
The MCA Advisory

The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America

Volume 10 Number 3

March 2007

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Dues: \$20.00/Year

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www.medalcollectors.org

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August 8-12, 2007--ANA Convention in Milwaukee

August 9, 2007--MCA meeting in Milwaukee at 3:00 p.m. Room 102

From the Editor

This issue is on the sparse side, to put it politely. The MCA Advisory is intended to be a vehicle for sharing ideas and experiences. Your editor seeks only a few contributions of scholarly value and, with the rest, wants members to share of themselves. Which of you has visited a useful museum? Which of you has acquired an exciting medal? Which of you has learned something that none of the rest of us knows? We are particularly disappointed in the silence of art medal collectors, classical medal collectors, mint medal fanatics and the Vernon crowd.

We recently purchased a medal from one of our famous auction firms that was described as struck but which, be it said, was a high quality cast. Clearly, quite a few of us are in need of instruction on telling the difference. Any volunteers?

Donated to the Club and now for Sale

(by John W. Adams)

Joseph Loubat's *Medallic History of the United States* was published in two sumptuous folio volumes in 1878. Volume I, which describes 187 medals, remains the definitive source on this corpus 130 years later. The author overestimated the demand such that the work remains readily available today. In the early 1970s, John Ford discovered a hoard of 140 sets being used to insulate a barn in Canada. With covers that are soiled and loose, the following are undoubtedly from the Canadian hoard. The interiors of the books, featuring well-registered printing on folio sheets of hand laid paper, are in fine condition.

- 1) First example, Volume I only \$150
 - 2) Second example, Volume I only \$150
 - 3) Third example, Volume I only \$150
- All proceeds to Medal Collectors of America.

More on the Libertas

(by John W. Adams)

In 2004, Lester C. Olson published *Benjamin Franklin's Vision of American Community*. Though unnoticed in numismatic channels, the book contains much of interest to medal collectors, most notably its 56 page chapter on the Libertas Americana.

With respect to the Libertas, Olson's focus is on communications: what Franklin intended to convey by the medal's design and how various categories of recipients reacted. The underlying research is painstaking: Olson draws on official records from a multiplicity of sources, extant correspondence of the principals and contemporary newspapers.

Much of the material falls outside a numismatist's normal purview. Collectors tend not to focus on the subtle interpretations of intent that are the essence of the author's work. However, collectors are keenly interested in the origins of a medal, both its design and the execution of that design. The author's treatment of this phase of Libertas is quite complete. All of the central characters are introduced. Franklin, L'académie des Belles Lettres, Théodore Brogniart, Esprit-Antoine Gibelin, Augustin Dupré and the Louvre Mint. Mr. Olson delved into the sources that would have revealed how many medals were made, but he fails to pursue this dimension of the project to a useful conclusion.

Serious medal collectors know that Franklin distributed the Libertas to influential persons on both sides of the Atlantic. The author describes in detail the warm response by recipients in France. Franklin had intended to use the medal to express gratitude to France and, in this, he succeeded mightily. Olson cites literally dozens of letters from French personages expressing gratitude to Franklin for the medal. Interpretations of the devices varied but the intent to flatter was perceived by all.

The distribution of the Libertas in the United States was similarly broad. It was sent to all members of Congress, all governors and assorted dignitaries. Franklin asked Congress for its official sanctioning of the medal, a response that was never given. We had long considered the omission as an oversight but Olson's thorough analysis suggests otherwise.

As early as March 4, 1782, Benjamin Franklin articulated his plan for the medal to Robert Livingston, then secretary for foreign affairs for Congress. Livingston responded that "I am charmed with your idea of a Medal . . ." ¹ when the medal was struck off, Franklin promptly sent Livingston a copy in bronze, a gift that was never acknowledged. On September 29, 1783, Livingston did write to the President of Congress, Elias Boudmot, expressing dissatisfaction with the design on several counts: "Hercules and the Serpents are too dimutive;" "the great contest seems to be between Minerva and her antagonist;" and, perhaps most important, "an important error in the history of this revolution, . . . [the design] keeps out of sight what we should most pride ourselves upon that the first serpent was strangled before France had armed in our defense."

Viewing the medal from the American perspective, these criticisms are understandable. Often accused of being a Francophile, Franklin was guilty in this case in that the celebration of two major American victories was obviously secondary to a desire on his part to flatter our important ally. Apparently, this somewhat parochial perspective was shared by many others on this side of the Atlantic. Whereas newspapers in the United States provided notice of the Libertas, Mr. Olson was not able to unearth any private expressions of praise for the medal or even a modest thank you for Franklin's generosity.

The elapsation of time has softened those initial reactions. Indeed, the Libertas

¹ Letter Livingston to Franklin dated May 30, 1782.

American has become wildly popular amongst collectors. Mr. Olson would simply note that it was not always thus.

Thomas Jefferson and the Comitia Americana medals: A Recollection (by David Menchell)

I recently came across an interesting item relating to the issuance of the first Congressional medals. In the January 17, 1820 issue of the Weekly Aurora newspaper published in Philadelphia appears this letter by Thomas Jefferson responding to the editor of the Pittsburgh Gazette:

Copy of a letter by Thomas Jefferson, late president of the United States, to the editor of the Pittsburgh Gazette dated-

Monticello, December 18, 1819

Sir-On receipt of your letter of the 10th instant, I turned to my papers respecting the medals given by congress to certain officers-they charged their minister of finance with procuring them, and he put the execution into the hands of colonel Humphreys, when he went to Paris as secretary of legation-but he returning before much progress was made, left the completion with me. I had them completed, and when I returned from France, in 1789, I had two complete sets, and delivered them to General Washington, the one in silver for himself, the others in gold or silver, as voted by congress, were for the officers, and delivered to Colonel Washington to be presented. That to Colonel Morgan was of gold-each die cost 2400 livres, and the gold for the medal was 400 livres as an additional charge. Congress had directed copies in silver to be presented to the different sovereigns of Europe and to the universities of that quarter<sic> and of our own; this part of the business being unfinished, was

left with Mr. Short, and finally, I believe, dropt. The dies were directed to be deposited in the office of Mr. Grand, banker of the United States, and, I think, they were afterwards directed to be sent here and deposited in the treasury office; but of this I am not sure. If they are not in our treasury they ought still to be in the office of Mr. Grand. The dies we consider as the property of the United States, and if not sent here, can, I imagine, be found by our minister at Paris, although Mr. Grand be dead long since, a Mr. Gautier succeeded in his house, but retired long since to Geneva, is still living as far as I know, and can give information on the subject. Perhaps Mr. Short of Philadelphia can also give information. This is the sum of my knowledge of the matter, which is tendered with assurance of my respect.

TH. JEFFERSON

M. Neville

The silver set Jefferson refers to is, of course, the set subsequently owned by Daniel Webster and currently residing at the Massachusetts Historical Society. There are a few obvious errors: Jefferson refers to Colonels Washington and Morgan, rather than General, their correct rank. This is particularly confusing in regard to Washington: General Washington received the two sets of medals, including his gold medal; Colonel William Washington was the recipient of a silver medal. Also, when Jefferson refers to two complete sets being delivered, it is not clear that this includes the medal awarded to Major Henry Lee. There is no evidence that the medal for Major Henry Lee was among the medals struck in Paris. Lee contacted then-Secretary of State Jefferson in 1789 regarding his outstanding medal. Subsequently, Joseph Wright was contracted to produce dies for the Lee medal. It is also interesting to note that it was intended that additional copies be made in silver. Although Jefferson states that the idea was never realized, there exist additional examples

of several these medals from the original dies struck in bronzed copper and silver. It is also interesting to note that the final disposition of the dies was not known to Jefferson, although the dies were paid for and considered by him to be the property of the United States, and were to be given to our representative in Paris. Only the dies for the Gates medal were brought to the Philadelphia Mint; several of the others (Obverse of the Washington Before Boston, William Washington, John Egar Howard) were used for producing restrikes well into the 19th century and were not relinquished by the Paris Mint.

David has extracted herewith a particularly pithy letter. Jefferson attempts to exculpate himself whereas it was he who allowed the dies to be scattered and it was he who failed to produce the 350 sets authorized by Congress. For the full and complete story, see COMITIA AMERICANA AND RELATED MEDALS coming (very) soon.—Ed.

The following article has very little to do with medals but, if it gets your children or grandchildren to collecting pennies, some number of these youngsters will grow up into medal collectors.—Ed.

The Lincoln Cent Is Obsolete A Collector of Lincoln Cents for 68 Years this Month (by Dick Johnson)

Many factors are driving the Lincoln Cent to oblivion. The rising costs of its metal composition. An expanding economy diminishing the purchasing power of its denomination. The public's rejection or use at the cash register. Lack of any item priced at one cent. Abandonment by the vending machine industry – no penny gum machines can be found anywhere. Yet we keep

demanding the U.S. Mint continue minting the cent because of habit, it seems, not for any useful purpose.

In September last year I proposed abolishing both the one-cent and five-cent coins because it is costing more to make the coins than their face value. I suggested the existing coins of these denominations be revalued at 10 cents each. That would eliminate any coin shortage and there would be no need for melting and recoining any denomination. The U.S. Mint should halt minting coins of these low denominations (and commence striking coins of \$5 and higher denomination for circulation).

For the final amount, all cash transactions must be rounded off to the nearest 10 cents. The dime would be the lowest coin in circulation in America. Rounding up or down would balance out in the long run. Critics say sellers would exploit the buyers by rounding off to their advantage. In a competitive retail world this just would not happen, as has been proved in Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and Finland where such low denomination coins have been abolished and rounding off occurred. Canada now is considering the same decision.

If the cents are going to be revalued – let's say at five cents – what is going to keep every coin collector from buying bags of cents to reap an anticipated profit? Nothing! Be my guest! Go drain every bank in America of their stock of cents. You will inevitably reap a \$200 profit for every bag of cents you drag home! With no downside risk! No matter what happens every bag will still be worth \$50 – face value of every cent in that bag – your cost.

But some of you reading this will say, "Dick Johnson, you are a traitor to Victor D. Brenner and the Lincoln Cent if you want to abolish the cent and the government does what you suggest." Just the opposite is true. I foresee this fact becoming reality: The elimination of the Lincoln Cent. It is inevitable. Its days are numbered.

To prove my affinity of the Lincoln Cent, let me count the ways. Like most of you reading this, I started my interest in coins by collecting Lincoln Cents. It began when I was eight years old and my father brought home a Lincoln Cent board – not the foldup album kind – this was in February 1939 when all Lincoln Cent issues fit on one large board. I still have a fondness for Lincoln Cents 68 years later!

I still own the second set of Lincolns I formed (the first set was sold to buy a bicycle at age 12 in 1942, I had pulled out all dates and mints from circulation before then, except two). I also have the rarest Brenner Lincoln in my collection, not a cent but a statuette. This was created by the same artist, signed and dated 1909, bearing the same Lincoln portrait as on the cent – a three-dimensional head of Lincoln with provenance traced back to Brenner himself (acquired from Medallion Art Company, my former employer) the only one in existence, a unique work of art.

I have written extensively on Brenner and given talks on him. I have researched him for 40 years. I have talked with his family members (brother, niece, nephew of his wife). His listing in my directory of American coin and medal artists is over 50 pages in length. I am a fan and admirer of Brenner; I greatly admire him, his Lincoln portrait on the U.S. cent and the more than 300 sculptural works he created. Brenner accomplished something no other American artist has accomplished, a portrait of such great longevity. But I am a realist; Brenner's Lincoln portrait and the cent coin are destined to be discontinued.

I would like to see Brenner's Lincoln Cent go out of circulation with a bang; a crescendo, a finale similar to the end of a symphony. I would like for his coin design to last through 2009 – issued for 101 continuous years – unsurpassed by any other type coin in American coinage history! In fact it must do this by the recent law authorizing four different reverses, honoring Lincoln's life in four

different states to be struck in 2009. But what about the intervening years, 2007 and 2008?

If you rebase or revalue the cent making it a five-cent value, then issue the Lincoln "cent" with a five-cent value between now and 2009. For a spectacular finale for the cent – then issue its final year in multiple compositions. I believe the most charming coin the Mint could produce would be a Lincoln Cent in gold, a gold penny!

Some coin collectors may object to abolishing the cent. But they need not fear. There will be ample coins to collect when the Lincoln Cent is abolished. In the meantime you might even be charmed, like I would be charmed, by a gold cent, a silver cent, and a bronze cent – all dated 2009 with four reverses – even at a surcharge. I wouldn't mind the additional costs for these tributes to Abraham Lincoln. And the numismatic memorials to Victor David Brenner and his world-famous Lincoln portrait that reached past the centurion mark in the bicentennial year of Lincoln's birth, 2009!

One can't accuse Dick Johnson of a lack of creativity or enthusiasm!—Ed.

Letters to the Editor

Dear John,

I have enclosed a photo of a 10.5mm bronze uniface medal in the Rochester Numismatic Associations collection. I wonder if an MCA member can help me tell what it is and who might have made it.

We have a terra cotta of the same by Giovanni Nini but I was told no bronze copies exist. It was donated to the club in the 1920's.

Thanks for any help you may offer.

Gerard Muhl

Dear John,

Nini worked almost exclusively in terracotta. I am aware of only a single one of his medallions, Dr. Foucault (Villers 40; Storelli 59; Baiardi/Sibille 86), which exists not only in terra cotta but also in an authentic bronze version (Baiardi/Sibille 87). I have examined this medallion, which is in the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque nationale, and have no doubt of its authenticity.

However, every bronze version of Nini's Franklin portraits that I have seen, whether a fur cap portrait, or the long flowing hair bust, have been obvious aftercasts. The best bronze example I have seen was a medallion depicting Franklin with long flowing hair, legend in Latin, and date in Roman numerals, which appeared in a Spink sale of November 18-19, 1981 (lot 170), and which I described in a brief article, 'Medallions in Bronze by Nini?' in the Fall 1983 issue of the Bulletin of Société américaine pour l'étude de la numismatique française. As attractive as it was it was not as sharp as terra cotta versions of the same piece.

As for the attractive example of the 105mm fur cap medallion you have asked me to comment on, I believe, primarily based on its size, which is smaller than any of the genuine terra cotta fur caps I have seen, the smallest of which are 112mm, that it is an aftercast. As I am going by the photograph rather than from the medallion itself, I am unable to point out the various defects which it probably exhibits which are characteristic of a later aftercast. Exactly when it was made, and by whom, I am unable to say, although I note that it has been in the collection of the Rochester Numismatic Association since the 1920's, which perhaps indicates that it may have been created in the 1890-1910 period, a time when many Nini aftercasts (in terra Cotta) were made. Of course, the various creators of Nini aftercasts,

with a couple of important exceptions, did not advertise their handiwork.

Best regards,

Dick Margolis



Dear John--

Hi. I hope all's well. I have a quick question. Do you know anything about some 19th century medals marked as being part of

"Harzfeld's series" and, if so, whether they were issued by S.K. Harzfeld? Thanks.

Best,

David

PS: I am working on a new fixed price list that should be out (I hope) in May.

David F. Fanning
PO Box 132422
Columbus, OH 43213

Hi David,

Harzfeld was a funny old fellow but he knew his stuff. My guess is "Harzfeld Series" refers to the French medals that he imported: he kept in stock the five Comitia Americana medals for which the dies were in Paris and he also stocked the 41mm Louis XIV restrikes for Martinique, St Christopher, Quebec, Cayenne, etc. He offered the latter group in silver and the former in both silver and bronze. To have struck off his own modern medalets would have been totally out of character, in my opinion.

Best,

John

As it turns out, Mr. Fanning has a better answer to his own question. For details, see the April Issue.--Ed

Dear John,

As a member of the Rochester Numismatic Association (RNA) for fifteen years I've been collecting the organization's medals. The RNA has a tradition of issuing each year a medal honoring the previous year's

president. This traces back to 1913 with our first president.

The RNA has also issued many medals with other themes. Our sister club, the Rochester Junior Numismatics Association (ages 18 and under) has also issued several medals. Most recently, they issued a medal that was designed by the members, most of whom are around ten years old.

Our web site has a gallery with the presidential medals and a few of our other medals: <http://www.the-rna.com/medals.php>. Our newsletters can be found at <http://www.the-rna.com/newsletter.php>.

The MCA has been included in our list of online numismatic resources (<http://the-rna.home/ontheweb.php>). If you would like a different descriptive paragraph for your listing please send me the text you would like included.

Thank You,

Tim Corio

Hello,

I have just come from your very useful webpage on the Thomason Medallic Bible—thank you for posting that information—with a question for you.

Are there loads and loads of copies of the Thomason medallions, minted in the same dimensions as the originals? I've got a partial set here, which I assume is just such a knock-off, but can find nothing but the Franklin mint reproductions on eBay or the internet, except for your site.

Can you direct me to any other resources?

Many thanks,

Paul Cymrot
www.riverbybooks.com

John,

Can either of you assist Mr. Cymrot with his question?

David Boitnott