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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

At a telephonic Board meeting on February 6<sup>th</sup>, the directors nominated the following slate of officers for 2008-2009:

President	John W. Adams
Treasurer	Barry Tayman
Vice President	John Sallay
Secretary	Vicken Yegparian
Directors	David Alexander
	Bob Fritsch
	Richard Margolis
	David Menchell
	Scott Miller
	Ira Rezak
	Don Scarinci
	Michael Turrini
	Benjamin Weiss

This slate and any further nominations will be presented at our meeting at the Milwaukee ANA in August.

Please note that Barry and I will be completing our fifth and sixth years, the maximum term of office. It is important that more members offer their time and energy because, simply put, we need you. I promise to anyone who applies that I will find some task to suit you and that your service on behalf of MCA will be a fulfilling experience.

## Admiral Vernon Variety

(by John W. Adams)

Half a dozen writers have made listings of Admiral Vernon varieties, including McCormick-Goodhart, C.W. Betts, Storer, Hawkins, Milford Haven and Medina. None of these have treated the series or any part of it in depth. This work remains to be written.

As a sample of the feast that may some day come, we reviewed a cache of nine examples of McCormick-Goodhart 146 (Betts 255). This variety is better designed than most: high rims protect Admiral Vernon and Commodore Brown on the obverse; the same

high rims watch over a symmetrical arrangement of the fabled “six ships only” on the reverse.

Remarkably, our small cache included planchets made of no less than five metals” silver, off-silver, nickel (“German silver” per John J. Ford, Jr.), bronze and pinchbeck. The silver example (lot 2179 in the Stack’s sale of 11/7-8/2006) was intended for a special purpose, no doubt, because of the high cost of the planchet. The other metals may likewise have been made for varying applications but a close examination of the nine suggests another explanation: given that the shallow dies and limited capability of the press were constants, the major variable in the process became the nature of the planchets employed.

The silver, off-silver and nickel are relatively hard metals, with the result that the design on these cannot be struck up with the pressure available. All three metals show Commodore Brown without facial features. In like manner, the hulls of the ships on the reverse show little detail and the two forts defining the mouth of the harbor are absolutely flat. The craftsman who prepared the dies could not have been pleased.

In contrast, the four examples in bronze show more details clearly, as does the piece made from pinchbeck (consistent with its low grade). Based on clarity of strike, all of the output should have been made from bronze. However, the four bronze examples in the cache, evidence chunks of missing rim suggesting that the available supply of the metal was uncharacteristically brittle.

Faced with an array of choices, the maker of McG-146 chose to produce some of each. The four bronze specimens come early in a clear die progression and, given their imperfections, must have touched off a search for something better. Alas, nothing better was found, with the more exotic metals exhibiting planchets cracks and flaking in addition to providing impressions with lesser detail. However, one must credit the maker with

trying and that is more praise than this unloved series generally draws.

	<u>Metal</u>	<u>Diameter</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>Grade</u>
1)	AR	38.7mm	20.45gms	VF
2)	Off-silver	38.6	16.33	VF
3)	NI	38.6	15.77	FT
4)	NI	38.4	13.77	FT
5)	AE	38.0	14.22	XF
6)	AE	37.9	13.32	AVF
7)	AE	37.9	13.66	XF
8)	AE	38.2	15.32	F
9)	Pinchbeck	38.2	12.80	VG

**Letter from Esprit Antoine Gibelin to Benjamin Franklin, February 7, 1785** (by Leonard Augsburger)

From the Franklin papers at Franklin papers.org. Gibelin discusses the Libertas Americana and other medals related to American Independence. Translation by Len Augsburger.



The medal of the United States of American that you had struck last year was modeled after the design that I composed at the request of Monsiuer Brongniart.

This pleasure, to have given a picturesque form to your superb idea, did not bring me at that time the honor of being known to you, but I dared to delude myself that for this reason I could hope for some share of your protection and kindness.

[Your protection and kindness] will be a great help to me in the project that I have formed to gather the designs of all the medals struck on the occasion of the last war, to have them etched and joined with descriptions of the precise history of the facts that gave them place, a work that could not help but be welcomed, by the greatness of the subject, because it puts at the same time under the eyes

the beautiful actions of celebrated men and the noble reward that they have had as a result, and finally because it reunites several sublime ideas of a time remarkable as ever; notably the majestic idea of this great arch cracked and broken, with one pillar over England and another over America, and the happy allegory of the Hercules the infant who smothers the two serpents.

I am familiar with the following medals-

1) The medal of the broken arch  
 2) General Washington with his profile at one side, and on the reverse the Liberty cap [possibly a 1783 Washington piece, Baker-2 through Baker-5]

3) the medal that I designed, of Hercules the infant [Gibelin does not take credit for the obverse of the Libertas Americana]

4) the taking of Stony Point, by de Fleury

5) the medal by the state of Provence for the Admiral bailli de Suffren that I drew and directed [a French medal, engraved by Dupré in 1784]

6) the medal that the Dutch Indian company just sent to him [probably "Compagnie des Indes", as in Ford XIV:302 Readers are invited to identify (1) and (2).]

Dupré, the engraver, showed me a medal with the inscription ERIPUIT COELO FULMEN, etc. [the Franklin Natus Boston]. I have composed myself others that I would have entered in this collection, only as projects [to this point].

Because of the reputation of the charity and protection that you accord to the letters and fine arts I do not hesitate to address myself to you, as the only person who could clear this up and indicate to me the best of the medals of which I do not know, and facilitate a way of putting into execution a project which I find so interesting that I dare not communicate it, of fear that someone will take it from me.

I beg you, Sir, to indicate the day and the hour I would be able to have the honor to see you and to speak to you of this affair. I am, with deep respect, your very humble and very obedient servant Gibelin, Rue Montmartre, close to the Rue Vieux Augustins, No. 52.



For French medals of the period, it was standard procedure for l'Académie of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres to commission a drawing of the stipulated devices. This drawing was then submitted to the King for his approval which, when given, was then relayed to the engraver of the dies. Of the American medals made in France, the Libertas is the only one, to our knowledge, that employed an artist who was not the engraver.—Ed.

## Extract from Saunier's Book on Dupré

(translation by Leonard Augsburger)

**Saunier, Charles.** *Augustin Dupré: Orfèvre, Médailleur et Graveur Général Des Monnaies*, (Paris: Société De Propagation Des Livres D'Art, 1894). In this extract dealing with the Libertas Americana medal, one sees Saunier exhibit a certain editorial bias favoring Dupré over contemporary French engravers.

### Chapter 2: America (pp. 17-21, translated by Len Augsburger).

The enthusiasm of a nation will always be very complex. The masses are surely disinterested, but not individuals: different motives make them act, and in the same fever, the profitable side of things suddenly appears to them.

This was quite vivid in the great movement in favor of American independence. If, in France, among the people hating England, the hereditary enemy, the sympathy for the

insurgents was great and disinterested, it was not at all the same way among the other classes. The military cadets saw a distraction, perhaps a fortune; the mercantile middle class saw an excellent opening for their products. In times of trouble, the Americans could not produce, and would be forced to come and ask of the French, their friends, what they lacked.

Pierre Caron de Beaumarchais, an inspired shark, and happy until this time, entered in the affair, and mixed himself in the furnishing of naval arms. But this time, though sincerely enthusiastic, his affairs went poorly [reference is made to Beaumarchais' expectation that the Continental Congress would amply reimburse him in the form of American produce, and the subsequent financial ruin of Beaumarchais].

Others fared better, artists for example. When the American Independence was definitively proclaimed, it had to have been well to honor the dedication and conserve the memory of the great battles.

In 1784, the Virginia parliament asked Houdon for a statue of Washington. The great sculptor came to America from October, 1785, to January 1786 and executed the busts of the principal defenders of American liberty. However, this was not enough. To perpetuate the remembrance of the late events and of their actors, the Congress chose the most notable expression of art: the medal.

Thanks to the medals, the features of the great men, the memory of actions will be unforgettably conserved and could be multiplied to infinity, and, as [the medals] must be still valued by their high artistic merit, the Americans could not do better than to address themselves to France. The Academy of Inscriptions and Belle-Lettres would decide the designs and mottos, and the best French medallists would execute [the medals].

(For the creation of the mottos of the first medals, certain members of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres had been unofficially consulted. From 1785, the

Academy did this officially, as noted in *Registre des Assemblées et Délibérations de l'Académie royale des Incriptions et Belles-Lettres pour l'année 1785*, "Secretary Dacier shared part of a letter from Humphreys, former colonel in the service of the United States, by which he requested three medals for Washington, General Gates and General Greene. He sent at the same time information about these three persons". The Academy, after having decided that each of its members would compose and propose an inscription, designated a commission charged with revising the common work. This commission was composed of the abbot Barthélémy, Dupuy, Brotier, Le Blond and later de Bréquigny.

The representative of the United States reserved the right to modify the decisions of the Academy. So, for example, the medal of General Greene was changed from SALUS PROVINCIARUM AUSTRALIUM to SALUS REGIONIUM AUSTRALIUM. For General Morgan the inscription in the exergue had to be CÆSIS AUT CAPTIS AD COWPENS HOSTIUM \*\* SIGNIS RELATIS \*\* 17 JAN. 1781, and for the Admiral John Paul Jones, that of the reverse [became] PRIMUS AMERICANORUM TRIUMPHUS NAVALIS.)

Benjamin Franklin, plenipotentiary minister of the United States, was charged with the execution of the decisions of Congress. The philosopher knew Dupré. He lived in Passy and Dupré owned close to there, at Auteuil (Boileau Street), a small, pleasant house [today the western side of Paris]. They were together in the mornings. Dupré went each morning to Paris, by the way of Cours-la-Reine, smoking his pipe. He met Franklin who followed the same path. Some occasion made them come together and thus the engraver and the philosopher were friends [Saunier does not explain further; the last may be conjecture on his part]. Dupré, in 1778, engraved the cachet of Franklin with this motto: IN SIMPLICI

SALUS (today at the Boston Public Library). But in spite of this relation and the sympathies that Franklin seemed to have for the engraver, it was not Dupré that Franklin sought out for the execution of the first medals. With a rather American lack of courage, he went to the celebrated and established Benjamin Duvivier, member of the Royal Academy of painting and sculpture and Engraver General of the mint. It was he who executed the medal voted by Congress, to Washington, for the evacuation of Boston, "a medal of a skilled worker, but without the least inspiration or imagination or genius" [Saunier quotes Appleton's *Augustin Dupré and his work for America*], the medal of de Fleury, of William Washington and of [John Eager] Howard, whereas Gatteaux, associated with the Academy, executed the medals of Gates, Wayne, and Stewart.

The confidence of Franklin in the qualifications of Benjamin Duvivier seemed so large that he looked beyond the price that seemed high to him, as noted in a letter to the President of Congress, Samuel Huntington:

"Passy, March 4, 1780. Conforming to the order of Congress, I have employed one of the best artists to engrave dies for the de Fleury medal. The price of a similar work is beyond what I would have thought, that is to say one thousand livres for each die. I will try, if it is possible, to get a better price on the others."

A useless lament. We will see that 2400 livres was ordinarily paid to the engraver for each medal and that Dupré would ask for even more for the medals of Daniel Morgan and the Admiral John Paul Jones.

Neither Duvivier nor Gatteaux completely satisfied their American client. Their works were the most often cold and without inspiration. Franklin thought finally of Dupré and entrusted him with of the execution of the important medal of American liberty, the *Libertas Americana* (1783).

The subject was great and worthy to inspire such an artist. The objective was to personify the young and daring America and to

recall her recent [history] and triumphant battles. Dupré created a masterpiece. The obverse is a delicate model, a beautiful and energetic young woman, covered by a halo of waving and floating hair, with a sword of justice at the shoulder, seeming to launch itself in a radiance of glory. On the reverse, a composition of exquisite grace, Hercules the infant (America) strangles two serpents, while at his side, an elegant Minerva (France), sword at hand, prepares to strike the English leopard, whose attacks she evades with her shield, adorned with fleur-de-lis. From its [first] appearance this medal was the object of an admiration without limitation as much in France as in America [a pity Saunier does not enumerate which contemporary sources he consulted before arriving at this conclusion]. But frequently, the praise was less for the beautiful obverse figure than for the reverse allegory. One is also ecstatic how Dupré was able to put to good use the legend, NON SINE DIIS ANIMOSUS INFANS (“not without God is the infant emboldened”).

This legitimate admiration endures today, as attested by Appleton, “The genius of Dupré worked this idea in a form so magnificent that this medal will always occupy an elevated rank among the best productions of modern art.”

It will seem like heresy to some that Saunier and many of his contemporaries thought that the reverse of the Libertas was even more beautiful than the obverse. This is a heresy that we share.—Ed.



## Letters to the Editor

Three weeks ago, Spencer Peck attended an obscure auction in upstate New York. Actually, all the sharks got wind of it so there

were very few bargains other than the one Spencer describes below:

John,

As to my trip "Up Country" it was VERY SUCCESSFUL. The piece I was going after is George Washington's personal Admiral Vernon medal, carried by him throughout the Revolutionary War. It came out of the estate of the Dutchess County, New York historian, Radford Curdy, who obtained it from the estate of Benjamin J. Lossing.

Curdy was an editor of one of the local papers and had a very extensive collection of Revolutionary War correspondence, coins, currency, ledger books, etc. I also believe his family traced back to that period. He was the 'authority' on the Revolutionary War in the area.

Benjamin Lossing was the author of over 40 books in the 1850's -1880's on the Revolution, War of 1812, etc. He also founded Vassar College. He passed way in 1891. From the facts I have been able to glean so far, he met with George Washington Parke Custis beginning in 1858 or so, to gather information for his books. Custis was the grandson of Martha Custis Washington and the adopted son of George Washington. He lived, at the time, in "Arlington House" which is today the site of Arlington Cemetery. Lossing's correspondence, which apparently spans a "who's who" of American personalities of the period, is held at both Syracuse University and the New York State Archives in Albany.

The implication is that GW obtained this piece from his half brother Lawrence who served as one of the captains in the Virginia Company {Gooch's Marines} of the "Royal American Regiment" during Vernon's campaign. Lawrence was also stationed on Vernon's flagship and came to both know and admire him personally. Lawrence also had a correspondence with Vernon long after the campaign ended. He may have obtained his medal directly from Vernon as a result of that friendship and correspondence.

GW accompanied Lawrence to Barbados in September, 1751 in hopes of finding a cure for the tuberculosis Lawrence had developed. He stayed in Barbados for several months, with Lawrence passing away in July, 1752; at which point GW inherited Mount Vernon.

The inventory of GW's personal property, kept at the Arlington, Virginia court house lists an "iron chest in the study" which contained stocks, bonds, cash, 3 Society of the Cincinnati badges, the gold Washington Before Boston medal authorized by Congress, a large medal of John Paul Jones, a Brass engraving of the Arms of the United States, and "11 medals in a case" among other things.

It is most probable that this medal was one of those listed. [The eleven medals are the Washington-Webster set of Comitia Americana's.—Ed.]

The fact that the auction listing noted this as GW's personal pocket piece carried by him throughout the Revolutionary war caught my eye. I was also familiar with the name "Lossing" as a famous American historian of the 1800's.

Both of these things caused me to drop everything to both preview and attend this sale.

The medal itself is contained in a custom leather case, probably commissioned by Lossing, from its age and wear, although I have no certain knowledge.

In my entire collecting "Life" I've always set a limit on what I would bid in a sale. This is the first time that I've pulled a "Statue of Liberty." My card went up and it was not coming down at any price, and so the piece now resides in my collection. Yes, it was a very good day; for now I have the piece which links the Vernon series to Mount Vernon and our first President. It ties everything together very nicely.

I need to dig through the Curdy and Lossing papers and publications to glean more details; so the quest for knowledge goes on. When I finally do meet with Glode, [Glode

Requa—Ed.] I'll show him this one. It should get his interest I would expect.

More will follow in due course.

Spencer Peck

John,

I received your WBB (Washington Before Boston) chapter. I enjoyed reading it and look forward to spending many comfortable evenings with the entire book when it is available. Thanks.

In the January MCA Advisory, I noted your comments on price escalation of medals. I thought you might be interested in my recent experience. In an effort to have more funds available to pursue Comitia Americana medals when they become available, I recently--sadly--sold my B602-B612 medals. They were in the ANR (Stack's) Norweb Collection sale on 7-8 Nov, 2006. They were lots 2229-2240, except for lot 2237. They were a nice group of high quality medals that I had slowly put together over several years. All had been purchased between 1998-2001, both at public auction and by private treaty. Results, in order, were as follows:

<u>Cost</u>	<u>Hammer</u>
\$900	\$2000
585	3200
1315	6000
450	1200
345	2000
1000	1800
405	2200
1600	5500
270	1300
245	400
1900	650

If you add 15% to the hammer, the results are even more dramatic. Doubles, triples, quadruples and even quintuples abound. Only one dud in the whole group, and I don't

understand why it went so low. So, it appears that the dramatic price increases are not just in high price material, but also in high quality material of lower value. Whatever the case, I rejoiced upon selling but will undoubtedly grumble when given the opportunity to make new purchases!

Finally, I recently purchased a previously unreported 2nd French mint restrike of the WBB medal. It is silver, with (cornucopia) and ARGENT on edge. It is Mooney state 3 with the reverse cud. The fascinating thing is that it is still in the original (I assume) velvet "frame" with the name and address of the Paris shop that did the framing work stamped on the reverse of the frame as follows:

MEDAILLES  
ARTISTIQUES  
A. GODARD  
37, Quai de l'horlogo  
PARIS

Being in an open front frame, the obverse unfortunately has some faint hairlines where it was probably occasionally "dusted" as it was displayed on the wall. The reverse is pristine. I purchased it at a local coin show from a gentleman who had bought it at a local estate sale, history unknown. Hot items at this show are usually modern proof sets and state quarters! I believe I made a very favorable, but not bargain, purchase. Hope springs eternal, occasionally rewarded, and that's why I continue to go to these local shows.

Now if I can only run across a silver, plain edge, original strike.....

All the best,

Marc McDonald

Marc is a really serious student of early American medals and, as the letter reveals, an astute purchaser of such material. His experience demonstrates the virtues of focus and knowledge.--Ed.