



The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America

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What's New On Our Website!

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE EVERY MONTH

www.medalcollectors.org

From the Editor

On July 28th, Medal Collectors of America held its annual meeting in San Francisco. It was a busy meeting featuring good fellowship, awards, reports and a fine presentation by John Sally on “School Medals” John has extraordinary knowledge of this subject; hopefully some version of his talk will find its way into these pages.

The Carl Carlson award went to Tony Terranova who has been a staunch supporter of the hobby in general and an especially staunch supporter of MCA in particular. Our very own vice president, John Kraljevich, received the Gloria Stamm Chamberlain award for promising young medallists, an award for which John is richly deserving.

Barry Tayman, our Secretary & Treasurer, tells us that we are running in the black, with all bills paid and \$10,000 plus in the bank. Paid membership has risen to 143 as of 6/30/05 and has grown since.

As measured by the quality of contributions to the MCA Advisory, membership trends and our bank account, the Club is in robust health. This is good but it is no reason for complacency. While we enjoy robust health, we need to better define our mission and then develop a formal agenda that goes beyond regular publication and periodic meetings. Your President will task the Board to come up with such an agenda in the near future. Meanwhile, suggestions on this topic from any member will be warmly received.

Menchell Offprint

Unbound offprints of David Menchell’s series on the French and Indian War are available at \$10 each. We are also offering a limited edition—bound, numbered and signed—at \$35

John J. Ford, Jr.

A Brief Retrospective

(by John W. Adams)

Long in failing health John J. Ford, Jr., died on July 5th. The hobby in general loses a giant and the medal collecting fraternity in particular loses its brightest star.

Some members of MCA knew John personally. Most members only knew “of him,” having heard a variety of comments—some good, many bad—about a man who enjoyed controversy as much as he did the vast body of knowledge he accumulated in his library and files.

In his early years, John shared his knowledge, writing brilliant articles for Wayne Raymond’s Coin Collectors Journal, The Numismatist and the Scrapbook. Then, of course, there was that landmark series of auction catalogues written by Ford and Walter Breen for New Netherlands Coin Company and extending over two decades. Most aficionados agree that there have been no more authoritative catalogues written before or since. The tragedy is that John published almost nothing in the 35 years thereafter.

John’s fatal flaw was that he did value money but found it difficult to value his time. Rather than buy one book for \$20, he would buy five for \$16 each, making the effort to sell (and deliver) the remaining four at \$20 each so as to obtain his copy for free. The cumulative amount of time invested in saving very finite sums could have been gainfully employed in writing on an almost endless list of subjects about which he was expert. The money was saved but his knowledge was never disseminated.

Ford was embroiled in a controversy that has lasted for forty years regarding western assay ingots. We are convinced that the man never knowingly sold anything that was false but we are equally convinced that many of the ingots in question were indeed false. If it had crossed John’s mind—as it may have—that he,

the great John Ford, had been duped by his source, he was too proud to admit it. His detractors have never adduced an iota of evidence that he knowingly sold fake products, much less that he made them.

So, yes, the man had his faults but these shrink into relative triviality when compared to his virtues. John was first and foremost a gatherer of information—thorough, relentless and meticulously accurate. When his research files are installed at the American Numismatic Society, these will become the foundation for scholarships for decades to come. Author after author will shower credit on Ford for the energy expended and the relevance of the material therein. George Kolbe's auctions of the Ford Library document the length and breadth of the man's interests. There is little in the field of numismatic Americana that did not attract his interest.

As a collector of numismatic Americana, John had no peer. Stacks' first eleven sales of his holdings across a variety of specialties stand as a monument to his foresight in gathering material before it was popular as well as his zeal in persevering toward near perfection of each series. Between the collector and his brilliant Bosworth, Michael Hodder, each auction catalogue has become a reference work in itself. Fortunately for we medal collectors the best is yet to come (not that four Washington and Columbia medals, eight clichés of the Diplomatic Medal and a near complete run of War of 1812 in silver have made for a shabby beginning). Ford's first love was the so-called "Betts medal" series and this material will be offered beginning in January 2006. No better, much less comparable, collection has ever appeared at an auction. Ford's attainments in the field of medals will educate and inspire us all. No doubt, many new collectors will be attracted to the field.

All the coins and medals that John owned were coins and medals that other collectors did not own. His very success

caused envy among rival collectors who had been beaten out by one means or another. Thus, jealousy accounts for much of the ill will that the man accumulated.

John out-collected me on many an occasion and my reaction could have been the same as that of many others. Instead, I chose to ally myself with the "enemy"—to learn rather than to oppose. For his part, John chose to reach out to me, with the result that we enjoyed an increasingly close relationship for 30 years. I, the student, was the recipient of hundreds of hours of tutorials. John, the master, was gratified that his knowledge had found such a receptive field in which to take root.

Whereas Ford wasted time in paying overly much attention to unimportant details, he invested vastly greater amounts of time in answering the questions of others, in reviewing manuscripts and, in general, serving as a database of information for the hobby. Perhaps, this time could have been better spent in writing books but, not really, because no book written by John J. Ford, Jr., the author, could have passed muster with John J. Ford, Jr. the editor.

He was the ultimate perfectionist. We medal collectors will remember the man as a pioneer who opened up vast tracts of wilderness that will be developed by those of us who follow in his steps. He will be remembered by other specialists in a similar fashion.

Libertas Americana

(by John W. Adams)

As has been noted by several contributors to this periodical, the *Libertas Americana* is one of the most beautiful medals ever made. Conceived by Benjamin Franklin and executed by Augustin Dupré, this piece celebrates the successful partnership between France and America in winning our Revolutionary War.

Franklin, who financed the project out of his own pocket, was liberal in his distribution of these medals. At least 100 were made in silver and 300 in bronze, most of which have survived. Thus, the Libertas may be classified as scarce but not rare. Nice specimens in silver routinely sell for \$25,000 and we know of one private transaction at \$35,000. The list of numismatists who would like to own a Libertas—coin collectors as well as medal collectors—is a long one.

On June 30th of this year, American Numismatic Rarities auctioned off the Cardinal Collection. Lot 3 was a particularly nice Libertas in silver, pedigreed to Harry Bass. “Going-in” estimates were \$25,000-30,000. Instead, the piece fetched \$115,000(!!!)--\$100,000 hammer price + 15% buyers fee.

Some may conclude that the medal market is hot. We believe that there were a variety of extraneous factors at work and, thus, would caution readers against re-calculating their net worths. What seems certain is that the dealers’ market for Libertas Americana medals will be frozen until the next auction appearance validates either the old or the new price.

Letters to the Editor

Dear John,

First, thank you for the excellent job you are doing as editor. As a volunteer in several other numismatic organizations, although not editor, I can appreciate the dedication, time and effort it takes to issue a MCA Advisory each month. All members of the MCA appreciate it. Now if we all can do our part and send you articles to edit.

Second, if you receive enough interest, I would appreciate an offprint of both David Menchell’s French and Indian War medals and David Alexander’s Society of Medallist.

Third, one of your letter writers commented on the Johnson inaugural medal, for the folks who don’t collect US presidential inaugural medals, there is a difference between an inaugural medal and an official inaugural medal. The latter is selected and authorized with the consent of the inaugural committee (or at least the chairperson) and President by the medal subcommittee. The former is any other medal that commemorates an inaugural. While David Alexander’s article in the May MCA Advisory might have given the impression that the LBJ medal was an official inaugural medal, the article actual only says inaugural medal.

Ron Thompson

Hi John,

Hope things are going well with you. We're deep into the summer season with lots of things going on.

If you don't have 10 respondents for a complete copy of Menchell's "Medals of Conflict/Medals of Conquest" count me in.

Also is there a complete listing of MCA articles? I'd be interested in anything written on Peace Medals. Second also, I am doing some work on fake peace medals. Have there been any MCA articles dealing with that subject? Would there be any interest in such an article?

Best,

Bob Pickering

(We sent him Warren Baker’s outstanding opus. —Ed.

John,

I would like copies of both reprints (SOM and French Indian War) and would be glad to pay any associated costs. Articles on series of medals or specialty medals are in great

demand but uncommon. I purchase most reference books that I can find that cover North American Medals. Thanks for taking the effort to make this happen.

Jan Monroe

Mr. Adams,

Thanks for your continued efforts as editor of the MCA Advisory. I really look forward to receiving each issue and learning more about this great "hobby" of ours.

Please put me down as a member who would very much like to see stand alone reprints of David Menchell's French and Indian War Medal articles (with color photos) as well as David Alexander's series on SOM medals.

Also, I have read the Letter to Editor by Chris Neuzil and others concerning the request for a specimen of the Truxton medal with the large obverse die cud. I think I have such a medal, and a digital photo is attached. I would like to offer my medal to them for research or photography purposes if they would like to borrow it for a short time. But they did not leave any contact information in their letter. Thus I am sending you this note in the hope that you can forward this information to them.

Many thanks,

Peter Irion
email: petervt@aol.com



Dear Mr. Adams:

In response to your editorial of the June 05 edition of MCA, reprints of David Alexander's series on Society of Medalists, I would like to request a reprint of the entire series in stand-alone format.

Would you also ask Mr. Alexander if he would address the silver issues in the SOM series, as I now only collect these in silver. My pursuit of this is coming along very well. I need to know if all of the SOM's were done in silver or just some of them.

I wish I could attend the meetings more, but as I am the Medal Chairman for TAMS and Thursday is TAMS big day, it becomes difficult. Thank you for a fine MCA publication, I enjoy it very much.

Donald Young
Charter Member.

Dear John,

There is an article in July 4th issue of coin world that Paul Gilkes wrote about Centennial medals that has me confused. I have a second official medal in silver 38 mm as shown on pg. 58. U.S. Centennial medal

authorized by congress 1876. I have been collecting coins since 1958 and this is a first one I have seen. I cannot make heads or tails as how many were made in silver or a ballpark on what it is worth? I take it to coin shows and all the dealers want it {even though it is not for sale} and the amount that is offered is crazy. I have been offered between \$50.00 and \$350. What is the real mintage and about what is it worth? If you need pictures I can send them.

Thank You,

J.C. Stout

Can someone provide Mr. Stout with an answer? –Ed.

Dear John,

I came across the enclosed ALS by Ely S. Parker. Perhaps you and the members can identify the medal he is referring to in his letter to John Schyler. It is very interesting.

Regards,

George T. Drost

In 1750, Sir William Johnson was superintendent of the Indian Department and he used medals as a standard means of recognizing chiefs. To cite a few specifics:

1. Account book for 4/20/1747: “6 large silver medals for sachems and Capt.”

2. Account book for 6/15/1767: “6 medals of silver for sachems.”

3. Letter of 7/30/1753 to Governor Clinton requesting “8-10 medals for sachems.”

Note that all of these medals were to be awarded to sachems (i.e. chiefs) with the exception of one for a warrior captain. Ely Parker’s correspondent makes it clear that none of the five named Indians was a sachem-- Mohawk oral history was and is quite comprehensive. Thus, the named parties were simple warriors suggesting that the award was not diplomatic but, rather, a reward for a specific service, such as rescuing a settler(s) from another tribe. A close reading of frontier accounts of the period would probably uncover some number of likely occasions. —Ed.