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Most Successful Medal Program

-D. WAYNE JOHNSON
Medallic Art Corporate Historian

I was once asked to describe the Hall of Fame Series of medals in one sentence. I wrote "One of the most popular series of medals in the world." I should have included the word "portrait."

Portrait medal series had existed in Europe long before. Swiss engraver Jean Dassier (1676-1763) worked in France where he created a 72-medal series of Famous French Celebrities, then moved on to England to engrave a series of British Kings and Queens.

In America the U.S. Mint struck medals of army and naval heroes at the discretion of the U.S. Congress. These were more single-issue medals that had a similarity of size and theme that seemed to fall into a series. They struck medals bearing the portrait of presidents as they were inaugurated late in the

19th century, but overlooked, at first, earlier presidents.

Even America's two 20th century medal series, Circle of Friends of the Medallion and The Society of Medallists overlooked portraits. There was no rule against portraits in both series, but few bore portraits.

There had been no true American portrait series until Presidential Art Medals, of Ohio, issued a series of U.S. presidents, in half dollar size, created by a top American sculptor and struck as fine art medals by Medallic Art Company. The success of that series led to a second - honoring U.S. States - each of which bore a portrait of their most famous son. Then a third series on Signers of the Declaration of Independence. All three series were created by one artist, Ralph J. Menconi (1915-1972) and all three series bore portraits on every medal, all of half dollar size, convenient for collecting, placing in an album, as collectors had done with coin series.

The success of President Art's three series got everyone thinking about other potential medal series. In New York City there was the Hall of Fame. This was a natural for a medal series.

The Hall of Fame honors the most famous Americans chosen by a select group of judges and sponsored by New York University. The first election was held in 1896, and elections were

held every four years thereafter.

Bronze statues of the honorees were installed along a Colonnade partially circling a building designed by famed architect Stanford White at the University's Morningside Heights campus. Niches for 102 statues appear on both sides of the Colonnade walkway.

Once a person was elected to the Hall of Fame - this was the world's first such hall of fame now widely copied by other organizations and fields - a statue was commissioned to be created slightly oversize by a prominent American sculptor. Once cast in bronze, it was installed in its own niche in that outdoor colonnade.

I cannot say for certain who came up with the idea first, I suspect it was Medallic Art's president Bill Louth, but it was a brilliant concept. In 1962 he formed a coalition to sponsor and market fine art medals of these most famous Hall of Fame Americans. If it was Bill Louth's program it was in imitation of one by his uncle, Clyde Curle Trees who created The Society of Medallists, three decades earlier in 1930.

The coalition consisted of New York University, the owner of the Hall of Fame, the National Sculpture Society who would furnish an art committee, the Medallic Art Company, which would manufacture the medals, and *Continued on page 3*

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COIN SHOW SCHEDULE

By Bill Liatys

June 2016

LOCAL SHOW SCHEDULE

PARSIPPANY *June 5th at Sunday 9 AM – 4 PM*
Pal Bldg 33 Baldwin Road Parsnippany NJ

BURLINGTON *June 12th Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM*
Burlington Mason Lodge Route 541 Burlington, NJ

TREVOSE *June 19th Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM*
Trevose Fire House 4900 Street Road Trevose, PA

TRI-STATE COIN & STAMP SHOW *June 26th Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM*
Williamson's Restaurant 500 Blair Mill Road Horsham, PA

WHITMAN COIN & COLLECTIBLES *July 14th-July 17th Thursday – Sunday*
Thursday – Noon – 6 PM Friday – Saturday - 10 AM – 6 PM Sunday – 10 AM – 3 PM
Baltimore Convention Center One W. Pratt Street Baltimore, MD

OCEAN COUNTY COIN CLUB *October 15 Saturday 9:30 AM – 3 PM*
Ocean Fire House 400 Arnold Avenue Pt. Pleasant Beach, NJ

President's Message

By Andrew Waholek

Hello to all! I hope everyone has had a wonderful month! We will be having our meeting on Monday May 23rd 2016 at 7pm. Make sure to bring those new coins that you've acquired for some show and tell. I'm looking forward to seeing all of you there!

Continued from page 1

the Coin and Currency Institute which would market the medals.

Over the next 13 years, 96 medals were created by 42 sculptors, predominately members of the National Sculpture Society. While the design was left to the artist each submission had to pass the approval of the Art Committee composed of at least five of the artists' sculptural peers.

Rules for the medal design were simple. It had to be a portrait on the obverse, significant scene from that subject's accomplishment for the reverse plus lettering on either side, in legend or inscription, HALL OF FAME FOR GREAT AMERICANS AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY.

Medals were struck in two sizes. A large 3-inch (76mm) bronze only, and a small 1¾-inch (44mm) size in bronze and silver. The silver medals were serially numbered. If I had to name the persons most responsible for the success of this series it would be Julius Lauth (1913-1991), art director at Medallic Art Company and Robert Friedberg (1912-1963) owner of Coin and Currency Institute. Lauth (no relation to Bill Louth, just a similarity of last names to the despair of our company telephone operators) kept on top of issuing commissions to qualified sculptor-medalists, all 96 commissions.



Julius knew who was available and who would have an empathy for the subject. For the theologians, for example, he would choose a sculptor with sympathetic religious beliefs. Or of similar ethic or background heritage as the American portrayed in a relief work of art. Julius had a dossier on each artist in his head. He was a masterful art director. Artists adored him, not only for the generous commissions he bestowed but also for his gentle demeanor and useful design suggestions. He never gave orders to artists, he was always attuned to their creative egos. In return, artists would do anything to please Julius, even if it meant another day or two completely remodeling a medal design he had briefly suggested.

But of paramount importance, if the sculptor who prepared the bronze bust in the Hall of Fame Colonnade was still alive, he would commission that artist for the medal. Such artist would already have the images still in his mind. It would be a superb companion piece to compliment their heroic sculpture in medallic form.

And in one case, where a sculptor died, as had Laura Gardin Fraser, Julius had to retrieve what she had accomplished to that point and reassign it to an artist with similar style and aptitude, Karl Gruppe.

I also remember in a conversation with Julius he was aware of the medal sequence, commissioning lesser known honorees, holding back some more popular ones for the last of the series.

He wanted to maintain collector interest right up to the end. Robert Friedberg was a genius who built a coin dealership following World War II into a numismatic institution. His knowledge of the field, and of marketing, led him to create a coin department, a leased department in a department store. He emulated the Marcus organization which had the philatelic department in Gimbels.

In New York City and the flagship Gimbels he established his coin department right next to the stamp department on the first floor. That was high rent, so he had to supply that department with enough numismatic material on a continuing basis to justify the monthly expense. With the success of a New York department store led to opening coin departments in other Gimbels stores around the country. At the height of the Friedberg expansion he had coin departments in 38 states. Purchases at these departments were typical gift items, often it was said for the "grandmother trade." Hall of Fame medals would be ideal gifts although many adult collectors would obtain these for themselves.

Look for Part two next Month

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D. WAYNE JOHNSON

And the help of Harry Garrison



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PNG warns of fakes

-Harry Garrison

A warning against counterfeit coins has been issued by the Professional Numismatic Guild.

Unsuspecting buyers have submitted counterfeit modern bullion coins to Numismatic Guaranty Corporation for authentication and grading, PNG said.

NGC, the official grading service of PNG, earlier reported submissions of counterfeit 2012-dated gold American Eagle \$50 denomination coins. Those particular counterfeits exhibit poorly defined details around Liberty's face and hair, different fonts for lettering and the date compared to genuine coins and the color is different because the fakes are not composed of gold, according to Max Spiegel, a vice president of Certified Collectibles Group, NGC's parent company.

Sales of counterfeit coins are potentially a multi-million dollar problem for the public, said Professional Numismatists Guild President Dana Samuelson.

"Professional dealers who look at classic U.S. coins and bullion items all day long are usually not fooled by these spurious items, but to the untrained eye they often look like the real thing," he said.

"We conducted an informal inquiry of PNG members and PNG Accredited Precious Metals Dealers about what

they're encountering now in the marketplace. They have seen everything from counterfeits of vintage rare coins to modern precious metal items. These include fakes of popular century-old U.S. Morgan and Peace design silver dollars to current gold and silver American Eagles, gold U.S. Buffalo coins, silver and gold Chinese Pandas, and Canadian silver and gold Maple Leaf coins. We're also seeing spurious gold and silver ingots," said Samuelson.

If you don't know coins, you better know!

Articles Wanted

If you have a topic you'd like to be covered in the Newsletter... write an article or submit your idea. Don't be shy....do it. All entries are welcome. Articles will appear in the Newsletter as soon as possible and might be edited for space consideration, not editorial content.

Meeting Schedule

The Trenton Numismatic Club meets on the fourth Monday of each month at the

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