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# The MCA Advisory

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*The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America*

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**Dues:** \$20.00/Year

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## Coming Events

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

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

## What's New on Our Website!

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE EVERY MONTH

[www.medalcollectors.org](http://www.medalcollectors.org)

## From the Editor

We are delighted to have attracted a reply to our question concerning casts and electrotypes. Dick Johnson's masterful coverage of this topic deserves to be extracted and framed. We all can learn and, more important, we can all profit from the knowledge.

Nowadays, a web site is vital to the health of an organization such as ours. Our web site has been relatively inactive but, under the leadership of Ben Weiss, I am expecting great things. Ben outlines some of his plans below.

Later on in these pages, we call notice to a new book published by ye editor and Anne Bentley. There will be a formal review of the book in the May issue. For now, we give details on availability as well as a few of the unusual features to be found.

There were no takers of our Loubat's (Volume I) offered at \$150. We are not proud and hereby reduce the price to \$100. All proceeds go the club. Without wishing to sound like a shill, this is a GREAT BARGAIN.

Hi John,

I have a brief biosketch on my own website from which you can take excerpts as you wish. It can be reached at:

<http://www.historicalartmedals.com/Ben's%20Biosketch.htm>

Insofar as the goals and plans for the MCA website are concerned, we plan to (or have already):

1. Published the back issues of the MCA Advisory on the website.
2. Published a rather comprehensive list of references (books, etc.) relating to medals. (Members are encouraged to send me additional references that are not included in this list).
3. We also plan to try to set up some sort of forum for people to post questions

related to their collection that members and other visitors to the website can address.

4. We plan to greatly expand the section providing LINKS to other websites that display collections of medals.

5. We will try to increase readership to the site and thereby increase membership in the organization, particularly among younger collectors.

6. We will try to increase traffic to the site by encouraging others to provide Links from their site to ours as well as by making our site still more interesting and informative.

7. We may wish to provide a list of medal dealers and auctions at which individuals may purchase medals.

8. We may solicit articles related to medals and medal collecting from those outside the organization.

9. Most importantly, I want to make this website a dynamic representative of the members of the Organization. To effect this goal I would greatly appreciate the submission of articles on medals and medal collecting and suggestions for improvement of the MCA website from its members.

Finally, and certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge the generous help and expertise of Sam Pennington for his most gracious and much appreciated assistance in this endeavor.

Best wishes,

Ben

Benjamin Weiss, Ph.D.  
Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology and  
Physiology  
Drexel University College of Medicine

## Organization Change

Our website was designed by David Boitnott and has been operated by him for many years. The Club owes him a great debt of gratitude which these few words are hardly sufficient to extinguish.

Our new web master is Benjamin Weiss. Ben will describe his plans for our site separately. However, in order to introduce the man, we need to say that he is a PhD. in pharmacology and is now Professor Emeritus at Drexel University College of Medicine, having served for over two decades in a variety of prestigious positions at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. At the head of his profession, Ben was asked to lecture literally round the world. He used these travels to visit museums on the side, gaining first hand knowledge of some of the finest medal collections. Perhaps the best way to introduce our talented colleague is to send you to [www.historicalartmedals.com](http://www.historicalartmedals.com), a website Ben maintains on his own collection.

## A FAVORITE MEDAL

### La Guardia by Onorio Ruotolo

(by Samuel Pennington)

In past years the *Advisory* ran a series called “My Favorite Medal.” I’ve tried, but I just cannot bring myself to do it. To paraphrase a song from *Finian’s Rainbow*, “When I’m not near the medal I love, I love the medal I’m near.”

This time I’m near a tribute to “Fiorello H. La Guardia Mayor of NYC Nov, 7, 1933.” The medal is by Italian-American sculptor Onorio Ruotolo (1888-1966). The obverse is a bust left of La Guardia. The reverse depicts a naked (and not very well endowed) Hercules torching the necks of the Hydra, the mythological serpent-like water beast with many heads.

Killing the Hydra was the second of twelve labors that Hercules was sentenced to accomplish as penance for having killed his own children. (In Greek and Roman mythology there were not many nice guys!)

Hercules’s problem with the hydra was that every time he cut off one of its heads, it grew two more.

The legend on the reverse reads, “HYDRAE COLLA EXURIT” and tells how Hercules solved the problem. According to my handy-dandy translation program, it says, “He burns the necks of the water serpent.” In the mythology, Hercules called on his nephew and charioteer Iolaus to bring him a torch. After cutting off the heads, Hercules cauterized them as we would say today, and they grew no more. He crushed the remaining head and placed it under a rock

La Guardia, the first three-term mayor of New York City, committed no Herculean crime, but certainly paralleled the mythological hero. To quote from his obituary in the New York Times, “In the first World War he was the pilot of a bombing plane on the Italian front, and he kept on dropping bombs all his life—on “reactionaries,” prohibitionists and Ku Klux Klanners in Congress during the Nineteen Twenties, and on Tammany Hall during his long Mayoralty service.”

The sculptor of the medal, Onorio Ruotolo, led an equally colorful life. Born in Italy in 1888, he came to the US in 1908 already an accomplished sculptor, having studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Naples since the age of twelve. In a review of a retrospective show in 2004, “The Art of Freedom: Onorio Ruotolo and the Leonardo Da Vinci Art School,” Joseph Sciorra and Peter Vellon characterized him as, “Sculptor, critic, editor, author, poet, illustrator, cartoonist, teacher, Onorio Ruotolo was known as the ‘Rodin of Little Italy.’ Ruotolo’s sculpture was a model of realist academic art, grounded in the classics yet with a prevailing concern for social justice.”

Interesting, certainly, but what is it of the medal itself that so endears it to me? First, it is big—a full three inches. It is heavy, 10.3 ounces, because the relief is deep. The best art medals are meant to be held and weight counts. The condition of my example is probably “circulated,” which says to me that former owners probably handled the medal long and lovingly.

As to the artistic quality, the sculptor has made full use of all his space. La Guardia’s jutting jaw impinges the legend around the bust, and the mayor’s always unruly forelock, as one critic wrote, invites “comparison with Napoleon.”

On the reverse, Hercules torches the Hydra with great power and hardly a millimeter of wasted or static space.

Well, there you have it. I’m off to eBay to look for my next love, but you may be sure, La Guardia and Hercules, “I’ll always be true to you in my fashion.”



## How To Tell Struck Medals From Cast

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By D. WAYNE JOHNSON

**Y**OU will have to learn a few words that may be new to you to differentiate STRUCK from CAST medals. One of these words is *meniscus*. If you look up this word in a dictionary you

will probably find an illustration of two tubes, one filled with water, one filled with mercury. The surface of the water is concave. The surface of mercury is convex – that is, bowed down at the edges from a higher center.

Cast metal is like mercury. Metal has the same physical property as mercury that makes it bow at the edges. Cast metal cannot fill tiny cavities in a medal die design because the MENISCUS prevents the liquefied cast metal from flowing into these small corners. Thus it cannot reproduce sharp, crisp edges at the juncture of two surfaces.

The most obvious evidence of this can be found where the top of lettering meets the sides, another location is where the rise of relief meets the background or field of a coin or medal. With typical casting, the human eye perceives these edges and corners as “soft.” Under magnification, relief, particularly lettering, appears with “rounded” junctures.

Some medalists were skilled at purposefully modeling soft texture and soft lettering. Louis Roty in France was one. Victor Brenner in America was another. Medallists not as skilled may produce edges of relief that will look indistinct as well as amateurish lettering. Collectors, it should be noted, seem to prefer sharp, crisp edges because this is closest to the uncirculated state of a coin. Once wear begins, the sharp edges, like highpoints, disappear.

For a coin or medal struck by a die, the metal fills these junctures and tiny cavities by the force of the die during striking. Struck pieces therefore can have sharp, crisp corners and edges where the junctures of two surfaces may come to a point.

Die struck pieces will appear sharp and not rounded if that characteristic is in the die. (But here, again, the roundness may be modeled into the pattern and reproduced in the die, or, the piece may have circulated and become worn.)

[The sharpness of the RIM / EDGE JUNCTURE, as on proof coins, is something else. This comes from the amount of metal mass in

the planchet and the amount of pressure applied, not from any modeling or anything in the pattern.]

A second term to learn is *porosity*. The surface of a cast piece may appear to have tiny pores or pockholes. These vary in size and are caused by dust or dirt in the mold or from trapped air.

When casting, skillful molders will blast the mold with compressed air to remove all contaminants just before pouring the metal. (Prior to this the mold may even be chemically cleaned.)

Trapped air bubbles prevent metal from filling all the nooks and crannies in the mold. This trapped gas tends to congregate around the base of relief or letters on the field or background. Skillful molders like to mold in a vacuum, or tip the mold and lightly tap it to let the air escape, or make elaborate vents for the air to flow out as the metal flows in.

Humorously, these pores or holes are called “craters” like bomb craters. (I say in my best Yosemite Sam cartoon voice imitation “That’s a figure of speech, Son. I say, that’s a hyperbole. That’s an overstatement, I say, to make them tiny holes look extreme!”)

If porosity is present on the piece you are examining, there is a strong chance the piece was cast. (“I say it was cast, Son. Take my word for it!” Enough Sam.)

In contrast to craters are *nodules*. These are raised lumps, also called *BOSSSES*. (I won’t even crack a joke on that – make up your own lumpy boss remark!)

Nodules also result from dirt or trapped air occurring in a previous generation in the casting process. They formed when the mold was made. Now use that pockmarked mold and you get *RAISED* nodules where tiny craters were located.

Pieces struck from rusted dies will also exhibit nodules. Here again, these will congregate around the base of relief or letters. This is where moisture settled and attacked the iron metal when the die was stored. Prolonged

exposure to a moist atmosphere creates rusting of unprotected steel dies. (Even storing dies one on top of the other with a struck piece between prevents rust, as well as other methods.)

Only with experience comes the ability to identify nodules from poor casting techniques *VERSUS* nodules from rusted dies on struck pieces. I didn’t say this was going to be easy.

Next term: *chased*. It is so common for cast items to have porosity and nodules that they are most often chased – hand tooled to remove these tiny imperfections. The term is almost one word: *cast and chased*. (Can you say “castandchased” as one word?) In some cases you can still see the *TOOL MARKS*, even though the chaser has a toolbox full of tools (like *BURNISHERS*) to smooth the metal surface after any gross amount of metal is removed or moved around.

The busiest worker in any foundry is the *CHASER* – cleaning up after the cast piece is broken out from the mold. All those casting flaws should be removed and all surfaces smoothed where they are supposed to be smooth. The trick is not to remove any detail.

The next term may be familiar. It is *resonance*. That is the sound a coin or medal makes when lightly tapped on its edge. The tone or clarity is caused by the metal alloy, absence of trapped air internally and its thickness. A cast piece will tend to have a lower-pitched sound, a “dull thud,” in comparison with similar struck pieces which produce more of a “ring.”

A *ring test*, however, is not exclusive or foolproof. A suspect piece should be compared with known specimens if you are testing for genuineness. Both struck and cast pieces will ring – after all, bells are made by casting. The only difference is the resonance. Have you got a good ear for pitch and tone?

A last term to be familiar with is a form of casting, but its results are sharper than even a struck piece. That term is

**electroforming.** This is how numismatic ELECTROTYPES are made. These are made in an electrolytic tank where the metal is deposited on a pattern, one ion of metal at a time.

Thus electroforms are noted for their sharpness, plus their extreme fidelity to their pattern, far more so than diestruck pieces. This sharpness has to be in the model, obviously. Electroforming re- produces EXACTLY the surface of the model. This is why electroforming – creating GALVANOS – were used for over a century for coin and medal patterns (and reduced on the die-engraving pantograph like the JANVIER reducing machine).

[Note: **electrotypes do not ring.—ed.]**

Here are the three methods of producing a coin or medal and the sharpness of detailed relief each method can reproduce:

**Casting –**

Detail down to a hundredth of an inch.

**Striking–**

Detail down to a thousandth of an inch.

**Electroforming –**

Detail down to the width of a molecule.

The following table summarizes criteria for visual inspection. If you have access to a lot of scientific equipment, you can examine the surface sub- structure of the metal or you can take microphotographs. There you will see how different struck metal is from cast metal after it undergoes the stress of striking.

## Struck/Cast Diagnostics by Inspection

	<b>Struck</b>	<b>Cast</b>
<b>Relief edges, corner junctures</b>	Sharp, crisp, pointed.	Rounded.
<b>Surface state</b>	Smooth, detail where intended, background generally smooth, flat; all relief fully struck up.	May have pores or nodules present, field may appear uneven; detail looks “soft.”
<b>Nodules present</b>	None; struck from rusted dies if at all.	From the cast mold.
<b>Multiple specimens</b>	Identical.	Pores, nodules may vary in number, size, position
<b>Chasing tool marks</b>	None.	May be present.
<b>Ring test resonance</b>	High pitch.	Duller tone.

## Letters to the Editor

Hello,

I have just come from your very useful webpage on the Thomason Medallion 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](http://www.riverbybooks.com)

Hello Paul,

I'm the one who put together the information on Thomason Medallion Bible for the MCA website. I don't know a lot more than what I've written for the web page, but have observed only two versions of these medals. There are the originals from 1830 which are large (73mm diameter) and come in white metal and gilt copper. And there are the Franklin Mint copies which are smaller (44mm diameter) and come in copper and, I think, also silver. To tell which you have, you'd only have to measure them, though the medals are noticeably different in appearance, too. The set shown on the MCA website is the original version.

Franklin Mint sets in copper are often available on eBay and generally sell for about \$100 for a complete set of 60, sometimes a little more. I have not seen a set in silver, but that might be worth a few hundred dollars.

The originals in white metal are sometimes also seen on eBay and generally sell

for \$40-80 each piece, depending on condition. The gilt copper original ones are scarcer and somewhat more valuable. A complete set of originals in nice condition is rare.

I hope this helps. Please let me know if you have any questions.

John Sallay

Dear John,

I read with particular interest the story in the MCA Advisory about the recent auction for George Washington's Admiral Vernon Medal pocket piece.

The untold part of the story is this: EBay Live Auctions had this item listed and pictured on their site, and also a large number of other historic medals listed from the same collection. Literally, millions of potential bidders had the access to make bids on that auction. All of the lots were available on EBay for on-line pre-bidding, as well as live real-time bidding through the EBay Live Auctions interface.

Shortly before the auction, the EBay system somehow completely broke down. Not only was it impossible to bid live on the auctions through the EBay interface, all of the online pre-bids which were previously entered for the sale were somehow completely lost. Few of the bidders knew this had occurred until it was too late; I was not notified that all of my bids were lost until after the live auction had taken place.

Hundreds of pre-bids were simply not entered or included in any way in the auction process that day. Much to my chagrin, and I am certain many others who had already laid significant pre-bids through EBay Live Auctions, the auction house decided to proceed with the live auction anyhow in deference to the live bidders who had personally shown up.

I don't remember the exact amount the Washington pocket piece sold for, but I can tell you that I had personally laid a pre-bid through

EBay in excess of that final hammer price. I would not have won the Washington pocket piece however, as I was already outbid; going in I recall there were at least 2 other pre-bids on EBay higher than mine, I believe significantly higher. Ultimately, many of the medals that sold that day went for bargain prices. From what I can tell, I may have lost out on at least 10 lots or more that sold below my high bid when my pre-bids were lost.

However expensive the Washington pocket piece may have been for its current owner, it was ultimately a true bargain price with all of the other pre-bids and live online bidders being pushed out of the picture at the 11th hour. If those bids were included, the Washington pocket piece may have sold for many times the final hammer price.

And now you know the rest of the story.

Regards,

Tony Lopez

John:

Have you seen an early Signing of the Declaration of Independence medal? I have seen a couple of larger bronze examples from the 100th Centennial with all the people in view and with facsimile signatures with it worded "THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE." My very different medal has the 5 people standing in front, and 2 foreground figures at the central table, a total of 7 people. It is the design with "SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE" and 1776 (SEE JPG). The reverse is blank. At the top of the medal there is a curved attached oval piece, perhaps to secure it to something. It has some flange or "flash" unevenly around the edges. It has a red copper tone and there is some green patina on the front and back.

The diameter of the medal is 1 1/4 inches. Even though it is dated 1776, it is from the 19th century, possibly a 25th or 50th

anniversary rather than 100th from 1876, because it is not dated 1776-1876, like the majority I have seen. I understand that American painter, John Trumbull has designed the first American Medals. [Not so—ed.] The art of the medal in the U.S. from the early 19th century reflects trends and tastes in Trumbull's paintings. He painted the Declaration of Independence scene in 1817.

The painting is often mistakenly called the "Signing of the Declaration of Independence", but only shows the presentation of the draft. While the signing did take place, it was not actually in the presence of all the people in the picture. Actually, only seven people were present. One medal collector told me that he has never seen an example like mine which, is smaller and has retained its reddish/orange copper hue. Do you have any additional information on this example?

Regards,

George Pek  
1968 Main St. West, Suite 908  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
L8S 1J7

**Mr. Pek poses a fascinating question. Are any of you up to it?—Ed.**



Dear John



I am seeking information about a medal by T(homas) W(ells) Ingram of Benvenuto Cellini, and I hope you can help with a request to members of Medal Collectors of America. I have been in contact with Christopher Eimer, Daniel Fearon, Philip Attwood at the BM, Ben Weiss, ANS, Smithsonian, Berlin Coin Cabinet, Victoria and Albert Museum and the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, but with no success.

The medal is uniface (the reverse is completely blank), in silver, 51mm in diameter, with a bust of Cellini right half-facing, and legend BENVts CELLINI FLORENTs SCVLPr ET AVRr (The lower case represents small capital letters above the main line.) The signature T W Ingram) of the medallist is on the right-hand extreme of the bust. I have attached a scan of the medal.

Regards,

Walter

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**Surely our readership can best the  
Smithsonian, the BM et al.--Ed**

Dear John,

Please include this in the next MCA Advisory in the hope that one or more members may be able to help me. I am looking for information on original cases for pre-1958 medals issued by the American Numismatic Society. I am familiar with that of the 1883 Washington medal, 1908 Diocese of New York medal, and the Algernon Sydney Sullivan medal, but have little information on the other issues, other than one example for the 1897 Grant medal. I am especially interested in hearing if any member has or has seen a case for the Lincoln memorial medal, as well as information concerning a large leather case that was made for the 1902 Prince Henry of Prussia medal; I recall seeing one more than 30 years ago.

Scott Miller, [wheatabix@comcast.net](mailto:wheatabix@comcast.net)

Hello, George (Fuld)--

I have a question about a Lafayette medal I recently obtained. The only reference I can find to it is in your September 1957 Numismatist article on the subject, where it is listed as L.A.M.8. Mine is in white metal. It is a fairly generic-looking medal of Lafayette, in small size (28 mm), with Masonic devices on the reverse. My question is about the reverse, which proclaims it to be part of "Harzfeld's Series." Do you have any idea if this is a reference to the coin dealer S.K. Harzfeld, of Philadelphia? I cannot seem to find this information and would greatly appreciate hearing from you if you know anything.

All the best,

df

David F. Fanning  
PO Box 132422  
Columbus, OH 43213

Hi Dave:

I know that it was issued by coin dealer Harzfield and I guess about 1870. Since listed in Marvin definitely before 1880. Cannot recall seeing any other Harzfield series issues but undoubtedly there are some. As a guess, issued in 1876.

George Fuld

## Holes ' In Numismatic Items

**From:** Bob Fritsch  
**To:** Dick Johnson  
**Subject:** Minting Technology

Dear Dick,

I was writing a quiz for one of my clubs (International Numismatic Society of San Diego) on the Science and Tools of

Numismatics, and wanted to ask a question, "How are the holes in minted coins created?" or some such wording. Then it hit me--I have no idea. I tried some internet searches but all I got was talk about holes from nails and such. There was one reference from the Japanese Mint about Why the 5 and 50 yen coins have holes, but no words on how they were put there.

Can you give me an assist? References, personal experience, whatever. It is easy to figure how holes are put in cast coins like Chinese cash -- it is part of the mold. But with struck coins, are the holes punched before, during or after the strike? Anything you can give me would help.  
Thanks much.

Yours in numismatics,

Bob Fritsch

**FROM:** Dick Johnson  
**TO:** Bob Fritsch

Bob:

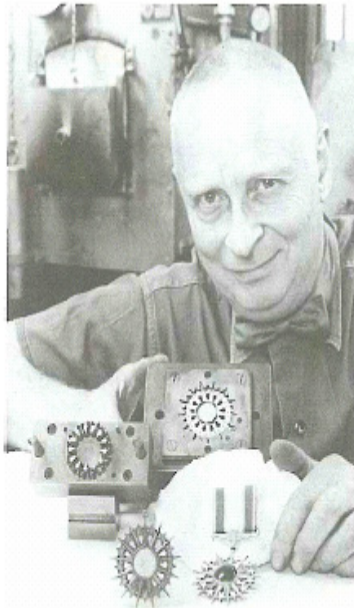
There are two kinds of holes -- called apertures -- in numismatic items. If they are circular and uniform they can be created with a drill bit. These are called "drill holes."  
Surprise!

The James Madison Indian Peace Medal (Julian IP-5) has drill holes. The U.S. Mint intended this, because they put a "limiting guide" in the obverse die before the medals were struck -- a small annular ring just inside the rim at the 12 o'clock position. This is the focus where the drill bit should be placed. (Some of these medals still exist without the hole and the limiting guide intact!) One other medal with a limiting guide was the John Tyler Medal (IP-21) but, as you are aware, most of the Indian Peace Medals exhibit drill holes.

It is tricky to drill the hole at exactly the 12 o'clock position. If it was off, the portrait

would appear twisted or tilted. But maybe the Indians didn't care!

Medals to be worn with an aperture, called "pierced for suspension," have been drilled since the days of the renaissance.



Apertures of all shapes can be created with "piercing dies." Their use is similar to blanking. The upper die pushes metal through the aperture in the lower piercing die -- it is cut to the exact shape with extremely hard metal around that hole. The upper die, called a "piercing punch" is made of very hard steel drill rod by a tool and die maker. He cuts this to the exact shape of that aperture (with a few ten-thousandths of an inch clearance).

There is a "nest" which holds all these tools in place. The item is placed on top of the nest in a punch-press and the press is actuated. The metal is pushed through the aperture in the piercing die and falls out below. There is a little more technology involved, but this is basic idea.

Generally this is done after the piece is struck. The tooling has to be designed so that it doesn't mash any relief. For example, one side of the piece needs to have a wide enough rim to rest on the piercing die.

For large production runs, like transportation tokens, "progressive dies" can be used. This is a compound tool that does several functions with each cycle of the press (but in reverse order to normal minting). It strikes the image at the first station, piercing at the second, and blanking at the third. The blank strip moves precisely to each station after each cycle.

For cast pieces, like art medals, a mold can be made with the apertures in place and generally does not require piercing. This is called "openwork."

For some elaborate pieces, like military decorations some apertures are close together. Multiple piercing dies are used and it has to be pierced several times to make the finished piece.

A "burr" occurs on the trail side of all metalworking. This is removed by hand chasing.

Hope this helps.

Dick

Hi John,

I was born in Wales, UK and I moved to the US in May 1981. I have a gold medal/coin that was issued to my great-grandfather December 6, 1919 by the eagle millmen looks like he died in action. Issued to PFC Simon Mainwaring. I have done a lot of research on it and have come up empty handed. Did not know if you know where i should go to research it. It seems to have been issued during the desert war. Looks like 10k gold stamps on the medal and the ring for holding it.

Thanks in advance,

Mark Mainwaring.

P.S. My e-mail is [markmainwaring@comcast.net](mailto:markmainwaring@comcast.net)

John,

Looks like a tribute medal issued by villages and townships, large and small, in 1919 following the First World War. I will tell him what I can, if he sends me a jpeg scan of the item.

Chris Eimer