



PAPERS
OF THE
PACIFIC COAST
NUMISMATIC SOCIETY
2013





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2013 Papers Staff

Chairman: Daniel Hipple

Judges: Greg Burns, William McKiver, Stephen Huston (editor)

About the 2013 PCNS Papers

by Stephen Huston

This year's papers reflect strong interests among most of our authors in *exonumia* — numismatic objects other than circulating coins. We have organized the contents with the winners first, followed by more *exonumia*, then paper currency, and a book review to round it out.

A sincere *thank you* to our five writers, who submitted seven works this year. Special thanks to our volunteer judges, and especially to Dan Hipple, our Papers Chairman, who has made this whole thing work two years in a row.

THE AUTHORS

MARK A. BENVENUTO, a repeat writer for PCNS Papers, who focuses on collection topics.

JAMES HANEY, first time Papers entry, currently webmaster of the Sacramento Valley Coin Club.

WILLIAM D. HYDER, noted medal researcher and author, and last year's first place Papers winner.

DAN WILSON, owner of Downtown Coin in Carson City, and president of the Downtown Coin Club.

JERRY F. SCHIMMEL, a prolific writer on world tokens, especially store cards of historic San Francisco.

JUDGING THE PAPERS

For those who don't know how these papers are judged, here is a brief overview of the judging standards:

ORIGINALITY (12 points): Was the information presented new? Was the subject presented in a new light? Did the author interpret existing facts in an independent, individual, fresh way?

RESEARCH (8 points): Did the article contain new facts uncovered by the author? Did the author include data obtained from an appropriate number of sources? Did the author uncover previously unused or seldom used sources of information?

NUMISMATIC INFORMATION (8 points): Was the information interesting and useful to numismatists?

SCOPE & COVERAGE (6 pts): Is the subject matter adequately covered?

READER APPEAL (6 pts): Is the article interesting? Was the information well organized and clearly presented? Were illustrations provided where needed? Were references to other works adequate?

That allows each paper up to 40 points from each of three judges.

Awards are made based on the total points per paper by all three judges. (Note: each author is eligible to win only once per year, even if they submit more than one paper.)

NEXT PAPERS CONTEST

If you want to try to displace our recent winners, the annual deadline for new papers is the April PCNS meeting of each year, so start writing.

THE JUDGES

GREG BURNS, editor of *The California Numismatist* (TCN), which has won the ANA's Best Regional Publication award for all 9 years of his tenure.

STEPHEN HUSTON, founding editor of *The Journal*, and long-time Papers participant as author or judge, and publication editor.

BILL MCKIVOR, of The Copper Corner, specialist in British tokens, member of ANA, EAC, C4 (Colonial Coin Collectors Club), TAMS, and Seattle-area coin clubs.

Thank you to PCNS Fellow, Jerry F. Schimmel, for underwriting the printing of this publication.

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Chinatown Tales: Stories and Brass Checks from Ross Alley and Old Chinatown Lane

by Jerry F. Schimmel

Walking east or west through Chinatown can be an adventure, especially with that steep hill. Just pick a route through one of the main thoroughfares, all narrow with impatient one-way traffic and pedestrian-clogged sidewalks. I recommend Sacramento, Clay, Washington, and Jackson streets as the best routes for Chinatown ambiance-on-the-hoof.

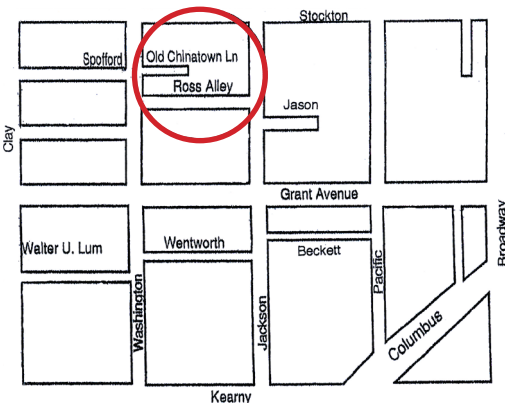
A walk south to north, and *vice versa*, lacks the hill. Sightseers mostly use narrow Grant Avenue, dominated by pagoda architecture and camera stores. Kearny Street is the least popular because of its fast, intimidating traffic. Stockton Street provides another way, though it's rarely free of double-parked trucks and family sedans tangled in gridlock. Whatever experiences

these routes may offer, they are no match for Chinatown's back streets like Ross Alley and Old Chinatown Lane, both of which breathe more history than exhaust fumes.

During the stroll be sure to look at the corner street signs. Attached above and below are small rectangles bearing Chinese characters. Their inscriptions are the local Chinese street names as opposed to city-adopted monikers. When translated, a few turn out to be simple approximations of English names like *See-Dak-Dun Gai* (Stockton Street) or *Pak-Si-Wik Gai* (Pacific Avenue). Others are more colorful like *Bak Wah Jun Gai*, or Street of John, the White Guy Who Speaks Good Chinese (Beckett Street).

But not to worry. This write-up covers only two alleys—plus stories of tokens issued by struggling cigar sellers a hundred years ago.

For your information the Cantonese word for street is 街, *gai*, pronounced "guy." Alley is *hong*, 巷.



*Map showing the locations of
Ross Alley
and
Old Chinatown Lane*



"Street of the Gamblers" –Genthe, c.1895



Ross Alley, c. 1995

ROSS ALLEY 舊呂宋巷

Gow-Lo-Sun Hong, literally Old Luzon Alley, is the local name for Ross Alley, but, to Walter Lee, late proprietor of Grant Avenue's Chew Chong Tai Company, it was "Old Filipino Alley" or "Old Manila Alley." Yet others call it "Old Spanish Alley," even when the characters spell out the name of a major Philippines island.

According to San Francisco's old time police chief, Jesse Cook (1860–1938), the route was originally settled by Spanish speakers, including Filipinos, who, way back in the 19th Century, were mostly Spanish-speaking. Yet another title for the street was invented by Arnold Genthe in his famous pre-1906 photograph — *Street of the Gamblers*. As the

story goes, Ross was also the first San Francisco thoroughfare to be officially anointed "alley."

Lee added that nearby Spoffard Alley, *Sun-Lo-Sun Hong*, literally New Luzon Alley, 新呂宋巷, is sometimes called "New Manila Alley," "New Filipino Alley," and sometimes "New Spanish Alley." Spoffard lies between Clay and Washington streets, downhill from Stockton Street, and across Washington Street from Old Chinatown Lane. One of the wider alleys, the street was officially named after W.E. Spoffard, the elected white commander of a citizens group which broke up the "Hounds" gang of July 1849. The original title has not changed since then.

Ross Alley has had its own share of city-designated names. On 1880s insurance maps it was shown as

"Stouts Alley (Ross St.)." The 1890s directories show "Ross Alley, see Stouts Alley." Entries continue up to 1910, when Stouts is dropped and the alley has the name we know.

Lowenstein claims that the "Ross" of Ross Alley was Charles L. Ross, merchant, judge, and alderman in the 1850s, although there was a Daniel Ross, also prominent at the same time. The name "Stouts" remains an enigma and may be a nickname for W.E. Stoutenburg, a member of the 1850 Vigilance Committee. While "Stouts" was an important man in those days "Stoutenburg's Alley" would have been a mouthful. Try saying the whole name ten times as fast as you can.

Maps of the 1880s show Chinese residents well-established along Ross Alley regardless of what other ethnic groups may have lived there. The route itself is one of the district's most active pedestrian thoroughfares lasting for a single block between Washington and Jackson streets. A short walk into the byway soon reveals an oddity. Some address numbers are not in numerical order. After the numbers were assigned by the city, Fong-Torres says, some residents simply removed them and put in numbers they liked better.

Between 1905 and 1920, small merchants in the alley issued a handful of tokens, mostly in support of cigar and tobacco sales. Tokens recorded for Ross Alley bear the

names Chung Jan, Fook Yuen, Leong Hop, Mee Wo, Far Kee, and Mon Quock. The future may reveal others.



CHUNG JAN

The Chung Jan 1438 $\frac{1}{2}$ piece (brass 28.5mm) has been a puzzle for more than a century. It was first mentioned in *The Numismatist*, January 1952, but the article was limited to descriptions and a plea for information. Russell Rulau listed the token under San Francisco in his *Standard Catalog of United States Tokens* and indicated that he had nothing to add. The June 1902, San Francisco phone book shows a Chung Jan, resident, Ross Alley, with no house number or occupation given. In more than two decades of searching this is the only Chung Jan I have found for San Francisco, or for that matter, anywhere.

Are the token and phone book names the same person? Does the phone book give us a proper attribution? Probably. In this case Chung Jan is a personal name as is the listing. The barely-to-be-seen diesinker's signature, L.H. Moise S.F., was used primarily between

1900 and 1906, which fits the directory date.

A remaining mystery is the sequence 1438 $\frac{1}{2}$. Most collectors think it is a street address, however Ross Alley numbers only go as high as the 60s. Grant Avenue and Stockton Street are possibilities, although the 1400s numbers would have been blocks north of 19th Century Chinatown. Another possibility is that it is a kind of numerology. For a few Chinese being associated with a specific number is all important.

In 1902, Ross Alley was still a major locale for single men's recreation with its gambling halls and brothels, and Chung Jan may well have played a part in either. The token has no denomination and could easily have served as a gambling or bordello chit. Note that the side with a diesinker's signature shows the numeral 3 struck over another number, possibly an 8. Chung Jan's "residence" would not have survived the April 1906, Earthquake and Fire.



FOOK YUEN: 19 ROSS ALLEY

Fook Yuen was a fruit salesman listed in the October 1905 phone

book. His 34.5mm brass token is uniface and crudely prepared without a collar. Like the Chung Jan piece, there is no indication of value or economic activity. However, for produce men worldwide the piece would be seen as a "tally" used by shopkeepers or stallholders as a receipt for goods consigned. Fook Yuen would have paid the suppliers' agents with these discs. At a later time he would exchange them for the balance due. His business would have been destroyed in 1906. This token itself is discolored, consistent with exposure to high temperatures.



LEONG HOP & CO: 23 ROSS ALLEY

The Leong Hop piece was issued sometime in 1905 or possibly early '06. Phone books date the shop from May 1, 1905, and the store could only have lasted until April 1906. Mr. Leong had an earlier address at 1 Cum Cook Alley (known officially as Sullivan's Alley) where he ran an "Electrical Works," whatever that was. Not all phone books were available, but, by June 1, 1902, he was shown as a grocer at the same place. There was no mention in the December 1903 book, but, by late 1905, Mr. Leong was peddling

phonographs at 23 Ross Alley. Which posits the question: Why would a phonograph salesman issue a 21mm brass token for *A Good Cigar*? We will never know, but someone who was conversant with electrical gadgets certainly knew slot machines, which is almost certainly what the token was used for. Slot machines were abundant back then, especially here in Frisco.



FAR KEE: 43 ROSS ALLEY

San Francisco directories show Far Kee at this address from June 1916, through August 1919. Nothing interesting can really be said about Mr. Far except that he was a commuter. Oakland phone books show him living at 343 Fifth Street from October 1913, through August 1919. His 21mm brass piece is one of two shown with a blank reverse. Without a doubt it, too, was made for slot machines.



MEE WO: 32 ROSS ALLEY

According to the phone books of

October 1914 through October 1916, Mee Wo's address was the same as on his token, his occupation noted only as "cigars." His 33mm brass token was manufactured around the same time if design is any indication. From June 1917 through April 1924, Mee Wo lived farther down the street at number 63. After then his name disappears from the lists.

The Mee Wo token shows a cash denomination — 20¢ — a common value used for Chinese minor coinage. In his time that price would have been exorbitant for tobacco products, most cigars selling for a nickel or at best a dime. The other puzzler is that Mee Wo's token does not mention cigars. I leave it to you, dear reader, to speculate on the token's purpose.



MON QUOCK: 67 ROSS ALLEY

Directories put Mon Quock at 69 Ross Alley from June 1914 through February 1915, and his residence at 67 from June 1915 through February of the following year. However, 67 is also the address shown on his 21mm brass token. Possibly he purchased a residential telephone service to use in the shop because it came at a cheaper rate. Curious visitors can see

the bricked up doorway to his old business at the north end of the alley.



I. WELLS: 38 ROSS ALLEY

I didn't include the Wells pieces on the list of six because of their obvious English name. The two aluminum pieces (24.5 and 34.5mm) remain something of a mystery and were issued, or better said, manufactured, between 1908 and 1912. The tiny diesinker's signature, Moise K. Co., was common from 1907 to 1910 and possibly as late as 1912. The two cash values, 25 and 50¢, closely resemble brass checks used in Bartlett Alley bordellos, both in denomination and design. Bartlett Alley (now Beckett Street) was one of the post-earthquake low-cost brothel streets. It lay a block east of Ross Alley and a few steps down from Grant Avenue.

The U.S. Census for 1910 shows six Chinese females in residence at 38 Ross Alley. Six per house was the standard complement in small

Frisco brothels so it is legitimate to conclude that the pieces were intended as bordello checks. Tokens were usually bought in advance by Johns and handed to their dates at the point of assignation. Girls never saw cash until they turned in their checks for a discounted amount. We can only fantasize about what services each token may have purchased.

Wells tokens always come uncirculated or in very high grades. There was an uneasy coalition between Chinese and Caucasian vice entrepreneurs, and it may be that a planned operation fell through before the tokens could be used.

No directory or census listings for I. Wells were found for Ross Alley. There was a Madge Wells at 418 Dupont Street in 1907 (now Grant Avenue), and 720 Commercial Street in 1908, both known locales for San Francisco's demi-monde. And Madge was skilled at promoting the occasional scandalous headline. Directories between 1911 and 1917 show several persons who could be "I. Wells," though none seem to have any connection to Ross Alley.

Number 38 does not exist now. Where it should be is a fairly recent concrete building with different house numbers. White prostitution was outlawed in San Francisco in 1917, and Chinese brothels were shuttered by 1920.



OLD CHINATOWN LANE

Gow-Wah-Fow Hong 舊華埠巷 (literally Old China Port City Alley), was once known informally



as *Ma-Fong Hong* 鳥房巷 or Stable Alley, literally Horse House Alley. The tiny way lies on the north side of Washington Street a few steps from Stockton Street. So far it has had several English names: Church Court, Cameron Alley, and eventually the current title. Jesse Cook tells us that alongside the old

First Baptist Church at Washington and Stockton streets there was this alley at the end of which was a stable for horses, thus a common source for both the Church Lane and Stable Alley names.

The first directory listing for Church Alley was in 1895, though the tiny way had been in pedestrian use long before then. In 1909, it turned into Cameron Alley, although the name “Church Alley” was still used in phone books up to 1912.

What occasioned the choice of “Old Chinatown Lane” three decades later is probably lost, though it may have had something to do with the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939–40. However, the name “Cameron” was most certainly taken from Donaldina Cameron (1869–1968), the Scottish missionary, whose life work was to rescue as many Chinese girls as possible from brothel slavery.



FOOK HING JAN

Fook Hing Jan 福興棧, literally Prosperity Begins Warehouse (*i.e.* retail store) was listed in the phone book as a tobacco shop for one year in 1913, at 7 Church Alley. A 25mm brass token used in the small shop is the only known piece from this location. Its denomination,

2 Cigar (*sic*), was probably intended as a promotion piece much like the coupons we get from supermarkets. I'm guessing there were also 1 Cigar and 5 Cigars tokens, similar to a series of Wing Lee pieces used in nearby Waverly Place. Note the unusually large Reininger and Co. manufacturer's signature. August Reininger was listed at 541 Market Street from 1910 through 1915, and at other locations before and after those dates. This signature so far is known only on the Fook Hing Jan and Wing Lee tokens. Today, no. 7 Old Chinatown Alley is a residence.

ON NEW HONG

In his memoirs, Jesse Cook described a pre-1906 passageway running east and west between Ross and Church

Alleys known as *On New Hong* 骯尿巷 (literally Dirty Urine Alley), which is still there. The name sounds comical now though it probably wasn't then. There were never any public toilets or open spaces in the tight confines of Chinatown, unlike the rest of the city where empty lots and dirt streets were ready for the relief of any passerby. As a footnote, Fong-Torres says the passageway was once used by the Beatles for a back door to Ross Alley during their 1960s tour, a way for the Fab Four



Ross Alley at Washington Street

Above — ca. 1895

Below — 1995



to sneak unnoticed into the now vanished Ricksha Cocktail Lounge.

Curious about *On New Hong*, I went to the end of Old Chinatown Lane. There I found a plywood wall with a fair sized hole through which could be seen a bare dirt



Three scenes of Ross Alley in 1995

yard over foundation ruins worn smooth. To the right of the hole at a ninety degree angle was a 3/4 inch thick plywood gate with keyed lock, obviously the entrance. Neither lock nor panel would budge a millimeter from my effort, and I momentarily daydreamed about picking locks, about which I know nothing.

My curiosity persisted and I went down to Ross Alley. There I found an identical plywood door at number 31 — as solid and immovable as its mate.

PHOTO CREDITS

Token photos: Stephen Huston

Mee Wo photo: Ron Lerch

19th Century Ross Alley: Arnold Genthe

20th Century Ross Alley: Jerry Schimmel

Old Chinatown Lane: Donna Dion





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*Remembering California's Service
in the Spanish-American War
by William D. Hyder*



The citizens of San Francisco celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the 1848 discovery of gold in California on January 24, 1898, and had just opened the Golden Jubilee Mining Fair, when the city's and the world's attention was distracted by unexpected events in Cuba. On February 15, 1898, the *U.S.S. Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor. American cries to "Remember the Maine" overshadowed most other events of 1898. Within a few days, America's newspapers printed headlines blaming Spain for the atrocity and began clamoring for war.

Stories in the February 18 issue of the *San Francisco Call* reported that San Francisco's men were ready for war, and, two days after that, stories reported on San Francisco's preparations for war. Less than a month later, the *San Francisco Chronicle* told the story of 3,233 soldiers encamped at the Presidio waiting to sail to the Philippines. So

Figure 1: Admiral George Dewey medal commemorating his May 1 victory over the Spanish Pacific fleet in Manila Bay. The medal had to have been issued after his promotion to admiral on March 2, 1899 (Aluminum, 38mm).

many had volunteered in California that the government was unprepared to fully outfit them. The young men spent their days drilling, trying to stay dry in the rain, and dodging sentries if they dared to venture into town at night without permission.

The First Regiment of California Volunteers and Batteries A and B of the California Heavy Artillery shipped out to Manila. While the artillery batteries occupied strategic positions, the regimental volunteers saw plenty of action and distinguished themselves in battle. They departed San Francisco on May 24, 1898, many of the volunteers having never been outside the state. They saw their first deployment

on July 19, following their ocean voyage that took them to Hawaii and Sydney before landing in the Philippines. On July 31, they fired their first shots in repelling a Spanish attack in the battle of Malute. Although untested volunteers, the California regiment was commended for their bravery under fire.

California Volunteers Battery A of the Heavy Artillery saw their

major action in the first six months of 1899, battling the Filipino insurgents. They held the road to the shipyards, protecting American naval vessels for 69 days. Relieved of duty in early July, Battery A sailed for home on July 26, coming ashore on August 25, 1899, to the welcome of the crowds in San Francisco.

Before the last shots were fired, California began preparing for the return of their volunteers. The governor vetoed legislation that proposed a state funded service medal for the Spanish-American War volunteers in early April 1899, owing to the poor state of California's economy. The Native Sons of the Golden West stepped into the void, vowing to raise the funds to honor every enlisted Californian whether he saw active field duty or not. The NSGW estimated that 5,000 to 6,000 volunteers and regular military would be entitled to recognition for their patriotic response to the country's call to duty.

Donations, large and small, poured in at a healthy pace. The



Figure 2: A satirical medal memorializing the Yanko-Spanko War. Ambrose Bierce, columnist for the San Francisco Examiner, at first joined the call to war only to become disillusioned with the ineptitude of the American and Spanish militaries. By the middle of May, he had taken to using the term "Yanko-Spanko War," and complained that America was now seeking to expand its territory in the Pacific. (Aluminum, 29mm)



Figure 3: The medal designed to honor the citizens of California who volunteered for the Spanish-American War. (Bronze, 38mm)

June 20th meeting of the California Volunteers' Medal Fund reported just over \$3,000 raised. By late August, more than \$8,300 had been received from across the state, and plans were made to present the first medals to the members of the First California Regiment.

The obverse design of the medal sought to tell the soldiers' story from their first encampment to their homecoming. On the left, in the distant field, is the tent city that filled the Presidio grounds. Fort Point and the Marin Headlands flank the Golden Gate in the center of the field along the horizon. The artist intended the view to evoke the soldiers' emotions as they sailed for the Philippines with California slipping from view. The *USS Olympia* rides at anchor in the bay on the right. In the foreground, Minerva or California sits with an outstretched hand holding an olive branch to greet the returning veterans. The bear sits peacefully at her side rather than being shown in a more aggressive standing position.

The reverse design originally carried the name of the Native Sons of the Golden West since they sponsored and raised the funds for the medal when the state bowed out. The NSGW, however, had their name removed in favor of "The People of California." The crossed flags of the United States and California form the negative space for the recipient to engrave

their name. The designer's signature, Hammersmith & Field, can be found below the dedication, "For Service in the / Spanish American War / 1898-99."

California artists Dr. Chalmers, A. Le Jeune, and Robert I. Aitken submitted alternative designs in competition with Hammersmith and Field, but each was found lacking and being too general to be recognized as commemorating the war.

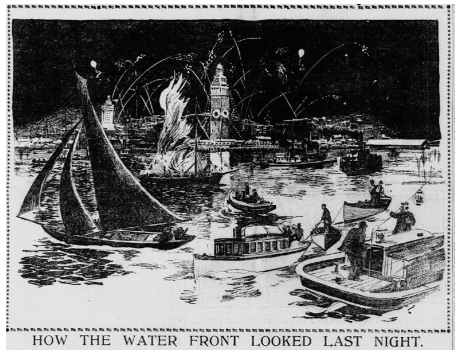
The Native Sons opted to reject the pin bar as proposed, and selected H. R. Hopps' design with a grizzly bear holding the "California" bar. The grizzly's claws and devilish eyes would be threatening were he not sticking his tongue out in a touch of whimsy. A loop with a pressure clamp attached the pin bar to the medal rather than punching a hole for a ring attachment. The pressure attachment is easily removed which explains why they are usually found as a stand-alone medal as pictured in figure 3.

Hammersmith and Field manufactured jewelry, spoons, decorations, and medals over a number of years in San Francisco. Their engravers undoubtedly produced the dies for the medal, but the firm may not have had the capacity to produce the 6,000 medals needed. John T. Greany of the NSGW made arrangements for the San Francisco mint to strike the medals. While the mint in San Francisco did not have the

capacity to design and produce the dies themselves, the Director of the Mint, George Roberts, directed the superintendent of the San Francisco mint to strike the medals at cost at a time when the work would not interfere with coin production.

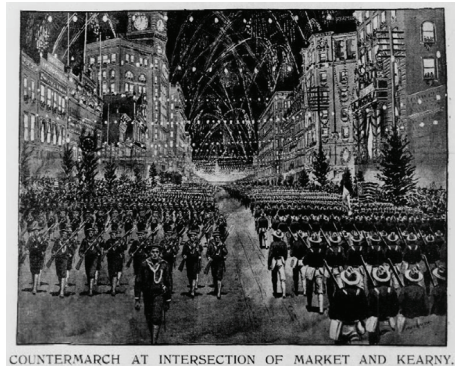
San Francisco planned a gala reception for the volunteers on their landing in San Francisco. Arrangements were made with the customs house inspectors to meet the troop transport ship *Sherman* at the Farallon Islands in order to clear the soldiers' bags before reaching port so no one would be delayed landing. Efforts were made to ensure clean streets and the welcoming committee prepared palms, garlands, and a brilliant array of lighting to mark the route to the official reviewing stand in front of the Chronicle Building at Market and Battery streets.

The *Sherman* entered port on the evening of Thursday, August 24th, surrounded by a flotilla of tugs and private boats (fig. 4, above right). The troops disembarked on Friday, and marched to the Presido to re-establish their tent city before being granted furloughs for the remainder of the day and evening. There would be no dodging sentries for this home coming as long as the men returned Saturday morning to prepare for the celebration and evening parade of soldiers.



HOW THE WATER FRONT LOOKED LAST NIGHT.

Figure 4: *The Call's* illustration of the waterfront celebrating the arrival of the *Sherman*.



COUNTERMARCH AT INTERSECTION OF MARKET AND KEARNY.

Figure 5: *The Call's* illustration of the troops in countermarch at Market and Kearny.

The crowds began gathering at 6 o'clock along the parade route hoping to secure the best viewing spots. The streets were lit with electricity and the sounds of cowbells, horns, sirens, and cannons announced the beginning of the celebration. Roman candles rocketed into the heavens. Troops were underway by 8:15, but the press of revelers wanting to welcome them home from war slowed their progress. The Third Artillery were



Figure 6: A souvenir-hanging medal likely struck by Schwaab Stamp and Seal of Milwaukee (gilt-brass, 38.5mm, above).

The complete badge likely had a red-white-blue ribbon like the 1898 badge (at right).

followed by contingents of the Native Sons, the Foresters, the Woodmen, the Red Men, the Irish, the German Vereins, Austrian guards, journeymen butchers, school children, volunteer firemen, and the Fraternal Eagles.

After nearly two hours, the Volunteers finally appeared and the crowds went wild.

Schwaab Stamp and Seal likely issued a hanging badge commemorating the event that was sold as a souvenir of the event (figure 6, above left). The medal lacks Schwaab's signature, but the style is consistent with the work of Schwaab S. & S., and many of their medals were unsigned. Although the example in my collection lacks its ribbon, a complete badge likely looked somewhat similar to a Schwaab badge sold for the 1898 Jubilee (figure 6, above right).

San Francisco's volunteers received their medals at a ceremony hosted by the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West in early September. Similar ceremonies were held in other cities and large towns over the next few months until the proud citizens of California had honored every volunteer answering the call of the Spanish-American War.

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Figure 7: The California Volunteer medal engraved by the recipient, Edward M. O'Brien. Born in California in 1872, the twenty-six year old O'Brien was an electrician in the San Francisco building industry and living with his parents when he joined the First Battalion California Volunteers, Battery A Heavy Artillery, and served in the Phillipines. Each pin bar bears a unique number although there is no known list to pair a number with an actual recipient. (Bronze, 38mm)

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*From Ancient Presentation Pieces to Common, Modern Proof Sets:
the Evolution of an Elite Coinage*
by Mark A. Benvenuto

INTRODUCTION

What collector does not strive to gather the best of any and all possible coins into their own collection? Who does not want an absolutely stellar piece when it comes their way? While coins that have some wear generally have a story to tell, the best of the best are coins many of us strive to add to our collections because of their beauty, the eye appeal associated with them, and the artistry they represent. Perhaps surprisingly, such pieces have a long (and beautiful) history.

ROMAN PRESENTATION PIECES

The Roman Empire remains one of the greatest political entities of history, and elements of it, or inspired by it, still exist within several world governments today. Many nations have a bicameral legislative body, as did the Romans. Countless words in the English-speaking world have their roots in the Latin of the Empire. Many of our laws and the facets of our legal system come directly from the customs and laws of Rome. And numerous features of our coins, including lettering written in arcs and pushed to the edge, abbreviations, and Latin inscriptions, were the inventions of the Romans.

Few of us though, even the avid collectors, would immediately claim the idea of proof coinage as something that has its roots buried way back in the time of imperial Rome. Yet a viable connection is there.

While many people today think that the sole means by which the Roman Empire expanded was by conquest, Rome maintained diplomatic ties and connections with many of its neighbors. One means by which agreements could be cemented and remembered, especially when the people and leaders with whom Roman leaders and commanders were dealing did not speak or read Latin, was to give a special Roman coin to the "barbarian" leader.

These were not everyday coins for spending and circulation, and as such were made with a higher degree of skill and care. The idea of specially polished dies seems to be a modern invention of proof coinage, but Roman dignitaries appear to have had the ability to have their mint masters produce high quality presentation coins, with extra care taken to centering the design on the planchet, and special care taken to ensure that the design was struck up as fully as possible. The result, even today, is a small cadre of

excellent coins that look especially beautiful. When such coins make an appearance at auction, there is usually some fierce bidding, precisely because of the high quality of any such piece.

SPANISH COLONIES ROYAL PIECES

Rome was nothing but a distant memory in 1492, when their Royal Catholic Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain gave the authorization for a voyage to Cathay (modern day China) to a Genoese mariner who proposed to get there by sailing westward around the Earth, across what was then called the Ocean Sea. Known to them as Christobol Colon, and to the modern world today as Christopher Columbus, we all know that he never made it to China or any of the Spice Islands off of eastern Asia, but that he changed the world dramatically and ushered in a new age, connecting Europe with the Americas.

Columbus and his patron and patroness were themselves all memories when the Mexico City Mint first opened for business in 1535. That date makes it the oldest and longest functioning mint in the western world. Right at the beginning, the young mint produced what we now consider crude coins, generally called cobs. The term supposedly derives from the Spanish “cabbe de barre” meaning “end of the bar,” in reference to the practice of sawing off the end of an ingot, and

then stamping it with the coining die. It did not take long for a river of New World silver and gold to start pouring from the Mint, and making the journey back across the Atlantic to Spain. This new-found wealth fueled the coffers of Spain, the wars of Europe, and the commerce of the world. Indeed, it had displaced silver mined in European lands by about 1580.¹

But in the midst of this flood of crude precious metal coins were a few true, real beauties. Even in the early days of the operations in New Spain, as Mexico was then called, there were a special few coins now referred to as “royal” pieces. These were not merely sliced off the end of an ingot of precious metal and quickly hammered with a coat of arms. They were struck on even, round blanks, and usually show the design well-centered and fully struck on the metal. There does not appear to be archival evidence that each of these special pieces was produced on a direct royal decree. But clearly, when the standard for producing Spanish colonial silver coins for circulation was so low, the extra time required for the striking of these special pieces indicates that some authority had need or desire of a few, special coins for some now unknown purpose.

While there are examples of smaller denominations made in this royal style, the true gems tend to be the large, silver 8 reales, or the

large, gold 8 escudos. When such coins come up for sale today, it is usually at auction, and bidding can be quite spirited. However, because the collector market within the United States does not focus on early Spanish colonial silver and gold as much as it does on some other series, the possibility still exists that a sharp-eyed collector might be able to add one or more of these “royal” pieces to a collection. Additionally, since “royal” pieces were produced in silver denominations smaller than the 8 reales, the possibility exists here of being able to obtain an example without an enormous cost, as smaller Spanish colonial silver is not generally collected as avidly as the 8 reales denomination.

For collectors of more modest means, simply purchasing the catalogue in which a gathering of these “royal” coin examples is offered can be a step towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of such pieces. One that has become something of a collectible in its own right is the catalogue of the Swiss Bank Corporation, “Collection of Spanish Colonial and Spanish Coins, Auction 27,” which was held in Basel way back on January 24th, 1991.² The illustrations, descriptions and overall material will give any collector a great deal of information on the subject, despite the age of the catalogue.

THE U.S. SETS OF “1804”

What avid numismatist has not heard of the United States 1804 silver dollar? It remains one of the most coveted of all rarities in the field of United States coinage. Yet, it was never made to circulate, and was not produced anywhere near the year 1804. These silver dollars were produced in 1834, as part of presentation sets of proof coins, made especially as gifts to foreign leaders. Two of the original 1804 dollars — often called the Class I dollars — can be traced to their inclusion in presentation sets to the Sultan of Muscat, and to the King of Siam.³

Perhaps because of the amazing hype that surrounds the sale of one of these dollar coins, few of us take the time to see the connections between them and the presentation pieces that came before them, or the more common proofs that would follow. Yet these silver dollars do form an important link in a chain that has now lasted for millennia. One can argue that these are the first U.S. coins that are special, that were made to what we might today call proof standards, that were made for purposes beyond mere circulation.

But one can also make the case that the 1804 sets were simply an outgrowth of a special numismatically-based program that had been with the young United States since its beginning. Since the time that the thirteen colonies had

been part of Great Britain, we had been in the habit of presenting what are now called Indian peace medals to the chiefs of friendly Indian nations. Great Britain and France, in their decades-long struggle for territory in North America, gave such medals to various chiefs when they felt it was called for. Such medals were always highly coveted, simply because the Native Americans had not yet mastered the smelting of different metals, and the ability to create such pieces. These served as tokens of friendship with peoples who often had no written language, and no concept of treaties and legal documents.

The United States jumped into the production of peace medals, and placed the face of the president on each, whereas Britain and France always had the visage of the reigning monarch on their medals. Thus, it appears logical to say that presentation coins made at the young United States Mint were preceded by the Indian peace medals that were produced immediately after our independence was won.

THE PROOFS OF THE 1800S

In the nineteenth century, coin collecting was nowhere near as popular as it has become today, and indeed was considered by many to be the hobby of kings. The United States, being quite king-less, might be forgiven for not having had a large number of collectors in this time

frame. But curiously, as the nation grew, and as fortunes were earned, gained, won, or stolen in the newly opened lands of the western United States, an upper class emerged throughout the country that was keen on imitating many of the aristocratic customs of our neighbors east of the Atlantic. These wealthy individuals found that the right word to the right official meant that they could purchase specially struck coins directly from the U.S. Mint, and thus, perhaps with no government plan or direction, a series of proof coins were manufactured during this time. This actually does mark the beginning of the transition from special, presentation coinage, to the proof sets we have today.

Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, special issues of the Mint increased to the point that they became something of an annual event. Even a cursory glance in some standard reference catalogue, such as the Yeoman guide — more properly, *A Guide Book of United States Coins* — shows that the silver coins of the United States saw proofs minted all the way back to the 1850s.⁴ It appears that the real transition from presentation piece to proof coin occurred during this era.

MODERN PROOF ISSUES: UNITED STATES, CANADA, BRITAIN, AND THE SOVIET UNION

The United States was hardly the only nation in the world, or the only

Mint in the world, that got into the business of making proof coins in the 1800s. Great Britain and France were two world leaders that also saw presentation issues evolve into proof issues, and eventually proof sets, during this time frame. But another shift occurred, one that moved Mints from a position of making proofs for a few, selected customers to the business of mass production of proof coins. While this shift happened at different dates for different countries, most collectors of United States proofs date the start of the modern era at 1936. Indeed, Dave Lange's book, *A Guide Book of Modern United States Proof Coin Sets*, starts there, and serves as a major reference for most collectors today.⁵

Interestingly, the Royal Canadian Mint developed a proof set program that matured as the twentieth century unfolded. Prior to 1973, the RCM produced special uncirculated pieces, often referred to as specimen coins. It was 1973, and the upcoming Olympic Games, that really launched the Canadian proof program. It has grown significantly as it has developed.

Another nation that used and issued proof coins, and did so as an outright propaganda tool, was the now-defunct Soviet Union. It took decades for the Soviet Mint in Moscow to get to the production of proofs, but when it finally happened and the flood gates opened, they

could never again be closed. There was a steady stream of grousing among collectors in the west that the bosses within the USSR knew of no better way to get hold of hard, western currency than by minting commemorative proofs for just about everything and selling them to us decadent capitalists. But many of us still bought those proof commemoratives, and thus did a part in keeping that propaganda machine churning out commems — some of them being very attractive proofs.

COMMON PROOF SETS

The debate about the point at which proof sets became common is probably one that will never be settled. As we just stated, the first of the current proofs in the United States were produced all the way back in 1936, yet one can argue that the few tens of thousands that were made in each of the early years are far greater in number than any Roman, Spanish colonial, or Renaissance presentation piece. By that standard, the 1936 proof sets are rather common. On the other side of this argument we have the 1957 proof sets, the first year in which the United States Mint produced over one million proofs! By any stretch, that has to be a common set.

Collectors often have to wait years to find a proper Roman, Spanish, British, or French presentation piece for sale. The flip side of such a phenomenon is that

just about anyone can go on-line today and find a United States proof set from the late 1950s or early 1960s for sale at a reasonable price. While the first purchase may be a true hunt, the latter can be almost as common as buying groceries.

The proof coins are still amazingly beautiful. Indeed, they are made to far more exacting specifications than any of the ancient, or nineteenth century coins. But with the modern proof coins, be they of the United States or any other nation, the transformation from presentation piece to common proof is complete.

EXPANDING A COLLECTION

Assembling a collection of proof and specimen coins is a different experience for every person. Their tastes, desires, and financial capabilities shape any collection they create. Most of us can afford to start with some of the modern United States proof sets. Some of us may then choose to seek out available Indian peace medals, issued by a young USA, or by Great Britain or France. Others may choose to widen their focus to Canadian, British, Soviet, or some other nation's proof issues. And the more ambitious among us may start looking back into Renaissance presentation pieces, or looking even farther back than that.

A FINAL THOUGHT

The progression of special coins from ancient, imperial presentation pieces to modern, but common, works of art has certainly been a long one. But throughout millennia of change, one thing has remained constant in the production of these special pieces: they are the best of the minter's art, the coins that are meant for something more than merely enabling some transaction. Thus, they form a continuing part of our history, and showcase some of the greatest art ever fitted into a small space.

END NOTES

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Geissebrecht, Macedo and Perry:

What to Do with Your Coins If You Don't Spend Them

by Jerry F. Schimmel



In the early 1890s three men were presented with two small but unusual gifts, an 1891 dime and an 1861 quarter. Both were shaved flat on the reverse and then handsomely engraved with custom messages.

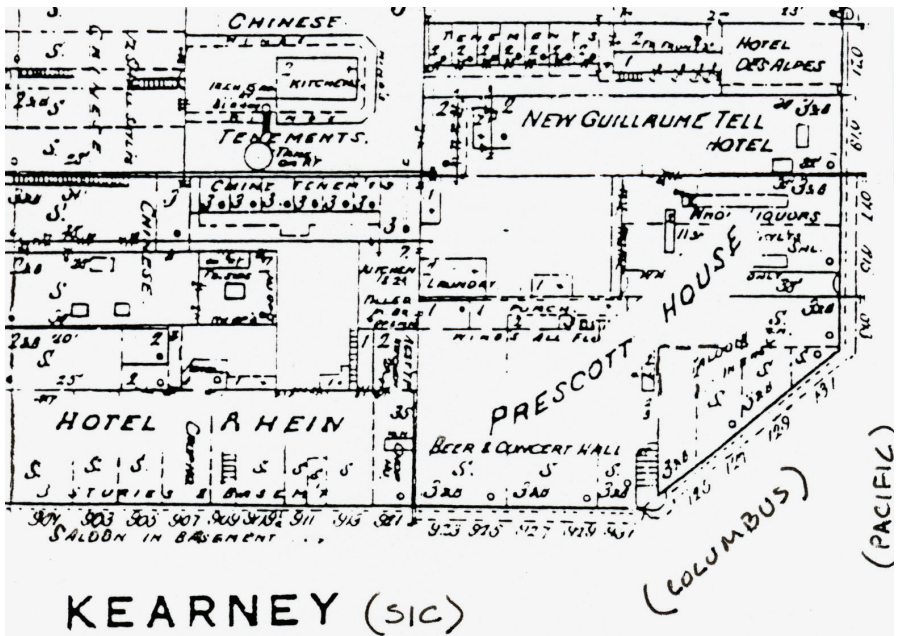
10¢ inscription: 811 $\frac{1}{2}$ KEARNY St / Dec. 16-93 / S.F.

25¢ inscription: 903 KEARNY St / Jan. 11-94 / S.F.

Note that the letters "S.F." (for San Francisco) and central decoration are remarkably alike, obviously done by the same engraver, one of more than four dozen listed in 1893.

Directories listed Max Giessebrecht alone as saloon keeper at 811 $\frac{1}{2}$ Kearny Street in 1893. Partners Manuel Macedo and John T. Perry were shown for the same year at 903, although the coin inscription date reads (18)94. None were listed in directories later or before 1893, except Perry in a grocery partnership with his brother in 1894. Then all disappear from the listings.





A Sanborn & Co. fire insurance map of 1890, (above) put 903 Kearny Street at the northwest corner of Kearny and Jackson streets. Note the words in the drawing “saloon in basement” which was probably where 903 led its erstwhile toppers. 811^{1/2} must have been a whole lot like it, located a block downhill near the corner of Kearny and Washington streets. The saloons lay on the southwest edge of San Francisco’s Barbary Coast district.

What was the purpose of the engraved coins? In both cases they were commemoratives of a personal kind.

My guess is they were produced to observe the closing of the two saloons. If made for a birthday or wedding, initials or names would have been part of the engraving.

Some call this type of coin alteration *love tokens*, though strictly speaking that term is applied to engravings done for events like engagements and anniversaries.

In 1893 and 1894, the country was in one of its periodic financial plunges and probably not a good time to open a bar or any business. The directories of 1893 were published on April First, which means that both pubs were open for the rest of the year and probably before April. Nine-oh-three Kearny did not make it into the 1894 book because it was gone before listings could be published.

The engraved legends remain as testimonials to the efforts of three men.

If you think they were made for something else, speak up!



The Madame and the Queen:

a Cheap Way to Promote the Oldest Profession

by Jerry F. Schimmel



In the French Riviera city of Nice, just before World War I, there were two hotels with English-related names: *Hotel de La Grande Bretagne* (Hotel Great Britain) and *Hotel d'Angleterre* (Hotel England), not to mention a major beach walking path called *Promenade de Anglais* (Walkway of the English). Thus it should surprise no one that a local brothel issued a 21mm advertising token stating “English Spoken.”

The French part of the token legend reads “Aux Violettes de Nice, Mme. Leonie, 6, Rue d’Alger, Nice.” I think the French translates to something like “The Violets of Nice, 6 Algiers Street, Nice.” (My French is non-existent.)

Rue d’Alger is a one-block thoroughfare near the Commissariat of Police, not far from the hotels, which, in turn, were not far from each other. I wonder what the *violettes* looked like? Pleasingly plump women over 30 dressed in black corsets and garter belts? That’s how they look in those old photos.

The natural scenery of the Nice area and its Mediterranean climate came to the attention of more mundane English travelers in the second half of the 18th Century. An increasing number of homeland aristocratic families had taken to spending Britain’s muggy winters on warm beaches. The Promenade owes its name to those early tourists.

The token reverse has a full Jubilee portrait of Queen Victoria. At a distance it might even be confused with a gold sovereign from the 1890s. The curious would quickly lose interest when handling the token because it is a gilt bronze *shellcard*, practically weightless.

A shellcard is a disc of wood or cardboard covered with very thin die-struck brass or bronze sheeting which usually bears the legend. Such tokens were discretely handed to English gentlemen by desk clerks, bell hops, cigar stands and the like. The tokens had no cash value and were really a form of business card.

Under normal circumstances, would Victoria have allowed her visage to appear on this coin-like thing, especially with a legend like “Aux Violettes de Nice?” Really now, old chap! But the French did. And — *mon cherie* — you know the French.

MPC:

a Numbers Game

by James Haney



When I received my copy of the *Comprehensive Catalog of Military Payment Certificates* by Fred Schwan I was delighted by one number and intrigued by another. The former was the fact that my favorite series of MPC to collect, that being series 681, was ordered in 1968, the same year I was born. The latter was in regards to what the serial number could tell you, in conjunction with the position number, about any MPC note you have in your collection.

In reading the book I discovered that the first two digits of the three digit series number tells you the year an issue was ordered. The third digit represents the series order that year. So again using my favorite series 681 it breaks down as follows: 1968 series order 1. It does seem there are exceptions to the rule and maybe I missed the explanation in my first reading. The example I actually own is the second printing of the series

What can you determine about this well worn note? (answer on page 35)

681 twenty dollar note since it was ordered in 1969. So should this note not be series 691, but wait — there is a series 691, and it was ordered in 1967. As you can probably guess if you have not read the book that my example is not the only exception. Also I am not here to dispute the system, again, I like it, if for anything 681 being 1968.

The other item was not so easy to fathom but piqued my interest. It was the idea that every sheet position consisted of 8000 notes. Just that little bit of information had me breaking out my calculator to see how it fit with the notes that I already had. Much to my dismay though it only seemed to work for two of my notes. The two notes that worked were \$0.05 notes position 53 and 57 respectively, but I had one with a position number 59 with a serial number 627,628 less than

position 53. I thought: am I missing something?

I kept reading though I glossed over one very important item — the unit number. This did not hit home until I had the opportunity to take the *Military Numismatics Since 1930* class put on by both Fred Schwan and Joe Boling during session II of the summer seminars at the ANA in Colorado Springs. It was during one of the lectures that unit number finally had a meaning, and now I could put the pieces together.

I already knew for each position there were 8000 notes, but what I was missing was that there are 8000 sheets to a unit which means for fractional notes 672,000 notes per unit. So, using fractional notes for our hypothetical example, there are 84 positions starting with serial number 00000001 for position 1, and then the last note will be position 84 with a serial number of 00672000. Of course I am omitting the block prefix and suffix for this discussion, though if you like series 681 like I do, just mentally add a C on the front and for the rear hey that is optional since leaving it off just makes the serial number that much more special. Again I digress since block letters are not what is important here. The real key is that unit 2 will start with 00672001 for position 1 and continue on for another 672,000 notes and so on and so forth with each consecutive unit.

So that is how I could have a note with a position number 59 having a serial number less than a note with a position number of 53. It was because they were from different units. As for the two notes that did work well they were both from the same unit so their spread was just the difference between the position numbers factored by 8000. As Fred would say repeatedly during our session, "How cool is that!"

If this is not enough you can take it one step further with this information you now have and determine what sheet within its unit your note came from. It is not a lengthy calculation but here is an example using my \$0.05 note position 59 serial number C07860023C:

$$\begin{aligned} 07860023/672000 &= 11.69 \\ 11*672000 &= 7392000 \\ (59-1)*8000 &= 464000 \\ 07860023-(7392000+464000) &= \\ 4023 &\text{ or better yet Sheet 4,023} \end{aligned}$$

So now from the serial number I can know what unit my note came from and even narrow it down to the sheet it came from. Of course not being one to let sleeping dogs lie I knew there had to be a way to have Microsoft Excel do this for me and even determine when to use 560,000 in lieu of 672,000 based upon denomination. Yes there are different numbers used since even though there are still only 8000 sheets there are only 70 positions for \$1.00 notes and even less for notes above \$1.00.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Denomination	Position	Serial	Cond.	Unit	Sheet	ShtCalc
2	0.05	59	C07860023C	67PPQ	12	4023	7392000

So, instead of pulling out the book every time and punching keys on a calculator, Excel seemed the way to go.

To be honest it was not as difficult as you could imagine though I did take some time to streamline the sequence to the point I felt it was good enough to share. I set up seven columns with the following headings: Cells A2 through D2 are simple fill in the blanks though A2 through C2 are important in providing the information needed to determine both the unit and sheet. G2 is simply a calculation used in completing the formula for F2. So for a point of reference I will fill in the table based upon the note I used above.

The following is the formula inserted into cell E2:

$$=ROUNDUP(IF(A3<1,(MID(C3,2,8))/672000,IF(A3=1,(MID(C3,2,8))/560000,IF(A3>1,(MID(C3,2,8))/400000))),0)$$

To break it down, I am asking the program to determine if the denomination is either less than a dollar, equal to a dollar, or more than a dollar. Once that has been determined then the command MID pulls the eight digits out excluding the block position which when completed would return a number like 11.69 for my example. So to get 12, I ask the program to round the number up.

The following is the formula

inserted into cell F2:

$$=(MID(C3,2,8))-(((B3-1)*8000)+G2)$$

This cell is basically performing the last equation taking the serial number less the sum of position number factored by 8000 plus the total units factored by the number of notes within the unit.

Cell G2 does the following:

$$=IF(A3<1,(E3-1)*672000,IF(A3=1,(E3-1)*560000,IF(A3>1,(E3-1)*400000)))$$

This calculation is only relevant to completing the formula. It is basically again evaluating the denominator to determine the number of notes based upon the unit number less 1 unit. Which, when you put it all together, would look something like the figure above.

Unfortunately, Word tables do not seem to be able to handle or possibly understand the commands I've shown above for Excel. At this point I am feeling pretty comfortable with the serial number game and hopefully you find the whole thing as intriguing as I did. Though it does beg one question — now that I can determine the sheet and unit number, *what should I do with this information?*

I think at this time I better stop before I start hearing that all too familiar theme music and Rod Serling starts his introduction.

(see page 35 for Answer)

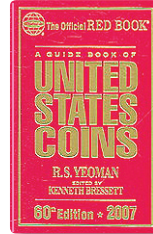
*The Red Book:
a Wealth of Information*

by Dan Wilson

Since 1946, almost all coin collectors have been acquainted with the Whitman Red Book. First written by R.S. Yeoman, it has been expanded on often, and many well-known numismatists have been contributors. Q. David Bowers is the research editor and is well respected all around the coin business. One of our coin club members, Ron Appel, has an Uncle who is also a contributor (Richard Appel).

I personally own each book since 1959, that is a long time before I could read, but I have since read and poured over them for many hours. I find it very interesting to see what some coins that are now completely out of reach for most of us, used to sell for. The book is a guide to all U.S. coins including colonial and post-colonial issues, commemoratives, proof and mint sets, gold bullion, U.S. patterns, territorial gold, private tokens, Philippine issues, mis-strikes and errors. WOW that's a lot of stuff. This is only the tip of the iceberg.

Each series is listed starting with half cents all the way thru \$50 gold coins. There are many series in the book that a lot of people don't even know existed. At the beginning of each type of coin, you are given a brief lesson on grading that type.



All the years and mintages are listed, as well as retail prices.

This is the one caution about this book; you cannot expect to get the prices listed if you are selling your coins. Also because it is published at the end of the year and not released until April, it is sometimes behind on gold and silver prices.

There is another book called the Blue Book which gives more of a wholesale price guide, and it seems funny but the guide most dealers use is the Gray Sheet. Now that we have the rainbow covered, back to the matter at hand.

By using the mintage information in the Red Book you can easily tell which coins in any series are "key dates," and, armed with that knowledge, you can get the most for your coins.

When using the grading information always be conservative. Read the description for each grade carefully and compare your coin to achieve a grade. The next step is to make sure there are no scratches on

the coin, or dents in the rim. Coins that are either scratched or damaged cause the grade to drop dramatically. These “problem coins” are harder to sell and most dealers steer clear of them. Finally, cleaned coins can also present a problem. Not only are they harder to sell, sometimes it is very hard to tell if a coin has been cleaned. This is an area where sometimes only an expert can help you. If you have questions, show the coin around and compare what you hear to what you know.

Finally, the best thing about the book is something even I only discovered a couple of years ago. From page 9–32 there is more information on Numismatics than you could digest in one sitting. These pages, called *Welcome to Numismatics*, has the wealth of information for which this article is named. You really need to read — no, study it. It will get you excited about coin collecting, and that is a good thing!

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ANSWER TO MPC QUESTION

cont. from page 33

What can you determine about this well worn note?



1. It is series 681, therefore ordered in 1968.
2. It is a replacement note, notice the lack of two block letters in the serial number.
3. It is position number 15.
4. Based upon the serial number being less than 672,000 it is from Unit 1.
5. Lastly it is from sheet 1,269.

Of course, if you do not have Excel, here is the breakdown:

- a. $113269/672000 = 0.168555 =$ part of 1 Unit so refer to position #
- b. $(15 - 1) * 8,000 = 112000$
- c. $113269 - 112000 = 1,269$ or Sheet **1,269**.



