in stock, and a quantity of unfinished gold coin blanks. Many of these blanks, some of which had a raised rim and some of which were plain discs, had concentric scraper markings;† all were, of course, of the correct weight of a Kruger pound. They therefore contained a pound's worth of gold, and were later used by the Government as money when supplies of properly minted coins became exhausted. They became known as "*kaal ponde*" ("bare pounds") and circulated to some extent in the Republican army.

The Z.A.R. "Veldmunt"



VII. A Z.A.R. Pond struck at the Field Mint (obverse).

The final chapter in the history of the coinage of the Transvaal belongs to the "*Z.A.R. veldpond*". 986 of these historic pieces were struck in romantic circumstances from hand-made dies at the "*Staatsmunt te Velde*" at Pilgrims' Rest (VI) in March and April, 1902, during the closing phase of the Boer war. Manufactured like the original Burgers pond from gold recovered at the local alluvial diggings, they bear on the

obverse the monogram Z.A.R. (Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek) and the date 1902 (VII), and on the reverse the value EEN POND (VIII). They were properly authorised and ordered by the Republican Government in the field and rank numismatically as "*siege pieces*". Their gold content is probably slightly in excess of their face value.

Soon after the striking of the Veld Pond came the Peace of Vereeniging. The Transvaal Republic passed into history; but it bequeathed to us a fascinating series of 23 gold coins which mirror much of that history – the two Burgers staatsponden of 1874; the double-shaft pound and half-pound of 1892; the 8 single-shaft pounds (1892-'98 and 1900) and 6 half-



VIII. The reverse of no. VII.

pounds (1892-'97); and "99" overstamp; the rimmed and rimless blanks; the Veld Pond of 1902; and the romantic Sammy Marks tickey.

Most if not all of these pieces were made from gold won from our own South African soil. They form a fascinating and priceless part of our cultural heritage.

†These can be seen in the centre of our front cover illustration.