

# THE Asylum

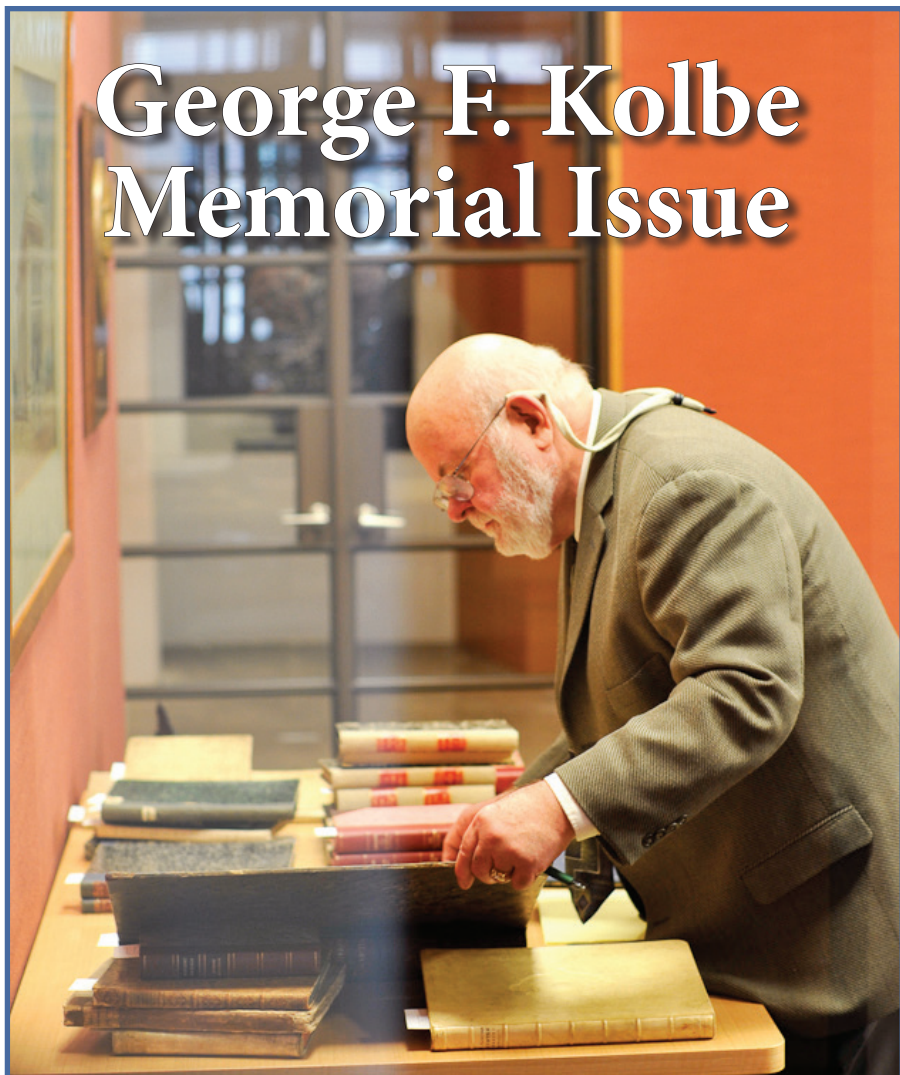
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WINTER 2025

Quarterly Journal of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society • [COINBOOKS.ORG](http://COINBOOKS.ORG)

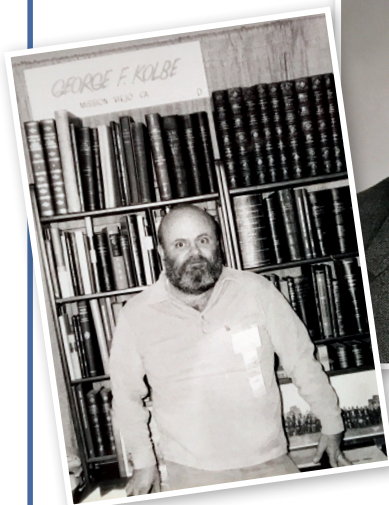
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Maria Fanning,  
*The Asylum*  
Editor

## From the Editor

Welcome to the George F. Kolbe Tribute Edition of *The Asylum*. Since George's passing, David and I have received many condolences and remembrances of George through email, phone calls and hand-written letters, all talking about how much he changed others' lives for the better, and I am certainly included in that group. In fact, I wouldn't be writing this editorial without his influence. George made it possible for my husband David to quit his job as the editor of a technical journal to pursue his passion for numismatic books as a business. At first I merely supported him in this risky move, but soon started helping around the office, mostly due to the fact that there were mass layoffs at the textbook publishing company where I was a designer. I was never happy working in a corporate environment, so spending my time finding ways to help the burgeoning Kolbe & Fanning grow in the former yoga studio in Gahanna was a perfect fit for me. George was a constant presence, always available to give advice and encouragement to both of us. He graciously allowed me to take over production of our catalogues, and I always admired the experimental flare he brought to many of his covers, using interesting colors and printing effects to highlight the material offered within.

I first met George in 2010 when he came to Columbus to visit, and spent time with him at NYINC shows, sometimes with his daughter Jennifer and her husband Tim, who were a great help with our live auctions at the Waldorf. I visited him and Linda at their home in Crestline in August of 2016 with David and our son Sam, then 12 years old. George showed us around his beloved mountain, and it was wonderful to see his library and how he set up his own business, and to meet the rest of his family. I was a bit nervous about the wildfire that was burning only a few miles away, and although we could see and smell the smoke, George was nonchalant about the danger. Apparently he had seen a lot worse! (See [The Asylum Spring 2024](#) issue for more about the 2003 wildfire.)

Lately I've reflected on how wonderfully strange it is that a numismatic bookdealer in California hugely altered the life of a graphic designer working on a tiny newspaper in New York, resulting in my co-ownership of a business in a field that I had never heard of twenty-five years ago. With his support and encouragement, George has given my family a life of freedom, passion and fulfillment. I will always be grateful for George's faith in both David and me to be worthy of carrying on his legacy. We will strive to continue to bring honor to his name, the business he has built, and the field of numismatic literature, which has given us so much.





Douglas and Sue's last visit with George and his wife Betty Lowery in March 2019 in La Quinta, California.



George with long-standing friend Marvin Lessen, May 2016 in Santa Monica.

# George Kolbe: Some Memories

By Douglas Saville

I had been working in the Book Department at Spinks in London since 1969, as Howard Linecar's assistant. I dealt with new publications on coins and medals, mostly published by Spink and all edited by Howard, or "HL" as he was called by customers and all those working at Spink. He had been there since the mid-1930s.

In early 1970 I suggested to Howard that it would be a good idea to start to deal in second-hand numismatic books—and he agreed. My long journey began. I started to receive book catalogues from all over the world, but bought very few. It was not easy without seeing them. I really had no idea what I was doing!

The largest and best-known antiquarian bookseller was based just a few minutes' walk from Spink's majestic offices in St. James's. Bernard Quaritch Ltd were based in Grafton Street, off Bond Street. I went there at least weekly and bought whatever books they had on coins and medals... the stock grew quickly. For very many years "Q's" had been the distributors of the *Numismatic Chronicle*, the annual publication of the Royal Numismatic Society, and they had enormous stock of individual parts and whole volumes of the *Chronicle* going back well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I succeeded in buying all those volumes and parts from them, and subsequently they decided to no longer deal in books relating to numismatics. They said they would refer all future enquiries relating to numismatic books to Spink. Good news for us!

I listed my first selection of second-hand books in the *Numismatic Circular* in February 1970.

Towards the end of 1970, David Edmunds, a collector of numismatic books (mostly relating to trade tokens) started his own bookselling business, John Drury, in Colchester, an hour's train ride from London. This was to change the scene dramatically. We now had a strong competitor in David—an astute and knowledgeable bookseller—and over a period of almost 10 years, until his company was purchased by B.A. Seaby Ltd in 1978, he produced amazingly well-researched and erudite fixed-price catalogues, the like of which really hadn't been seen before. A new market was developing. From 1978–1980 David, as the main Director of Seaby Rare Books Ltd, published a series of six well-produced fixed-price catalogues, emulating the previous John Drury catalogues. But by mid-1980 the market was changing—really quickly, and dramatically. We were now in recessionary times. Seaby decided to close the Rare Book Department, David left the company to concentrate on his own John Drury company, and he no longer dealt primarily with numismatic books. David sold his small, but still very good, remaining stock at much reduced prices...to George.

Meanwhile there had been a few libraries sold at auction in the U.S. and in Europe: the great Pilartz sale held by Jacques Schulman in Amsterdam in 1970 was just one that springs to mind. During the early '70s I had been helping a major U.K. Institutional library build up their numismatic library as a part of their Art Library, and they had been sending me extensive lists of "requirements." As a result I was a major buyer in the Pilartz sale. It was the first time I had been abroad on a business trip, the first of



George and Linda with George's grandkids, son George and daughter Jennifer at Crestline 2015 on one of my many trips to visit the mountain.

many such trips to Europe and to the U.S.—and between 1980 and 2010, usually with George.

In 1976 David and I had each received a catalogue from a G. “Frederick” Kolbe based in Mission Viejo...who was “Fred” Kolbe, and where was Mission Viejo? The catalogue had lots of good books listed for sale. David reckoned he wouldn't last long in the business. After all, where would “Fred” get his books? Who would buy his books? Was there really a market in the U.S. for such things? There had been a few catalogues of numismatic books sold in the U.S. in the late '60s and early '70s. Hans Schul-

man had sold one or two good libraries in the late '60s. Harmer Rooke had held one major sale in 1970, Sotheby Parke Bernet had some good books from the Philip More library, offered with his coins. Nobody except Frank & Laurese Katen were true specialists in numismatic books, and frankly the material that the Katens were offering was fairly run of the mill.

I continued to buy from George. By now I had realized that he liked to be called “George,” and in 1979 he produced a really impressive catalogue of his first public auction to be held at the C.O.I.N. in Los Angeles. I booked a trip to Los Angeles. I was a major buyer at the sale—for stock and for my gradually-increasing client base. And I bought tons, almost literally, from George's stock in his Mission Viejo office. George later told me he had graded me his best A+++ number 1 client at the time.

George and I got on very well—who didn't like George? I stayed with George and his family in his Mission Viejo house, and I remember we went on day trips with Linda, his wife and teenage kids Jennifer, Laura and little George to Disneyland in Anaheim and to Knott's Berry Farm. I wonder where those two caricatures we had done of each of us ended up? George had threatened often to use the one he had of me as a frontispiece to one of the Kolbe-Spink auction catalogues that we held in New York during the 80s and 90s. And some forty-six years later my daughter still has the Mickey and Minnie Mouse soft toys from Disneyland and the long-player record, “It's a Small World” that I brought home from that trip, some 46 years later.

After the final lots was knocked down at that sale in 1979, a middle-aged “collector” approached me and introduced himself as the son of a “great coin collector” who had formed the “best numismatic library in the world,” and would I like to buy it? I said yes, I would like to buy it. I arranged to go back to the L.A. area a few weeks later and see the library. I told George about the approach, and he hesitated for a while and then told me he had agreed to buy the library “en-bloc” a few months before,



with the owner of the library, the “collector’s” father, but before anything could be written down the father had died. We contemplated this awkward situation and we agreed that I had no option but to look at the books and if I could buy the non-U.S. part of the library, about half the total, then I would do that, but insist that the rest, the U.S. material, should be offered to George. That eventually did happen, after some very protracted negotiations with the family. George bought the U.S. books and catalogues, and I shipped back to the U.K. all the non-U.S. material. From then onwards George and I knew we could trust one another totally. I have no recollection of ever having had any real disagreements with George over the years. It was a really very good library, but not “The best library in the world.”

I recall in the early 1980s before George started full-time in the book business, that he asked me whether I thought he should give up his day job in the retail food industry, to concentrate full-time on his book business. I encouraged him to do so—he was the best there was in the U.S. The market was ripe for growing and the demand would increase, and it was up to him to develop it. In 2004 my partner, Sue, and myself and George and Linda went for a holiday in Maui, Hawaii. I asked George if I should think about resigning from Spinks. I had been working there for almost 36 years, and the company had changed considerably over those years. He encouraged me to do so. The following year I left Spink and started my own business a year or so later, near home in Caversham, Reading where I have been ever since.

I recall his massive auction with Munzhandlung Basel, held in the beautiful city of Basel, in 1987. It comprised some 3000 lots, four long sessions of 9 hours each, a feat of endurance—not only by George in cataloguing the material, but also by anyone attending all four sessions. George’s slurring of words after the final lot was knocked down was less due to the “large” beers (were they really two litres each?), much more likely caused by exhaustion.

George finally retired in 2023. He had produced or been associated with upwards of 150 publications and public and mail-bid internet auctions. I had attended the majority of the C.O.I.N. sales in Los Angeles, and also most of George’s N.Y.I.N.C. sales in New York, the earlier ones held in the 1980s and 1990s with Spink, London.

In 2012 George published *The Reference Library of a Numismatic Bookseller*, and he presented me with a copy of the volume, with a covering letter containing the moving sentiment: “in memory of the many good times we have enjoyed together, and also in appreciation of your steadfast friendship and insights over many years.”

I will miss George, a really good friend, sounding-board, colleague of exceptional talent, and a skilful and outstanding bookseller. A few have tried to emulate his efforts in the U.S., but frankly with little lasting success. My friends David Fanning carries the banner now in Kolbe & Fanning, in Columbus, Ohio, and Charles Davis on the east coast in Wenham, Massachusetts.

[See: *The Asylum*, 25 Years of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society. Volume XXII. No. 3. Summer 2004. “Recollections of 34 Years at Spink 1969–2003,” pp.307–336]



## **Some key sales that George and I attended 1980–2009**

Joseph Lepczyk. East Lansing, 1980: and the truly wonderful French onion soup in the hotel where the sale was held. A remarkable sale attended also by David Edmunds (John Drury), and George and I also learned (or rather we didn't learn too well) how to play liar's poker.

Anders Ringberg sale of the great Kress, Helbing, Merzbacher–G. Hirsch libraries. Dusseldorf, 1981: Two days of fascinating, and exhilarating bidding for some great books.

The Leu sale of the (anonymous) Hans von Aulock library. Zurich, 1982: George and I were amazed at many truly ridiculously-high(?) prices realised at the sale. To George's and my chagrin, the Getty Library and their agents at the sale carried with them "buy" bids on many key lots. We had both gone to the sale with lots of high bids, we thought.

Fuerstenberg Castle, Donaueschingen, the sale of parts of the magnificent library. Zurich, 1982: Dazzling and beautiful books in wonderful condition. Both George and I really regretted not buying much more than we did at this fabulous auction sale, catalogued by Sotheby's simply as "Books on Coins and Medals." I sold almost all the lots I had bought at the sale within a week or so of returning to the office, and George told me he had done the same!

Alfred Page library. Paris, 1989: Small, but very nice books. George and I hammered one another on many lots.

Hess Library. Frankfurt/Main, 1991: A wonderful experience. A two-day sale, three separate rooms given over to German speakers, French and other speakers, and English speakers. One of the great sales. George and I hit our heads over many, many lots. John Spring, a real friend of both George and me, was also there—a memorable and exceptional sale.

Rollin-Feuardent library sale. Paris, 1993: a less than well-catalogued, but nevertheless magnificent and extensive numismatic reference library, the remnants of that formed over many years by this long-established Parisian dealer—boxed-up and held in store since the late 1930s in France. George and I had allowed ourselves two days to view the lots—many huge and often totally uncatalogued—and we realized we really needed more than a week to view the huge lots, in fact. One of the great sales, and we were between us the main buyers, or underbidders.

The sale of (part of) the once tremendous Jacques Schulman library. Frankfurt/Main, 1995: George and I fought over quite a few lots in this sale.

Maison Kampmann/Platt. Paris, 2003: Extremely nice books—one of the best Parisienne libraries formed by the original founder of Maison Platt. George and I were really active at this sale.

Domenico Rossi. Pavia, 2005: A really important and extensive collection of major auction catalogues formed by a well-respected and knowledgeable collector. John Spring was there, and he was a heavy buyer of auction catalogues for his use in pro-



(left to right) Linda Kolbe, Douglas Saville, George Kolbe and Herb Kreindler at Kolbe Sale 11 (June 1982) in Los Angeles.

ducing his major bibliography. Wonderful Italian hospitality.

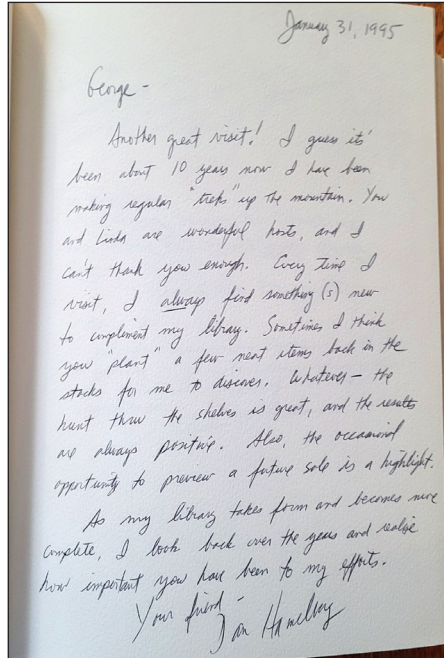
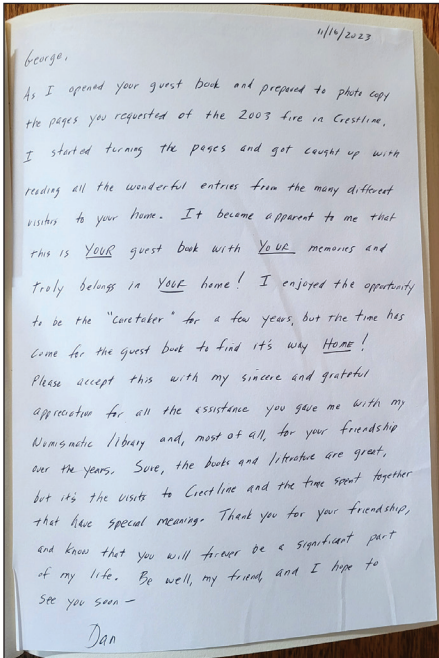
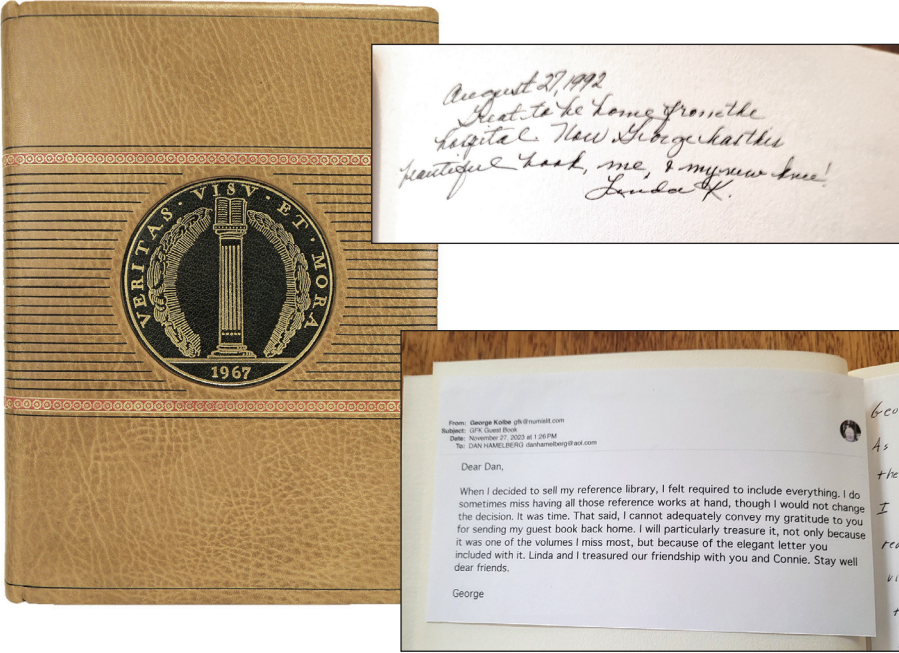
Munzen und Medaillen A.G. library. Osnabrueck, 2005: a truly great library, superbly catalogued, and where George and I hurt each other in our extensive bidding.

Joel Malter library sale. Encino, 2006: An extensive, but really sad sale. Joel passed away during the night following the first-day's sale. There were some remarkable prices realized and Mike Malter gallantly continued with the second day's sale. George had left after the first day's auction.

Frank Sternberg sale. Zurich, 2009: just a fraction of the great reference library formed by this well-respected specialist in ancient coins. George and I were disappointed at the quality and quantity of the books in this sale—a mere fraction of what had been a remarkable and important reference library. I recall visiting Frank in my early years at Spink when I was trying to build-up my rare book stock. It was probably in the late 1970s. Frank had invited me to look at his very important library, in his lovely offices in Bahnhofstrasse, in central Zurich. We sat down to chat after I had spent a few hours looking through the numerous packed shelves of books. He asked me what I thought of his library. I said I thought it was the best I had ever seen. I asked if he might be willing to sell it to me. He laughed and put down his coffee and told me I had lots to learn about “this business of ours.” He told me that I didn’t understand that “my library IS my business,” and without his library he had no business. I learned a very basic fact on that business, and I have not forgotten that. So many companies these days fail to recognize that. George understood what he meant.

Marco Olivari sale. Pavia, 2013: A really nice collector’s library, formed by a true numismatist/collector. George and I attended this sale, and I always remembered it for really wonderful Italian hospitality.





George's guest book

# My Friend George F. Kolbe

By Dan Hamelberg

The first time I met George Kolbe was Thursday, June 14, 1984 at the offices of Lester Merkin, 515 Madison Ave., New York, for lot viewing of the Merkin Library Sale. I arrived about an hour before the 5pm closing, so my available lot viewing time was limited. This was my first major numismatic literature auction, and I wanted to be careful with my assessments. As it passed 5pm, I was the last one there, and George said it would be OK to stay a bit longer to finish up. A short period of time passed, and Lester invited us into his private office room. As we took a seat, Lester opened his desk drawer and pulled out a bottle of bourbon and three glasses. For the next hour, we enjoyed Lester's stories of major coin dealers of the past and present. Wow! Here I was in the company of George Kolbe and Lester Merkin listening to great stories and drinking bourbon! I thought, "I am going to like this numismatic literature thing!"

The next day on Friday, June 15, 1984 at the Omni Park Central Hotel, I spent over \$3,000 on twenty-three lots including getting a good start on my plated Chapmans with a Cleneay, Stickney, Morris and Lymon. Just think, if George had not extended my lot viewing time, my auction results and long term direction with the hobby might have been different. Thank you, George.

A few years later, George decided to run a live auction from his home/office in Crestline. This "home" auction was not intended to be a pattern for future sales, as subsequent auctions would be held in conjunction with a major coin show in a space equal to the occasion. Most of the numismatic literature notables were present, and this would be my first of many visits to Crestline. What a scene—lots of chairs squeezed into George's living room and arms up in the air with bidder cards! Connie and I stayed at a hotel in nearby Lake Arrowhead. For future visits, George would invite us to stay in Crestline in the guest room. One of the visits included a trip to a nearby hospital to help welcome the birth of their first grandchild. Other visits might include a "treasure hunt" for literature items as George would allow me to search all the shelves, closets and cubby holes in the lower office areas. I think George may have planted some special items ahead of time for me to find. George and Linda were great hosts, and we became good friends.

Many years of auctions and private sales passed by. Most of my important purchases were from George, but there were a few other numismatic literature sellers during this time including Charlie Davis, John Bergman, Cal Wilson, Jack Collins, Frank Katen, Fred Lake, the Money Tree guys Ken & Myron, Remy Bourne, Orville Grady and more. The numismatic literature fraternity of collectors and dealers was a welcoming group, and the shows and auctions were great get-togethers. Truly a golden age.

In January, 2017, George and David Fanning were having an auction at the annual international coin show in New York. George and David had teamed up in 2010 to form the Kolbe & Fanning brand. It was a rainy night when a few of us walked several blocks to a nearby restaurant for dinner. During the evening, George Kolbe, David



Fanning, Len Augsburg, Joel Orosz, John Adams and myself gave birth to the Attinelli Fellowship. We celebrate the fellowship every year now during the annual ANA convention with dinner for members and invited guests.

The 2019 ANA August convention was held in Chicago. I extended an invitation to NBS members to visit my library in Champaign while in the area. Champaign is just about a two-hour drive from Chicago. On August 18, a spirited group showed

up ready to see the library. Among the visitors were George and Betty. I had the opportunity to show George the library he helped me to assemble. Having the opportunity to share my library with George and the other visitors was a great privilege.

In October of 2019 George decided to auction his personal reference library, including his personal guest book, which I purchased. The full leather deluxe binding book was initiated in George's office in August, 1992 with the last entry in December 2018. As I looked through the pages, I saw entries from many prominent numismatists including Anthony Terranova, Douglas Saville, Wayne Homren, Del Bland, John Dannreuther, Len Augsburg and others. A visit in January, 1995, gave me the opportunity to sign the guest book.

In November 2023, George contacted me to request copies of the pages in the guest book that he had noted information regarding the Crestline fire in late October 2003. George was writing an article on the fire, and needed the information he noted in the guest book. As I began to photocopy the pages he needed, I started looking through the book and it became clear to me that this guest book should go back home. So I sent the guest book back home with a cover letter to George. He answered with a warm response and a thank-you for friendship.

In early March, 2025, Connie and I had the occasion to see George and Betty in Crestline. Our visit included a full day at their house. Betty prepared a fine brunch to start followed by a relaxing afternoon of remembering family, friends and good times. We took George and Betty out to dinner that night to finish a great day and a wonderful visit.

Shortly after George passed away, I received a "mystery box" in the mail with no return address. I opened it to find that Betty sent the guest book back to me. George had tipped in my cover letter. It is now a treasured book in my library and a reminder of good times and a lasting friendship.



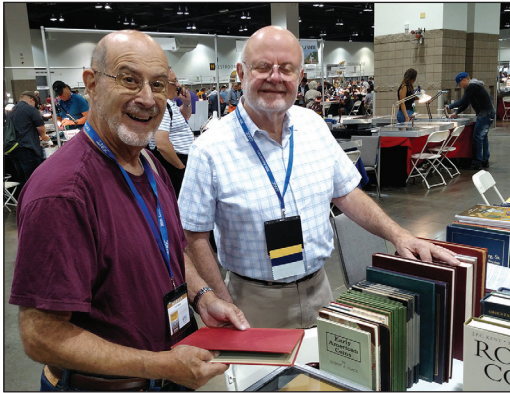
Dan Hamelberg with George Kolbe and Betty Lowery at their home in Crestline. Photo by Connie Hamelberg





# In Memory of George F. Kolbe

By P. Scott Rubin



George and Scott at the 2017 ANA convention.

If you are a numismatist, your life was probably improved by book dealer George F. Kolbe. You did not have to deal with him personally for this to occur, you just had to have a desire to learn about the hobby. It was George and his friend Jack Collins who founded the Numismatic Bibliomania Society, better known as NBS. NBS became a source for not only obtaining numismatic publications but also a place for literature collectors, dealers, researchers and writers of coins,

paper money and all related aspects of the hobby to share with others.

George, Jack and George's wife Linda did most of the work to get NBS started. At the 1979 American Numismatic Association convention they held a meeting to promote the newly created organization. They found that as many dealers joined as individual collectors. All seemed to realize the time for such an organization had come and would benefit all involved.

I was a half cent collector at one time, and George kept mentioning that the standard reference on the subject by a man named Gilbert had been reprinted over the years, and that there was no way to identify a first edition of the publication. Me, being a person who liked to discover as much as I could about half cents, decided to use the skills I used to trace a coin's pedigree to find out how I could identify a first edition of Gilbert's book on half cents. I did discover this information and published it in *The Asylum*.

I do not remember when I personally became friendly with George—it just seems like we were always friends. Over the years, George and I realized we had a lot in common about how we felt about numismatic publications, although George was much more knowledgeable about the field than I could ever be. This did not stop us from enjoying each other's company.

Over the years George and I would spend many hours over the phone talking about any number of numismatic topics. I now very much miss being able to call or receive a call from George. His passing is a loss not just to me but to the entire numismatic community.



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# Memories of George from Sweden

By Per-Göran Carlsson

Inspired by my father and his involvement as a collector and coin club initiator in Norrköping, my Swedish birthplace, from 1950s forward, I started out my junior collector career with modest means cherry-picking family pocket change. During my teenage époque in the 1970s, I gradually grew a systematic collection of the low denomination type 1 ore, issued between 1522 and 1971 of silver, copper, bronze, iron and gold! In parallel, my appetite for numismatic reference literature started to grow as well as my interest for world coins and medals. Soon, the supply of desired literature available in Sweden was exhausted and my search widened into a global search for items and suppliers. During the 1980s, the name of George Frederick Kolbe, numismatic literature seller and auctioneer, became a household name. Frequent parcels of numismatic literature made their way across the Atlantic to my hometown in Sweden. A real reference library was in the making, and George became an important source and supplier! As an interesting fact, I most likely was the only client George ever had based in Mogadishu in Somalia from 1986–1987 for the United Nations Capital Development Fund which I was recruited to head. It happened more than once that I got my own personal singular diplomatic pouch delivered to the office with numismatic goodies. The U.N. delivery and distribution center in Geneva, Switzerland had hard times.

Professionally in the 1990s, my civil career path brought me into international traveling for energy ventures on behalf of Swedish State conglomerate Vattenfall, financial advisory services, project management and more. My backyard became Europe and Luxembourg my residence, a few years even in Warsaw, Poland. Logistically, I had field days when I could easily combine duties with ad hoc visits to many dealers, searching for coins and sniffing their shelves of obsolete, ancient numismatic prints and books. One such trip brought me to Amsterdam and I recall the viewing (I think in 1993) the duplicate auction sale of Schulman's auctions catalogue library. I visited the announced viewing place, pretty obscure large but naked storage hall, where only an estimated 30 meter shelf system was set up, filled to the brim with VERY dusty auction lots, many in fragile well used condition and almost falling apart. I approached the center of this storage facility, placed under a ceiling window letting daylight in. That was the only source of light, and I cannot even remember that a helper was around. However, there was only one other person there, very focused, so I decided



The Carlsson family in 1998, showcasing the author's distilled classic numismatic library, surrounded by wife Anitta, son Fredrik and daughter Amelie.

not to disturb him. I rather started in the other end of the shelf system. Logically, it turned out to be the final numbered lots of the sale. But I dug in and moved my way sort of backwards gradually to the center of the system. In complete silence (except for occasional coughing caused by the very dusty items) we were at that time the only persons there. After several hours of focused checking of the goods, we bumped into each other. With a curious smile, we cheered and exchanged introductions. I had run into George Frederick Kolbe! His main comment was, "Aah, I always have wondered how you (me, the client) would look like!" That meeting became a sublime happening, where two sorts of nerds met. However focused as both of us were, we paused just a minute and then exchanged places and continued the viewing in each opposite direction. I focused on the auction catalogues with plates of Swedish-related numismatic content, while George applied a generalist view of interest.

Years later, in 1998, I was handpicked for the Swedish diplomatic corps and joined the senior ranking position, just below the Ambassador and the Minister, as Counsellor of Finance at the Swedish Embassy in London, U.K. I was specially designated as advisor to the Board of Directors of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, with H.Q. at Liverpool Station, and I had an executive office there. I chose my living quarters in Mayfair, just a few blocks from the U.S. embassy. Of course, I negotiated to bring my essentials of the numismatic library to London. However, my then-total library was very extensive, including duplicates, but for good reasons, of course! A working condition item was many times supplemented with provenance and exlibris items of same title, and exclusive bindings of good craftsmanship. In Stockholm, I had a residence apartment with ample room for book storage. I estimated a total of some 50 meters of shelves of singular accountable titles and duplicates, plus boxes with minor prints en mass. In the summertime, some 10 weeks before taking up my duties in London on September 1, 1998, I realized NOW was a good time to trim the sheer volume of titles and items, separating those I wanted to bring to London from those that I could live without.

After a quick contemplation, I decided to call George and offer him first opportunity to peruse my duplicates and make his selections useful for his trade and auctioning. It just took minutes and George agreed to such a unique offer. A week later, he arrived from Los Angeles to Stockholm and spent three days reviewing my shelves. I had prepared the viewing by pulling the duplicate titles halfway out, and some not-needed titles of significance made available for George's consideration. We agreed that the items he liked (to be then later negotiated) stayed pulled out while the items he passed on were to be pushed back in normal shelf position. The process took time but was very professionally done.

During the spring of 1998, a collector friend in Stockholm, Mr. Max Mitteregger, focused on Swedish quality type coins, had started to fancy numismatic books too, inspired by my library and the visual impact it made on him. Max asked me once, "why do you have so many books of this kind?" I gave him a long version of the explanatory rational behind my driving passion. Max "bought the concept" and asked me to find him those titles in deserving condition that constitutes "an important numismatic library." So that process was in full swing when, suddenly, he heard that George was coming over to consider purchasing parts of my library. Only then



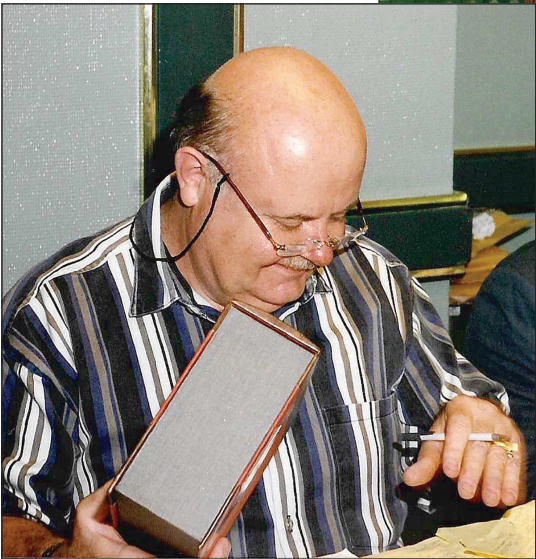
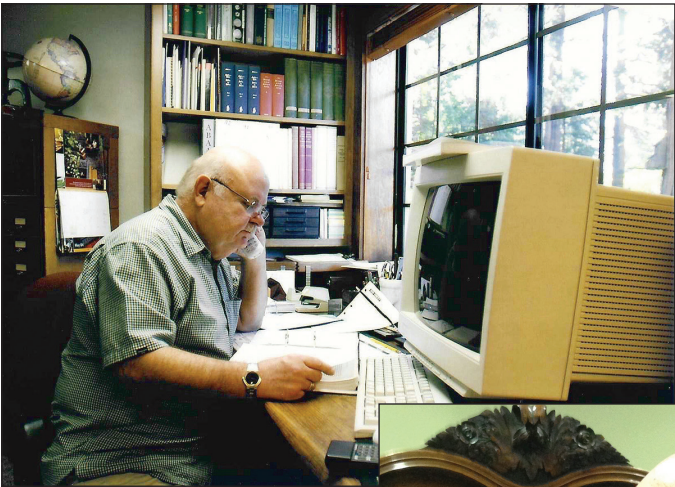
did Max understand fully how important my library really was, and how important the moment of truth was to become decisive! The third evening when George finally concluded his selection of choice, Max arrived, very stressed. He asked for the favor of reviewing George's selections and make to his selections to complement his own growing library. Since George realized that Max was a coming client to him, George gracefully agreed to let Max have "first pick." That evening, Max, using my guidance, selected those items he preferred. A deal was struck between Max and myself, and many of those titles still remain in his library. The remaining volume of George's pre-selected items were negotiated on the fourth day!

Since George had preselected sometimes three to four duplicates of same title, I became curious and asked him, "Which of these items do you prefer?" (assuming he wanted only one of them). Addressing him, he looked with big eyes at me and responded, unexpectedly, "I want them all, for the very same reason you collected them!" Such an educated, sharp answer. We hand-numbered the agreed items and tallied the agreed itemized price in dollars. I think I recall correctly 217 items and lots were accounted for. The consummated deal was by far the largest such transaction up to this day of writing, facilitated by the high exchange rate dollar versus the Swedish Krona. In total, I recovered my cost and still some more, nearing a six figure dollar number. He was happy and I felt also happy to have managed to trim the sheer volume without missing out anything significant! At the time, the size of the commercial deal was completely unheard of, and certainly a very aggressive decisive action by George. It was agreed that payment would be submitted once George returned to L.A. To my great surprise, in addition, George spent more than two grand to air freight 477 kg numismatic literature across the Atlantic to L.A! I saw the bill of lading. Asking him why not rent and ship a container much more cheaply, he calmly responded, "I don't have the time to wait!"

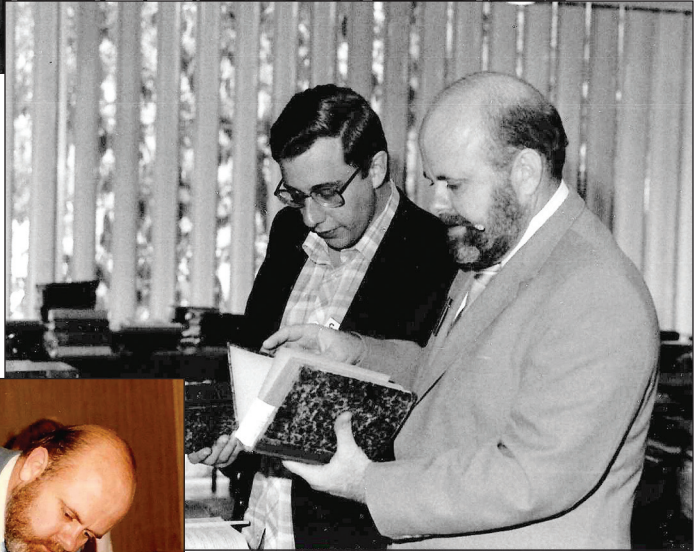
In December of 1998, George issued his literature auction catalogue number 76, where on the title page is referred to "Selections from the numismatic library formerly of Mr. Per-Göran Carlsson." The auction catalogue starts with a section listing of over one hundred pre-1800 numismatic titles. One hundred and three of those lots originated from our deal, and some more items related to ancient coins and Americana were scattered under different additional headings. Analyzing the list of prices realized made me realize that George did not do particularly well on my items commercially. I was thinking that George would have been a bit upset about it. Nevertheless, years after the millennium, we bumped into each other at Spinks in London, cheered and had some good chatting. I curiously decided to find out his own opinion of how the event turned out. Very calmly, he agreed that the commercial success left something to be desired, but, George, the gentleman he always appeared to me, explained, "*That* was less important, since I have never before nor after the deal have had such an experience admiring, being offered and be able to obtain so many titles and lovely bindings I have never had before. That wonderful experience—in Stockholm with you Per-Göran—is gratitude enough for me!"







(top to bottom)  
Working at the first Crestline house.  
David Fanning and George in  
George's library in 2019.  
At lot viewing for the third Champa  
Library sale (New York, September  
1995). Photo by Charles Horning.



(top to bottom)

Group shot at Kolbe Sale 9 (June 1981) in Los Angeles. Participants present with George include (L-R): Harry W. Bass, Jr., Alan Meghrig, Doug Bird, Cal Wilson, Denis Loring, Jack Collins, Jon Hanson, Keith Kelman, Jess Patrick, Armand Champa and John Bergman.

At Kolbe Sale 11 (June 1982) in Los Angeles with Douglas Saville.

At lot viewing at Kolbe Sale 11 (June 1982).





George Kolbe's bookseller token. Photos courtesy of Kolbe & Fanning



—Independent Photo

**THIRD TIME'S A CHARM**

Dick Evans, left, and George Kolbe, Jr. chalked up a couple of "firsts" in Carrier-of-the-Month competition yesterday among 360 Independent carrier boys. The two 15-year-old youths, both striving to be first to win the award for the third time, tied for Carrier-of-the-Month honors to become the first co-winners in contest history. Dick had won the award for salesmanship and service the previous two months.

# The George Kolbe Bookseller Token

By Pete Smith

The George Kolbe bookseller token shown on the left was originally included with *Trade Tokens of British and American Booksellers & Bookmakers*, published in 1989.

Henry Morris produced the book for Bird and Bull Press of Newtown, Pennsylvania. It consists of a quarto volume, bound in light blue quarter morocco, accompanied by a portfolio housing eleven copper tokens issued by various American and British booksellers, papermakers and bookbinders. The text features an essay on the production and use of tradesmen's tokens from the 17th to 20th centuries, with listings of known British and American bookseller tokens. Three hundred copies were printed, a small number of which include an additional Bird & Bull Press token struck in silver. The portfolio of contemporary tokens represented these companies:

- Bird & Bull Press
- The Book Press
- Dawson's Book Shop
- Detering Book Gallery
- Enterprise Books
- Joseph J. Felcone
- Kater-Crafts Bookbinders
- George Frederick Kolbe / Fine Numismatic Books
- G. T. Mandl, English papermakers
- Iris Nevins, marbler
- Oak Knoll Books

The dies were engraved by Kenneth Douglas at the Green Duck Company in Olive Branch, Mississippi. The tokens were struck under the supervision of Meyer Katz at the Unity Mint in Ambler, Pennsylvania. Morris reported that the dies cost \$9800 in 1988. The set of used dies along with a mahogany box were offered for sale in 2006. The box included a metal plate engraved, "ORIGINAL DIES FOR BOOKSELLER'S TOKENS ... BIRD AND BULL PRESS."

Henry Morris began as a paper maker and printed his first book in 1958 as an outlet for his paper. The Bird and Bull Press combined high quality printing with high quality binding. They specialized in topics related to book production and paper making. Morris announced his retirement from the private press business in 2013 at the age of 88. A special exhibition of "The Life and Times of the Bird and Bull Press" was shown at the University of Delaware Library in 2013.

George Frederick Kolbe also included his bookseller token in copies of his 1990 44th sale catalog, "Selections from the American Numismatic Library of John Weston Adams." The pages were die cut to fit around the token. Only 200 copies of the catalog were printed with the token included. Thus the token has an association, not only with Kolbe, but with Morris and Adams as well.

Some quantity of these tokens were not glued into a publication but were given

out by Kolbe as promotional store cards and “good for” tokens after 1990. The Kolbe tokens show up occasionally on the secondary market. I can’t recall seeing the Bird and Bull token not attached to the book.

I was honored to work with Henry Morris on *The Magnum Opus of Joseph Florimond Loubat*, with 150 copies printed in 2007. This was a reprint of my 2006 article on Loubat for *The Asylum*. Also included were articles by John W. Adams and George F. Kolbe. The book was bound at Campbell-Logan Bindery in Minneapolis.

Henry Morris, Bird and Bull Press, John Weston Adams, George Frederick Kolbe and Campbell Logan Bindery all represent the highest accomplishments in their fields. When I see my name included in the credits, it is like entering an elite private club and expecting that security will escort me out at any moment.



## NBS Bibliotalk

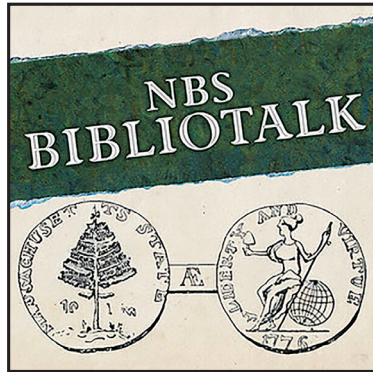
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## Support Your NBS

Established in 1979, the Numismatic Bibliomania Society’s purpose is to stimulate interest in collecting numismatic literature and cultivate cooperation among collectors and researchers. The NBS has a rich history of generous members who have supported its mission over the years.

The NBS would be truly grateful for your donation to help sustain our role in the numismatic community. As a 501(c)3 organization, all donations to the NBS are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

***Become a Sustaining Member or  
make a one-time donation today.***

Contact NBS Treasurer Jeff Dickerson at [treasurer@coinbooks.org](mailto:treasurer@coinbooks.org).



# Mendacity Unmasked: A Biblio-Hoax Mystery Solved

By Leonard Augsburger

The story began on August 10, 1840 in Binche, Belgium. Bibliophiles gathered to attend a sale advertised in the 52-lot *Catalogue d'une très-riche mais peu nombreuse collection de livres*. The sale catalog described the maniacal disposition of a recently deceased book collector, the Count de Fortsas (translated from French):

Almost all libraries formed over the past fifty years have been slavishly modeled on De Bure's *Bibliographie instructive*.<sup>1</sup> The consequence has been that the works presented by De Bure as rare or curious, sought after, exhumed, and preserved by collectors, are now found everywhere as fundamental pieces—so much so that it has become true to say that, when it comes to books, there is nothing more common than rarities.

A taste entirely opposed to this servility—a mindset of a truly exclusive bibliomaniac—on the contrary, presided over the selection of the unique collection we present today at auction.

**Count de Fortsas admitted onto his shelves only works unknown to all bibliographers and catalogers.** That was his unchanging rule, one from which he never deviated. With such a system, it is easy to understand that the collection he assembled—though he devoted to it substantial sums over forty years—could not be very large. But what is hard to believe is that he would mercilessly expel from his shelves volumes paid for at the price of gold—volumes that would have been the pride of the most demanding collectors—as soon as he learned that a previously unknown work had been cited in any catalog.

This unfortunate discovery was marked in his handwritten inventory, in a dedicated column, with the words: *Mentioned in such-and-such a work, etc.*; then: *sold, given away*, or (something incredible unless one understands how far the passion of exclusive collectors can go) *destroyed!!*

The publication of Brunet's *Nouvelles recherches*<sup>2</sup> was a very painful blow for our bibliomaniac, and undoubtedly hastened his end. It caused him to lose, in one stroke, a third of his library. From that point on, he seemed disgusted by both books and life; he never made another acquisition. But *Techener's Bulletin*<sup>3</sup> continued, from time to time, to further thin the already depleted ranks of his sacred battalion.

Jean-Népomucène-Auguste Pichauld, Count de Fortsas, born on October 24, 1770, at his château of Fortsas, near Binche in Hainaut, died on

MARTIN NATHANIEL DAYCIUS  
GALLERIES

ANNOUNCE

A PUBLIC AUCTION SALE

BOOKS AND CATALOGS ON COINS & SUNDRY ITEMS

ON WEDNESDAY THE FIRST OF APRIL  
AT 1204 MAGNOLIA, FORT WORTH, TEXAS  
10:30 AM SHARP

Many 100's of lots, recently discovered, From A long deceased dealer. Old coin books. Many old catalogs in beautiful leathers, though a number marked up with prices and various names. Nice photos in a number. Lots of old records and invoices also. Several box lots of old coin envelopes, letters and so on. Large pile of old coin sales, a few going back to the 1820's.

TERMS OF SALE: CASH ONLY  
ALL ITEMS MUST BE PAID FOR AND REMOVED AT END OF THE SALE

M. N. Daycius, Auctioneer  
Carrollton, Texas

The original M.N. Daycius flyer

September 1, 1839, in the very place of his birth and in the room where he had first seen the light of day 69 years earlier.

Entirely devoted to his books, he had witnessed (or rather had not witnessed) thirty years of revolutions and wars pass by without ever once disturbing himself from his favorite occupation—without ever stepping outside his sanctuary in any way. It is for him that the motto ought to have been written:

Vitam impendere libris [to devote one's life to books.]

On the date of the sale, eager bibliophiles traveled to Binche to peruse these one-of-a-kind treasures. There, they were greeted by a broadside noting the sale cancellation. The Fortsas books had supposedly been purchased by a local library, which, after some investigation, did not exist. The entire affair turned out to be a hoax perpetrated by the antiquarian and numismatist Renier Chalon<sup>4</sup>, who carefully tailored the lot descriptions to entice specific collectors.

In 1992, a numismatic prankster decided to follow suit. A folded, single page flyer<sup>5</sup> landed in the mailboxes of American numismatic bibliophiles and advertised “A Public Auction Sale [of] Books and Catalogs on Coins & Sundry Items.” Offered by the auction firm of “M. N. Daycius,” Carrollton, Texas, the sale ostensibly represented the library of Texas dealer B. Max Mehl (1884–1957). The auctioneer was painted as not especially aware of the import of the collection, e.g. “Many old catalogs in beautiful leathers, though a number marked up with prices and various names,” and “Large pile of old coin sales, a few going back to the 1820’s.”

*Coin World* recited the known facts a few weeks later, in the April 20, 1992 issue:

### **Numismatic bibliophiles target of April Fool's joke**

A number of numismatic bibliophiles were the target of an apparent April Fool's Day joke April 1, in which they were invited to attend a non-existent auction of numismatic literature from a “long deceased dealer” in Fort Worth, Texas.

The invitation was from “Martin Nathaniel Daycius Galleries” in Carrollton, Texas. The announcement invited the numismatists to attend “a ‘public auction sale’ [of] books and catalogs on coins & sundry items.”

The auction site given was 1204 Magnolia in Fort Worth. The address happens to be that of the former business of B. Max Mehl, the legendary Texas coin dealer who died Sept. 17, 1957.

According to the announcement, the auction was scheduled “on Wednesday the first of April at 1204 Magnolia, Fort Worth, Texas, 10:30 AM sharp.”

The material advertised in the announcement appears to be specifically directed to whet the appetite of numismatic bibliophiles, promising a number of literature and related treasures: “Many 100s of lots, recently

discovered. From a long deceased dealer. Old coin books. Many old catalogs in beautiful leathers, though a number marked up with prices and various names. Nice photos in a number. Lots of old records and invoices also. Several box lots of old coin envelopes, letters and so on. Large pile of old coin sales, a few going back to the 1820's."

The "Terms of sale: cash only," with "All items must be paid for and removed at end of the sale."

George Frederick Kolbe, a California dealer in numismatic literature, said he received several telephone calls from customers who had received the invitation. He, too, received an invitation March 24.

Kolbe said one of his customers who called was reading the invitation to him over the telephone when the customer noted the date and determined it to be an April Fool's joke.

Kolbe said he knew several bibliophiles who hired individuals from the Fort Worth area to check out the auction location. One of the local individuals is a coin dealer who recognized the site as the Mehl building. The location is now a condemned building, Kolbe noted.

Although several of those invited to attend the auction were significantly intrigued to research the possibility of such an auction and the auction site in case it was real, it is unknown whether anyone actually showed up in Fort Worth April 1.

The prankster's identity is unknown.

Ken Lowe, the numismatic bookseller, opined in much deeper detail in his house organ *Out On a Limb* (July 1992):

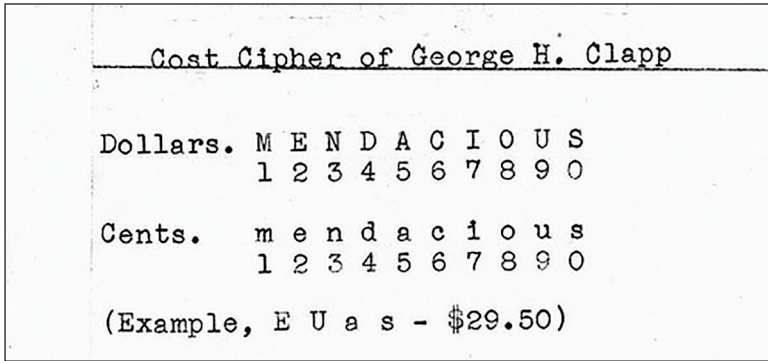
### **The Great American April Fool Numismatic Hoax**

[Although COIN WORLD carried a brief account of the following, a slew of readers(!) asked me for some of the inside dope on the matter, so being the dope inside, let me elaborate (something that I obviously do with great reluctance).]

I went to my Post Office box late afternoon March 30, 1992. Most of the mail was so typical that I could recognize what it was merely by its shape or appearance. A careful perusal was unnecessary then. Said perusal to wait until late afternoon, before dinner when it is couch time with the cat sleeping on my arm.

Again, nothing special. One of the items was a folded (horizontally bisected), stapled sheet of blue paper, typical xerox-type eight and a half by eleven. The address was handprinted in a feminine (I know, a sexist comment) hand. A cancelled 29c stamp with no postmark. Typically this type of flyer is an announcement for an upcoming local coin show, of no real





distinction. I ripped the paper away from the clip. The letter appeared to be a very poor quality photocopy, the amateurish style of the typical garage sale flyer. The entire text of the letter including spacing, capitalization errors, and typos are included [text of flyer follows].

My first reaction. Sonuvagun. Somebody found a bunch of old Max Mehl stuff. I checked the date. Wednesday, April 1. Hell, there's no way I can get away to Texas on Wednesday, APRIL THE FIRST! Wait a minute! From the murky recesses of my memory came the recollection —“M.N. Daycius.” MENDACIOUS! Synonym for “lying” as in “fib.”

Numismatic tie-in. I vaguely remember hearing that when George Clapp was looking over the George French large cents coins that Max Mehl had purchased, for which subsequently Mehl had produced the famous French fixed price list. Clapp told Mehl that the appropriate dealer's pricing code for putting on the holders was, “MENDACIOUS”—10 letters, all different, representing numbers 1–10.

At that point I realized it had to be an April Fool's joke. Neat. Soon after I phoned Myron to see if he had gotten a copy. Yessir, he had. He believed it legit for a while also. We laughed. We then tried to figure out who would have done it. Myron's copy came with a Fort Worth postmark. So someone did at least mail one copy from Fort Worth. Naturally we began to list suspects. So we will let you in on Sherlockian thought processes phrase by phrase:

1. With the use “mendacious,” suspicions were that it had to one of the copper fraternity who knew of the George Clapp story. Unless there is someone in numismatics who actually is smart enough to know what mendacious meant
2. “First of April”—obvious
3. “From A long deceased dealer”—someone who knew that with the Fort Worth location, the hoax victim would automatically think of Max Mehl.

4. "Many old catalogs on beautiful leathers"—deluxe and presentation editions of Mehl sales and others.
5. "though a number marked up with prices and various names"—named and priced copies of old auction catalogues.
6. "Nice photos in a number"—early plated catalogues.
7. "Lots of old records, and invoices also"—ephemera and archival research material, probably previously unknown.
8. "Several box lots of old coin envelopes, letters and so on"—something of particular interest to Myron and me.
9. "Large pile of old coin sales, a few going back to the 1820's."—Attinelli listed the first American auction to feature anything numismatic was the 1828 Watkins sale (although at least two other earlier ones are known) of which 2 original copies are known: 1 is believed to be defective. 12 reprinted copies were made in the 1850s or 1860s. The hoaxer had to know about Attinelli or Watkins.

So, what have we learned? What do we know? What do we do next?

By talking about beautiful leathers, and priced and named copies, and going back to the 1820s, we believed that this was specifically intended to lure several of the advanced collectors.

Next, we checked our mailing list to see if any of our suspects lived in Texas. Nope.

We learned that the A.N.A. Midyear convention had been held several weeks ago in the Dallas area; thus affording the hoaxer the opportunity to have the flyers mailed from there. So no geographic clues to help. About then it was time for dinner. So Myron and I hung up (?) (hanged up?) .... put our respective phones on their respective hooks, except for his which is a cordless, so he put it on the un-hook.

Immediately, my phone began to ring, Armand, Mark Auerbach, Wayne Homren, Scott Rubin, Remy Bourne and on and on. I will not embarrass anyone, but some of the callers, not necessarily (but not necessarily not) any of the aforementioned absolutely believed the letter. As a matter of fact, in later letters and calls we heard from some of this country's most prominent numismatists, numismatic bibliophiles, and "professional" numismatists who indicated that they had been sucked in.

How far had some gone? Several phoned the Fort Worth information number to get the phone number of the Gallery. Someone suggested to me that I go down there for them and buy the whole lot, outright. Someone sent a check for \$25.00 Fedex to get a copy of the catalogue. Some phoned friends in Fort Worth (and also Dallas) to find out what they

could about the Gallery. Someone phoned a friend who worked across the street from the address to find out what the place looked like. Answer, "It's a boarded up building." At least two made airplane reservations, and a bunch more were planning to. Yep, time stood still as we numismatic bibliophiles all hoped that Geraldo Rivera, at last, had dug up something—the great Max Mehl accumulation of numismatic literature.

As phone calls continued to criss-cross the country, people gradually became aware of the hoax, generally greeting it with good humor.

Some of the people got the flyer addressed to an old address. Mark Auerbach suggested that it might have been someone using an old address list. Who might that be? Perhaps a former clerk-treasurer of the NBS John Bergman! No, not his style (at least we don't believe so), Mark maintained that it was Carling Gresham. I agreed until we found out that Carling had been undergoing surgery. George Kolbe (nawww, but just maybe). Us, no! We wish that we were the perpetrators, but definitely not us.

The current theories include Elvis because one post office in Fort Worth is located next to a donut shop. And that Mehl himself came back, to try to take it with him this time.

Whodunit? We don't know, but for a few days there was great excitement in the numismatic bibliophilic community. If any of you have any theories, or knowledge, please contact us.

Originally, Myron and I were going to take full credit for the hoax; apologizing for any inconvenience, hoping to get the real hoaxer to confess. Anyway, congrats for an excellent joke to the hoaxter.

Wayne Homren recounted his initial reaction a few years later, in the April 7, 2002 issue of *The E-Sylum*:

A number of U.S. bibliophiles received a flyer postmarked Ft. Worth, TX, advertising an upcoming event run by an auctioneer named Martin Nathaniel Daycius. The auction consisted of an extensive numismatic literature library with items printed as early as 1820. The address of the auction turned out to be that of the B. Max Mehl building in Ft. Worth. Mehl's coin business was shut down decades ago, but to an expectant bibliophile, his library, if kept intact, could be a bonanza. Could it have been in storage all these years?

In every great con, the mark has to WANT to believe. And the flyer found a number of believers, some of whom went as far as booking flights to Texas prior to the sale date, Wednesday, April 1st.

I checked my schedule and prices for flights too, but putting money down was too much of a leap of faith. Setting out to confirm the auction, I was frustrated by the lack of a contact phone number on the flyer (which you

would think would be a big clue...) There was no auctioneer named Daycious in the phone book. Ever resourceful, and knowing that auctioneers are generally licensed by the state, I called the licensing office and was told they had no record of the gentleman. "But if he's holding an auction, we want to know about it. He'll be hearing from us." Hmmm, clue number two.

Still undeterred, a few more phone calls and lots of southern hospitality later, I found myself talking to a clerk in a shoe store across the street from the Mehl Building. No luck. "Oh, no," she said, "that place has been boarded up for years." Clue the third?

I knew something was fishy, but it didn't dawn on me until later that evening. Sitting in night class I mentally pronounced the signature at the bottom of the flyer: M. N. Daycious. Men Daycious. Mendacious!

I recalled a story about George Clapp telling Max Mehl that he thought he was "mendacious". Mehl thanked him, thinking it was a compliment. It wasn't (look it up!). I laughed out loud and my fellow MBA students must have wondered what substance I was abusing to find managerial accounting so amusing.

There the matter lay for some time, until a series of pieces by Myron Xenos appeared in the pages of *The Asylum*. In "Mendacity Revisited" (Fall 2003), Xenos captured the feeling at the time of the hoax: "You had to be there...This, naturally, is where we all went deaf, dumb and blind, mostly dumb, with our collective judgment fogged up by salacious thought of acquisition. It is necessary, at this juncture, to keep in mind that this era was truly golden for numismatic literature. Still alive were Armand Champa, John Bergman, Jack Collins, Frank Katen, Ken Lowe, and others such as Harry Bass, and wallets were opened wide for occasions such as this." Xenos called for the NBS to put their collective heads together, in an effort to "hunt down the scoundrel and give him a trophy."

The following issue (Winter 2004) included Myron's full-page ad promising that "We...will reveal the name of the perpetrator in the next issue." Readers no doubt opened the Spring 2004 with great anticipation, but rather than laying out the case with prosecutorial zeal and a rock-solid trail of evidence, Xenos instead compiled various opinions on the matter.

John Adams pointed the finger squarely at George Kolbe. "...the obvious candidate is George Kolbe. Who knows better the larcenous thoughts that dwell in the minds of bibliophiles? Who would have realized that B. Max Mehl never sold his library (perhaps because he didn't have one)? Who has a warped, subtle sense of humor? Who is so literary as to be able to make puns and create fantasies? Who else embodies all these traits to perfection?" Other suspects named in the Xenos article included Walter Breen, Cal Wilson, Carling Gresham, Ken Lowe, and Armand Champa. Myron's survey also drew denials from Wayne Homren, David Gladfelter, and Myron himself.

With no one talking, the hoax became the stuff of bibliophilic legend. The March 27, 2022 *E-Sylum* revived interest in the topic with an article from "Sam E. Coudin"



(an anagram for *mendacious*) in which the author claimed to have extracted a DNA profile from the 29c stamp applied to an example of the Daycius flyer. Coudin appealed to the audience for funding to pursue DNA testing of potential suspects. Given the proximate publication date of April Fool's Day, it is safe to say that this account was entirely fictitious.<sup>6</sup> Still, *E-Sylum* readers wondered.

Harold Welch followed up in the April 10, 2022 *E-Sylum* issue, "When I first read the article based on Sam E. Coudin's investigation of the M. N. DAYCIUS Prank, I immediately suspected another prank. A Google search didn't turn up any reference to that name. I'm not a genetic scientist, but DNA on a stamp that old seems a bit far fetched. Even if possible, who would damage a piece of numismatic history and spend the money to remove and have the stamps tested? Especially someone with a phony sounding name who doesn't seem to want to be identified? ... Can anyone actually confirm that he is a real person or is someone taking us for a ride?"

The "Sam E. Coudin" piece further elicited a retrospective from Charlie Davis, published in the April 3 issue:

It hit me several days ago that [the] article on the April fools prank mendacious flyer represented a rebirth of a 30 year old cold case. The dastardly devil has never been identified. I remember well a phone call at the time from John Adams asking if I had received the flyer which I had not as I was out of town. He described it to me and I asked if the envelope gave any clues. He said they could not find it and had all the wastepaper baskets in the office dumped on the floor and staff were sifting through it with no luck. It was not until I returned home and found my copy that I realized there was no envelope as it was a single sheet folded over, stapled and mailed.

In addition to John Ford, Armand Champa was taken in by the hoax, especially as B. Max Mehl was his idol. When it became apparent he'd been duped, he commissioned a Dallas photographer to go to the address and take photos of the building in several views—Mehl's poorly preserved office. As I remember he had copies made in small and larger format, one of which he presented to me and which now graces my office wall. Len's illustration was of one side of the flyer and it would be interesting to see other recipients send in scans of the address side of theirs. Sort of like laying together all known 1804 dollars or 1913 Liberty Head nickels out for comparison. Perhaps a poll could be conducted to see who we think was the jokester.

The matter was finally settled on July 21, 2025 at the Celestino Restaurant in Pasadena, CA. Speaking at a lunch following the funeral of George Kolbe, his son, also named George<sup>7</sup>, finally gave it up. George, the son, a resident of Carrollton, TX at the time, admitted to depositing the M. N. Daycius circulars in the local mail.<sup>8</sup> The confession was completely unsolicited by the bibliophiles in attendance and was intended only to convey George's sense of humor to a (mostly) non-numismatic audience.

Kolbe himself never revealed the identity of the prankster but may have come

close. Around 2011, Kolbe engaged this writer in an attempt to develop further information surrounding the Count Fortsas affair. Among the delicacies shared for study was a copy, one of two hundred printed, of *Documents et particularités historiques sur le catalogue du comte de Fortsas: ouvrage dédié aux bibliophiles de tous les pays* (Emm. Hoyois, 1857). A literature review revealed that the topic was already well researched, and neither of us could add much to the subject. In my library is a copy of *Renier Chalon Alias Fortsas*, a 2008 collection of papers on Chalon, including coverage of the Count Fortsas hoax.<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, a card is laid-in, “With Compliments” of George Frederick Kolbe.

In retrospect, we all should have known. David Fanning recalled that “George never denied it.” Wayne Homren wrote in 2004 “My money is on George Kolbe. With his impish sense of humor, vocabulary, knowledge of numismatic, literature, and bibliophiles, he’s my prime suspect. I asked him about it once and he just danced around it without actually denying it.”<sup>10</sup> Joel Orosz noted “no other suspect ever came within a country mile of GFK. George had the wit, the historical knowledge, and the mailing list needed to pull off this classic prank.”<sup>11</sup>

Dan Hamelberg suspected Kolbe of “salting” his shelves whenever Dan visited to browse the bookseller’s stock. The human capacity for delight is seemingly endless, an emotion that somehow survives the cynicism imparted by the struggles of day-to-day life. Dan always found something surprising on George’s shelves, more likely by design than by chance. George might have easily accepted his accolades as the mendacious prankster while he was living, but I think he somehow perceived that our sense of delight might be greater following his passing, acting as brief respite from the sorrow of our loss.

## Epilogue

Whenever ink combines with paper, the bibliophiles will not be far behind archiving, memorializing, collecting, and of course pricing. Since the 1992 hoax, a few M. N. Daycius-related items have appeared on the market.

The Armand Champa sale, part III (September 1995), lot 2487, presented a set of three large color photographs of the Mehl building, commissioned by Champa in light of the 1992 Daycius circular. Similar photographs appeared in Champa IV sale (November 1996), lots 3785-3787. The photographer was Paul Whitnah, as noted in the Money Tree catalog for their sale no. 29 (November 1997), lot 206.

The Ford library sale, part II (June, 2005) included an example of the M. N. Daycius circular, lot 1062, which realized \$65. The cataloger Kolbe, with tongue planted firmly in cheek, wrote: “‘Mendacity’ articles by Myron Xenos in the Fall 2003 and Spring 2004 issues of *The Asylum* provide light on the M. N. Daycius flyer and subsequent events, though the latter installment is marred in part by what are considered by some to be inurbane assertions.”

The October 2019 sale of the Kolbe library, lot 525, represented as the “George Frederick Kolbe Archives,” included eleven binders and four boxes. Box 3 included “materials relating to ‘The 1992 M. N. Daycius Caper.’” The lot sold for \$11,000.

More recently, the Wayne Homren file on the Daycius affair, including an example of the sale announcement and color photographs of the Mehl building, appeared in

the Kolbe & Fanning September 2023 sale, lot 530, and realized \$160. David Fanning noted “The perpetrator has neither been revealed nor ’fessed up, though suspicions tend to focus on one individual whom discretion declines to name.”

The author’s example of the Daycius circular came from Charlie Davis at the 2022 ANA convention in Rosemont, IL, and is addressed to Davis at his old Morristown, NJ address.

## Endnotes

- 1 Guillaume-François De Bure, *Bibliographie instructive: ou traité de la connaissance des livres rares et singuliers* (1763-1769, 7 vols.). De Bure (1731-1782) was a Paris bookseller whose extensive bibliography formed a foundational guide for book collectors of the era.
- 2 Jacques-Charles Brunet (1780-1867) was the most influential successor to De Bure. He published *Manuel du libraire et de l’amateur de livres* in 1810, followed by multiple editions of the supplement *Nouvelles recherches bibliographiques pour servir de supplément au Manuel du libraire et de l’amateur de livres*.
- 3 Jean-Baptiste Techener (1802-1871), a Paris bookseller, issued *Techener’s Bulletin*, a bibliographic periodical that played an important role in the rare book trade.
- 4 Chalon (1802-1889) was president of the Belgian Royal Society of Numismatics, 1848-1887. An obituary is found in *Revue belge de numismatique* (1889, vol. 45, pp. 452-464).
- 5 A digitized copy is at <https://archive.org/details/mndaycius19920401>.
- 6 Pete Smith included both Daycius and Coudin in his article “Fake Names in Numismatics,” published in the Spring 2023 *Asylum*.
- 7 Although not sharing a middle name, the Kolbe family tree contains multiple Georges. The bookseller is informally referred to as “George 2” while his son is “George 3.”
- 8 The author’s example is postmarked Coppell, TX, which is near Carrollton. The Wayne Homren example is postmarked “North Texas MPC,” designating a postal service distribution facility in Coppell. The Joel Orosz example is marked likewise.
- 9 François de Callataÿ & Claude Sorgeloos, eds. *Renier Chalon alias Fortsas : un érudit malicieux au mitan du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Morlanwelz, Belgium: Musée Royal de Mariemont, 2008). Monographies du Musée Royal de Mariemont, no. 16.
- 10 Myron Xenos, “Mendacity Rears Its Ugly Head” (*The Asylum*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Spring 2004, p. 49).
- 11 Email to the author, July 21, 2025.

# The M.N. Daycius Caper, in the Words of George Kolbe

Compiled by Leonard Augsburger

[Note: The October 2019 Kolbe & Fanning sale, *The Reference Library of a Numismatic Bookseller*, featured Kolbe's personal reference library. Lot 525, "Numismatic literature, ephemera, and other miscellaneous," represented a treasure trove of Kolbiana, including correspondence, photographs, and ephemera to be found nowhere else. The lot hammered at \$11,000 and today resides in the American Numismatic Society library. Box 3 of this lot contained "materials relating to 'The 1992 M.N. Daycius Caper.'" Wondering if perhaps this might shed light on the controversy, we asked ANS Librarian David Hill for a copy of the related material. The term "smoking gun" is often used but rarely exists. This is an exception. George was sufficiently proud of his creativity (mendacity?) that he felt compelled to leave a written record of the M.N. Daycius caper. Here then, in George's own words (lightly edited), is how it all went down in 1992.]

**March 18:** I Came across Bowers' *Rare Coin Review* photograph of the old Mehl building, with address. I had decided to play an April Fool's joke about a week earlier but had given up when I could not find a street address for Mehl. I prepared the flyer in about half an hour, and made photocopies of photocopies until appropriately "crummy" reproduction was achieved. Addressed flyers to 62 recipients.

**March 19:** Sent flyers by Express Mail to "accomplice" in Texas.

**March 20:** Flyers mailed.

**March 24:** Marvin Lessen called about flyer. I played dumb and he said he would send a fax of flyer.

In the meantime Alan Meghrig called. During the course of our conversation he took the flyer seriously until he noticed the sale date and opined that it was "an April Fool's joke."

Marvin called back to see if I had received the flyer and to talk about the "sale." I could not restrain myself and told him it was a prank. He was quite unhappy with himself that he had not figured it out!

**March 25:** Jonathan Kagan called, excited about the sale and wondering if I had heard about it. He said he had called information but could not get a number for the auctioneer. Again I fessed up and he was quite amused about it.

Alan Meghrig called and had figured out "M.N. Daycius" and also that the address was probably Mehl's.



John J. Ford, Jr. called. Discussed Walter Breen's cancer surgery and mentioned that Breen had the highest Army I.Q. score (in 150's) and that Ford had scored 135 (110 required to become Officer). Mentioned that he had worked in cryptography branch of Service during WWII. But...seemed to take the flyer seriously (!?) and wanted me to attend the sale (!?). He said he knew where the material in the sale came from: oldtime Fort Worth dealer R.E. Wallace. Wallace had, according to Ford, purchased volumes of Dunham catalogues and large quantities of other materials from the Mehl estate. At the time, Ford had visited Wallace and purchased several important inventories of coin collections (Ellsworth?) but had left most of the material there. I told him one of the people who had called me about the "sale" thought it might be a prank but he said no because he "knew where the material came from." (!?) I suggested that he try to find out more about the auction from local people but he did not want to "cut anyone else in on the deal." (!?) Finally, he said he would call John Rowe to see if Rowe could get a phone number for Daycius and that he would get back to me. He suggested that Rowe might represent us but asked once more if I would be willing to go to the sale if he got more information about it. He asked me what the sale date was and I sort of played dumb saying I would look at the flyer. He beat me to it saying "It's on April Fool's Day" seriously. (!?) I had to laugh at that and he said he would get back to me if the sale was real.

Armand Champa called around 6:45 pm. He had just figured out that the sale is a hoax. He said that Mark Auerbach and Barry Tayman had called and that Barry had deciphered M.N. Daycius. He said he has spent the last two days on the phone trying to get more information about the sale. Things he tried:

- 1) Sent \$20 cash in an overnight letter for a catalogue.
- 2) Called Texas auctioneer organizations.
- 3) Paid to have the address looked up in professional address/resident reference books.
- 4) Sent someone by 1204 Magnolia. Just heard back about an hour before calling me: building is condemned! He also said that Del Bland had called and was all excited about the sale.

Wayne Homren called about 8 pm. He thinks that I am the culprit because his flyer was addressed to "Rebellion Numismatics" and I am one of the few people who knows that is the name he uses when advertising for numismatic books. He said that he was fooled for a while and made phone calls to Texas. He finally figured out the M.N. Daycius clue because he had heard that "mendacious" was George Clapp's cost code. He also related that it was Clapp who had told B. Max Mehl, after Mehl profusely thanked Clapp for his hospitality, that Mehl was mendacious and Mehl took it as a compliment. According to Wayne, Clapp had a low opinion of Mehl and thought that although Mehl used big words he often did not know their meaning. In other circles, he mentioned, Charlie Davis and Scott Rubin are suspects. He mentioned that John Bums had called and felt left out because he did not get a flyer.

**March 26:** I called JFF to tell him that Armand had called to say sale was a hoax. JFF had called John Rowe and had him check out the address so he already knew.

I called Jack Collins. He agrees with Alan's reasoning and thinks it may be O.J. Grady. He did think that some people would turn up at the "sale."

Wayne Anderson called to ask if I was going to Fort Worth. I don't think he knew for sure it was a hoax but I had to tell him.

I called Scott Rubin and he called back. He heard about the sale from Martin Gengerke who took it seriously and wanted Scott to attend. Scott tried to get a telephone number in Fort Worth but eventually figured out it was a hoax. He thinks that Bill Anton did it. Scott did not receive his flyer until today.

**March 27:** Called Henry Morris. Asked him about flyer. He had read it but could not find it while on the phone. I would give him no clues but told him to see if he could find it. He called back in a few minutes and had figured out the sale date, M.N. Daycius, and, of course, knows who is the perpetrator.

Stu Levine called at 11:45 am with a "lead." He just received the flyer, "all crumpled up." Told him it was a hoax.

**March 30:** Dan Hamelberg called. He just returned from a week vacation in Florida. I brought up "sale" first but he had not figured out it was a hoax (I should have let him bring it up first—if he would have—but felt I had to mention it at some time to protect my "innocence").

**March 31-April 2:** Vacation in Las Vegas.

**April 2:** Bill Gibbs of *Coin World* left message at 11:07 AM requesting information about the "April Fool's joke you were the victim of the other day."

Marv had sent fax on the 31st depicting the "April Fool" being strung up, with the caption "Tomorrow." When I called him he said that he had thought of coming up today and putting the drawing on my door but he had not known I was gone or he would have for sure.

**April 3:** Called Bill Gibbs and answered his questions about the "sale." I think he has a "suspect" but he did not identify him or her.





(top to bottom)

(clockwise from top left) Dan Hamelberg, George Kolbe, John Adams, Peter Tompa, David Hill, Regina Adams, Joel Orosz, Florence Orosz, David Fanning, Betty Lowery and Connie Hamelberg at the ANS Gala in New York, January 2019.

Betty Lowery and George Kolbe with Connie and Dan Hamelberg (January 2019).

George with Dave Walsworth



(top to bottom)

(left to right) Len Augsburg, George Kolbe, Joel Orosz, David Fanning and John Adams in June 2018.

(left to right) John Adams cooks up his famous pancakes at the Orosz's with Joel Orosz, Len Augsburg and George Kolbe.

George with his wife Betty Lowery at the Huntington Museum



# A Testimonial to George Frederick Kolbe

By David Gladfelter

George treated numismatics as a discipline, not as just a hobby or pastime, and regarded its literature as the means of defining and interpreting its many forms and topics. He turned his love of literature into a successful business, attracting not only major consignments, but also serving the interests of both the collector focused on a particular specialty and the generalist. Thus his catalogs and published articles now stand as ongoing sources of numismatic information, both new and old but always current, bringing satisfaction and pleasure to those who consult them.

This disciplinary treatment is particularly evident in George's 2012 book about the key contents of his own library, titled *The Reference Library of a Numismatic Bookseller*. Well indexed and organized, the book is designed as a pathway to guide a researcher to basic sources not to be overlooked. Moreover, it describes actual books that George owned and used, some of which are signed by their authors, some of which are specially bound, some of which are provenanced to notable collections. It serves more than the function of a bibliography. In his foreword, Jonathan Kagan calls it a "bibliography of bibliographies," the first serious one of a numismatic nature. Joel Orosz's book review appearing in the January-March 2013 issue of *The Asylum* does justice to the book and to its author.

George was not only a reliable bookseller but a dear friend in many ways. He wrote a particularly kind comment in my copy of *Reference Library*. I greatly appreciate his help in forming my own reference library. And I treasure his friendship.

To cite the trite, here tweaked a bit: "As we mourn the passing of the flame, let us remember how brightly it burned."

## Thank You, George!

By Dave Steine

I got to know George in the late 1990s, toward the end of the Harry Bass, Jr. library sales. I had a reasonably good knowledge of rare U.S. coins, but numismatic books, outside of the Red Book, were completely foreign to me. One day I decided it was time to call this George Kolbe guy. I remember being a little bit intimidated by his name—wow, George Frederick Kolbe. I thought to myself, he will probably hang up when he figures out how limited my knowledge of rare numismatic literature is.

With apprehension I made the call and quickly found out what a wonderful person George was. Over the next several years we had many conversations regarding how to collect numismatic literature and its value. At first the mail bid sales were tough for



me; I would send in a page full of bids and win maybe five lots. With George's guidance I got better at it over time.

I first met George in person at his home in Crestline during the John Ford, Jr. library preview. I remember being in awe not only of the Ford holdings but also the cool home and office that George operated his business out of. Humble as always, George welcomed me to the preview. The Ford sale, held at the Mission Inn Hotel in Riverside, was an incredible event that I will always remember.

George was so kind to me. He would send me ultra special copies of his important sales. I remember the day my "ultra special" copy of the Ford sales came in the mail. My name was embossed in gold leaf on the front cover; I was over the moon!

George's patience and guidance in those early years kept me on track. I know that without his help the library I have today would be vastly different if it existed at all.

Thank you George! Rest in peace.

## George F. Kolbe, Rittenhouse Society Member

By Dennis Tucker

[Previously published in the July 15<sup>th</sup> *Rittenreport*.]

George Frederick Kolbe, longtime Rittenhouse Society member, has left us. We all know that George was much more than just a "book dealer," and his passing is truly significant—he worked within a complicated and often opaque and jealously guarded professional field (rare literature) to nurture and energize an under-developed discipline (numismatics) within that field.

My own involvement with George dates back about twenty years. He was among the first numismatic specialists I consulted after I joined Whitman Publishing in 2004. Three months after I was hired as publisher we were wrapping up the manuscript and layout of the 59th edition of the Red Book. A few of our final tasks: Review Scott Rubin's current "Top 250" list of auction records; double-check the Stella mintages using the latest research by Saul Teichman; and (a direct quote from my notes) "Send Red Book prices to George Kolbe for his review." As the nation's preeminent dealer in numismatic books, George was our most important contributor to the "Red Book as a Collectible" section. Vintage editions of the Red Book and Blue Book made up only a fraction of his rare-book sales, of course, but his specialized knowledge of the market was just what we needed. He also helped with information in Frank J. Colletti's *Guide Book of the Official Red Book of United States Coins* and other projects. He was an active consultant for nearly my entire twenty years at Whitman, and I was grateful to be able to rely on his expertise. You'll find George F. Kolbe cited in many Whitman Publishing books of that era—in my opinion, a fitting and proper place for his memory to live on.

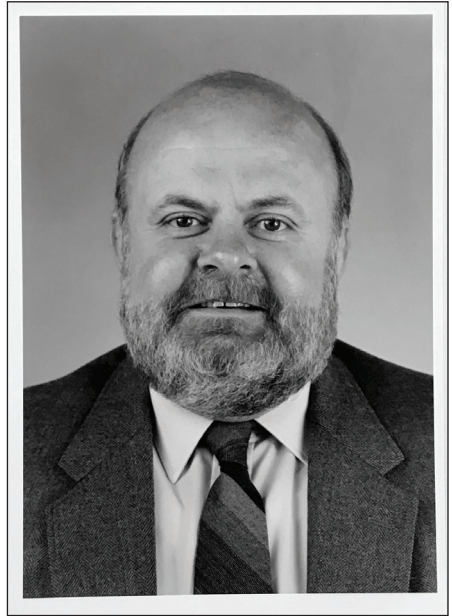
# The Indispensable Man: George Frederick Kolbe, 1941–2025

By Joel J. Orosz

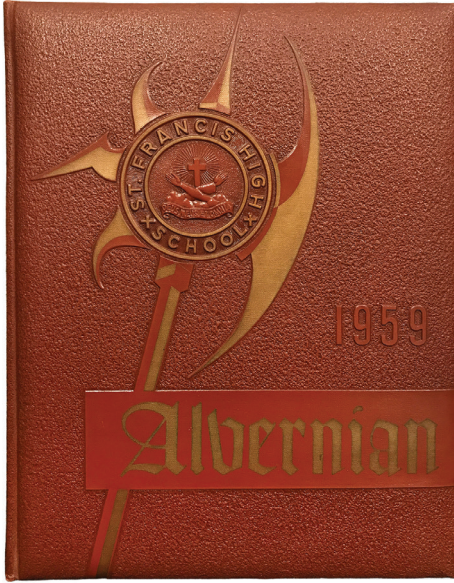
“The graveyards,” according to Charles de Gaulle, “are full of indispensable men.” In most cases, this mordant witticism is correct, but on rare occasions, “indispensable man” proves to be an accurate description of a truly exceptional person who bends the arc of history at a moment of inflection. Such a man was George Frederick Kolbe, and his “moment” occurred from the 1970s through the 2010s, when he almost single-handedly gathered, from disparate parts, both a trade and a hobby of numismatic literature. The man and his methods were so intertwined that we may never unravel them fully: but let us begin.

The multi-talented Mr. Kolbe contained multitudes, and that starts with a plethora of names. His trade style evolved over the years, beginning with “G. Frederick Kolbe” in 1967, when he formally became a numismatic bibliopole. Soon people started addressing him as “Fred,” an unforeseen and unwelcome outcome. In response, he employed all three of his names: the magisterial “George Frederick Kolbe.” That remained his trade style until the 2010 partnership with David Fanning created “Kolbe & Fanning.” It must also be noted that the article he contributed to Vol. 1, No. 1 of *The Asylum* was signed “G.F. Kolbe.” In personal interactions, he elided the “Frederick” to simply “George Kolbe,” and to the multitude of his customers and friends, it was either cognomen or surname: “I got it from George,” or “It came from a Kolbe sale.” One nickname he did not fancy was “Mountain Man,” hung upon him by Carling Gresham, in the mid-1980s, a play upon his then-bearded visage and the fact that his home in Crestline was nestled in the San Bernadino Mountains. Many were the names, but the bookman’s identity undergirded them all.

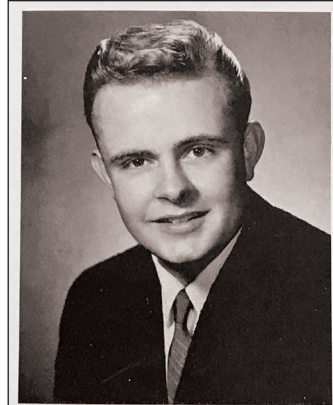
“The child is the father of the man”: Wordsworth’s insight was truly exemplified by young George Kolbe. He began collecting coins at the age of nine, just when the great U.S. postwar numismatic boom market was igniting. The September 25, 1955 issue of the *Pasadena Independent* featured a photo of young George, who had won an award



George Kolbe circa 1980



*The Alvernian*, 1959 yearbook of St. Francis High School, La Canada, California. NBS Archives



**GEORGE KOLBE**

"George" . . . member of Fr. A's "Eat, drink, and be merry" society . . . treacherous card shark—never loses (when dealing) . . . ambition: to be a walking advertisement for Ayds.  
Debating Team; Knight Breeze '59.

George Kolbe's Senior Portrait and Predictions, from *The Alvernian*, 1959

for attracting new subscribers to the paper (and no doubt added to his collection by searching the receipts from his route). George was a 1959 graduate of St. Francis High School in La Canada, California, and the captions under his senior portrait proved uncannily accurate. He was a member of "Father A's 'Eat, Drink and be Merry' Society," a proclivity that continued in his dinner-and-nightcaps excursions with friends at many a coin convention. He was also humorously described as a "treacherous card shark—never loses (when dealing)," which foreshadowed his skill at the gaming tables (including an appearance in the World Series of Poker).

Like many another young numismatist, George fell away from the hobby in early adulthood, a lapse he attributed to a compelling interest in "cars and girls." One of those girls was Linda Louiselle, whom he married in 1961. The happy couple were blessed with three children. George entered upon a career in grocery store management, which proved to be a surprisingly apt preparation for his subsequent career in bookselling, for in the pre-computer era, the habits of close attention to keep track of constantly shifting inventory ingrained salutary powers of observation and description.

In the mid-1960s, George once again felt the allure of numismatics. He tried his hand at "vest-pocket dealing" in coins, taking as his guide the great dealer Abe Kosoff, whom Kolbe remembered years later as being considered "almost a god" in Southern California numismatic circles. He could not emulate Abe's commercial success, however, and later modestly assessed: "I became a good bookseller because I was a lousy coin dealer." So, in 1967, he entered the ranks of the biblioplists.

In the United States of that era, coin-related literature was not exactly in the wil-

derness, but it was far from any metropolis. Numismatic bibliophiles were rare; most collectors' "libraries" consisted of a handful of volumes needed for reference. There had been a long winter for numismatic research, and many of the references available—such as Adams-Woodin for patterns, and Baker for Washingtoniana—were significantly dated. Many dealers buying collectors' estates sent the coins to auction, and the books to the pulping mill. A few dealers, such as Aubrey and Adeline Bebee, offered some titles as sidelights. Only a small number of exceptional collectors and dealers—such as John J. Ford, Harry Bass, Nathan Eglit, Floyd B. Newell, and the father-son team of Melvin and George J. Fuld—were actual bibliophiles, who built substantial libraries.

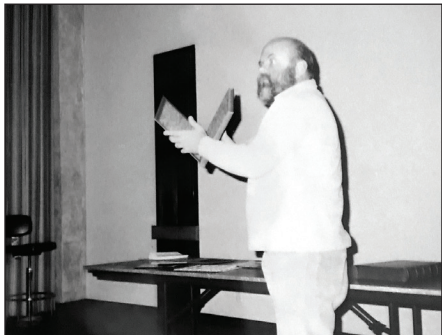
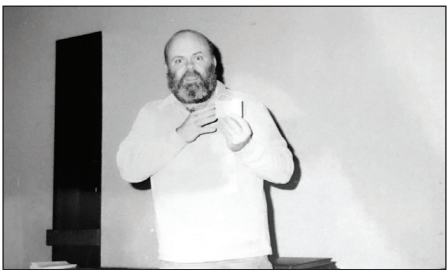
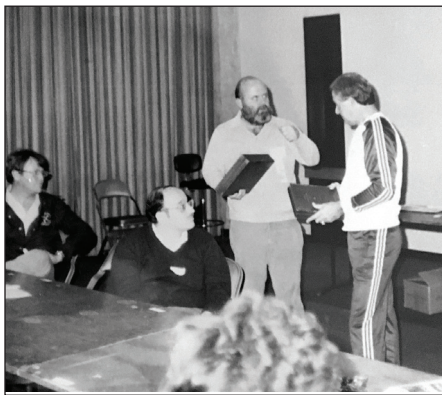
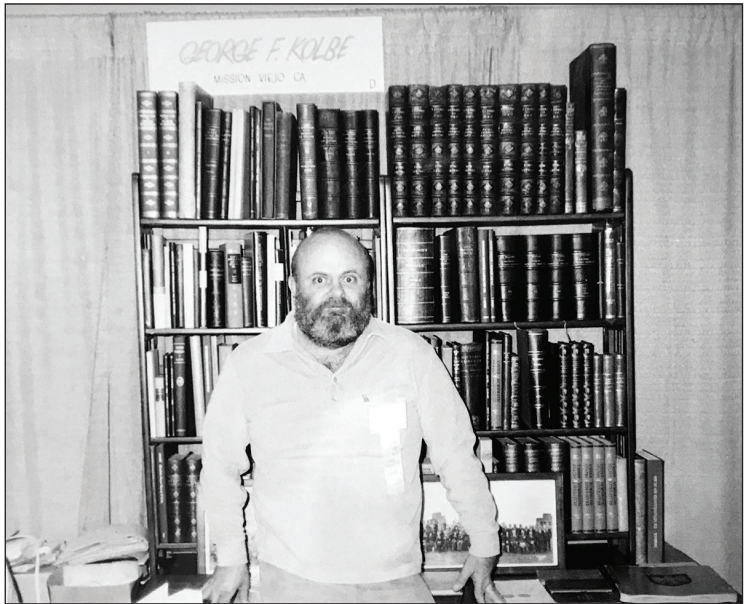
George, however, entered this sparse field with superb timing. Starting in January of 1961, the new weekly newspaper *Coin World* had begun publishing annual book lists, the first two of which were compiled by Editor D. Wayne Johnson. Covering subjects from Coins of the Americas to Transportation Tokens, more than 1,800 books were listed and priced. Frank J. Katen, of Washington, D.C., took over the third edition in 1963, and kept the renamed "Book Edition" going through its 12<sup>th</sup> iteration, in 1975. These lists provided collectors with readily-accessible guides to the literature.

Nor was this Frank's only contribution to the cause. As John W. Adams has noted, with Katen's 29<sup>th</sup> auction sale on June 21, 1958, he switched from being a coin dealer who also handled books to a book dealer who also handled coins. Aaron Feldman also contributed his mite, through "The World's Smallest Bookstore" in New York City. They fostered a new generation of serious bibliophiles, including the aforementioned John W. Adams, Jack Collins, John Bergman, Myron Xenos, Armand Champa, and P. Scott Rubin.

Although the hobby was growing during the 1950s and 1960s, one major impediment stood athwart its progress. This roadblock was epitomized, unfortunately, by the era's foremost dealer of numismatic literature, Frank J. Katen. In 1971, he handled the first truly great American numismatic library to come to market, that of George J. Fuld. Katen offered it in two sales, a total of 2,658 lots of rare and important literature described in only 122 octavo pages. Most of Katen's descriptions were laconic in the extreme, such as *three lines* used to offer one of the legendary rarities in American numismatics, Adolphus Hart's *History of the Issues of Paper-Money in the American Colonies, Anterior to the Revolution*, WITH the accompanying plate! Katen's Fuld catalog teems with imprecise terms such as "Beautifully bound" and "Large book." Incorrect "facts" about print runs and edition dates are bandied about. Slapdashedness is cheerfully admitted (see lot 1215 of the second sale, where Frank comments "This lot is really out of place, but better now than never"). Gratuitous admissions are made: *vide* lot 928a of the second sale: "We have no way of knowing whether any collector is interested in the entire lot of Chapman catalogues." What hobbyists desperately needed was a professional biblipole to properly describe items on offer, and a scholar, who could explicate the historical import of the volumes up for sale.

To be sure, George Kolbe, in 1967, was neither a professional nor a scholar. His first offerings came via lists that Linda typed on 8 ½ x 11 sheets of paper, manually duplicated, which were sent to a small mailing list of aficionados. The fledgling business remained part-time into the early '70s. George prowled the bookstores in Los Angeles





(clockwise from top) 1) George at his table; 2–4) George holding forth on numismatic books; 5) George with Armand Champa, Cal Wilson and others; all at the Long Beach Expo, 1983.  
NBS Archives



and on Hollywood Boulevard, finding delicacies for his stock. The highlight of this diligent searching was discovering, in a hole-in-the-wall bookstore, a bound copy of the first six volumes of *The Numismatist*, which he purchased quite reasonably, and sold to the only interested customer, for a gratifying “mid-three-figure amount.” Most importantly, he studied booksellers’ terms and conditions, learned the subtle difference between a royal octavo and a short quarto; the distinctions between morocco and calf leathers; what distinguished albumen plates from collotypes; and began describing his offerings with precision. He researched to a fare-thee-well, until he could explain, in the historical context of the 1850s, why Hickox’s *An Historical Account of American Coinage* was so quickly superseded by Dickeson’s *American Numismatological Manual*. Kolbe’s catalogs rapidly evolved into works of reference, teaching collectors about their hobby, and preserving the provenances of the items handled.

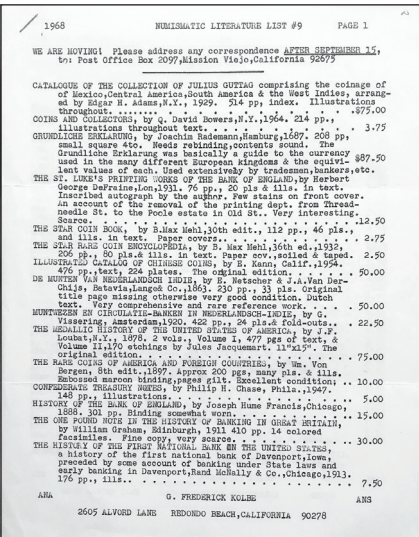


George Kolbe Portrait, ca, 1985. NBS Archives

Throughout the 1970s, George grew his knowledge and his business in tandem. His first mail bid auction sale of numismatic literature, on February 28, 1976, was a sort of coming-out party for both bibliopole and bibliophile. Although modest in size and rarities on offer compared to later sales, it had some choice material, as heavily-annotated surviving copies attest. He also cannily asked John W. Adams, who had just finished editing the Quarterman reprint of Attinelli’s *Numisgraphics*, to provide rarity ratings and valuations for the extensive run of early U.S. auction sales on offer. The sale was a huge success, and a fitting launch pad for the series of Kolbe catalogs which continues, uninterrupted, to this day. A steady stream of auction sales and fixed price lists—some with intriguing titles, such as 1978’s Christmas catalog, “An Olla Podrida”—followed throughout the decade.

As his business flourished, a community of collectors accreted around the publications—and the person—of George Kolbe. One of them is worthy of special mention—a beer bar owner, television special associate producer, and numismatic photographer extraordinaire—Jack Collins. George often told the story of their first meeting, on a busy coin bourse. Jack was eating a snack as Kolbe was introduced, and said, apologetically, “Excuse me, I have nuts in my teeth,” to which George quickly replied, “Well, that’s better than the reverse!” The two instantly bonded over their shared love of numismatics and irreverent humor.

Early in 1979, Jack called George to propose formation of a club for numismatic literature aficionados. At the St. Louis ANA in the summer of that year, they gathered a dozen of their mutual friends for dinner and launched the Numismatic Biblioma-



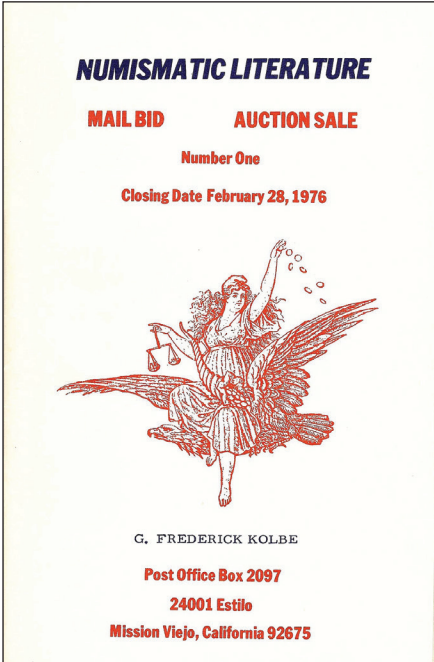
One of George's early lists, from 1968, typed by Linda.



The vocabulary-expanding *Catalogue III*, an Olla Podrida.

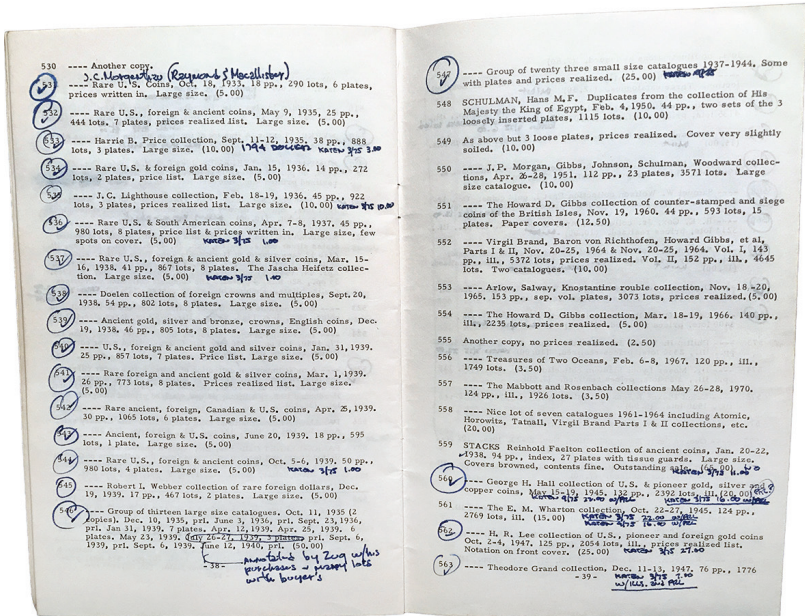


George's colorful *Catalogue II*, from 1977.



George's *Numismatic Literature Mail Bid 1*, 1976.





George's Numismatic Literature Mail Bid Sale 1, annotated by Jack Collins.  
Author's Library



Cover of George's full-color Auction Sale 11, 1982.

nia Society. In mid-1980, George and Jack sat down together to edit the first issue of *The Asylum*, with, as Kolbe recalled later, Jack providing most of the inspiration and George providing most of the perspiration. As would be the case for decades in numismatic bibliomania, one was certain to find George Kolbe in “the room where it happened.”

The room where it *really happened* for the young hobby of numismatic bibliomania was located in the Los Angeles Hilton, on June 28 and 29, 1981. It was there and then that George’s Ninth sale of numismatic literature emphatically announced that the hobby had arrived. Prior to this date, literature had been the poor cousin subsisting on crumbs from the coin banquet; at a time when the magnificent Garrett collection had realized \$20 million over four auctions, even the greatest numismatic libraries at auction brought around one-tenth of 1% of that sum. In Kolbe’s December 19, 1980 Eighth sale, for example, only one of its 2655 lots realized over \$500 (#1318, a first edition *Red Book*). Kolbe’s Ninth, however, held only three months after the last of the Garrett sales, and in a doldrums coin market no less, blasted through old limits to another dimension.

The catalogue, printed in the gold-on-white cover style of the Brothers Chapman, offered sensational lots from the library of the late dealer Kenneth Lee; duplicates from the holdings of mega-collector Armand Champa; and numismatic remainders from the Essex Institute. This attractive catalog boasted twenty illustrated plates, including an unprecedented eight in color. Moreover, the lots were extensively described, finally exorcising the laconic ghost of Frank Katzen.

The community of collectors that George had nurtured for the previous fourteen years showed up in force, and with open checkbooks. A complete run of *The American Journal of Numismatics* hammered for \$6,300, and then the records started to fall. The greatest price ever paid for an American numismatic book—\$4,500—was followed by the greatest price ever paid for an American auction catalog—\$9,000—leading to the memorable sight of the winning bidder, Jack Collins, passionately kissing his S.H. Chapman Hunter sale. Subsequent to the hammer falling on lot 1025, Kolbe announced that his Ninth sale had achieved the greatest realization of any numismatic book sale, \$271,765.

After fifteen years toiling in the shadows, George suddenly found himself on the center stage. The numismatic press, for the first time, covered the results of a book sale as a news story, and *Coin World* made him their first numismatic literature columnist. New consignments began rolling in, and their quality led to improved production values for his publications (*vide*, for example, the technicolor covers of his eleventh sale). George told me in 2010 that his parents had doubted the wisdom of his career change from grocer to bibliopole, but were finally persuaded by the Ninth sale that he had chosen wisely.

Kolbe’s Ninth had a salutary impact not just upon his own business, but more broadly across the field. Before the 1980s were out, a new generation of avid collectors such as Dan Hamelberg, Wayne Homren, Michael J. Sullivan, Joel J. Orosz and Frank Van Zandt arose, and new dealers like Cal Wilson, David Sklow, Charles Davis, and the Money Tree duo of Myron Xenos and Kenneth Lowe hung out their shingles to meet increasing demand.

This wave of new collectors and bibliopoles, however, had left the young Numismatic Bibliomania Society foundering in its backwash. Meetings grew infrequent, and *The Asylum* couldn't keep a regular publishing schedule. Just as the NBS seemed to be slouching toward desuetude, George organized a Golden State rescue mission. With the able assistance of Jack Collins, Cal Wilson and John Bergman, George organized the first Regional Meeting of the NBS at the Long Beach Coin Expo February 17–20, 1983. Bibliomaniacs swarmed

Kolbe's table on the bourse, and George himself seemed to be everywhere, chatting up hobby luminaries such as Armand Champa and Walter Breen, holding forth upon the subject of numismatic literature, adding energy and enthusiasm to all and sundry. The regional meeting idea itself never really caught on, but the momentum from Long Beach reinvigorated the NBS, and made possible the organization's present-day dynamism.

George himself went from strength to strength during the 1980s and the '90s. In addition to his continuing string of auction sales, he added his own fixed price lists, *The Numismatic Bookseller*, which offered many important items. He arranged for the December 24–31, 1990 issue of the leading antiquarian bookseller's publication, *AB Bookman's Weekly*, to focus on numismatic literature, and wrote the lead article. His friendship with Douglas Saville of Spink led to the joint Kolbe/Spink sales in New York City every December, the numismatic literature event of the season. George quietly helped discerning collectors build great libraries during this era, including the greatest American library of all, the incomparable aggregation of Dan Hamelberg. American or Ancient, World or Medieval and Modern, most great libraries passed through the mountain fastness of Crestline on their way to auction, sometimes accompanied by undesirable drama, when wildfires would be contained only a few hundred yards from the mile-high Kolbe manse.

Not as destructive as a wildfire, but every bit as combustible, was the *contretemps* between Kolbe and Champa, truly a clash of titans. Collectors of numismatic literature ephemera occasionally encounter a puzzling Kolbe advertisement, printed on an early March 1994 ANA "Action Card" slip, announcing:

Announcing the Public Auction of  
**THE MOST IMPORTANT  
 AMERICAN NUMISMATIC LIBRARY  
 ~~~~~ EVER SOLD ~~~~~**

The Magnificent Library formed by ARMAND CHAMPA will be offered in a series of THREE PUBLIC SALES, starting with the Summer 1994 ANA CONVENTION and culminating at the 1995 ANA CONVENTION in Anaheim. Two or more mail bid sales will follow. Catalogues will be issued in a limited hardbound edition and will be available on a subscription basis only. Please CALL, WRITE OR FAX FOR DETAILS.

**GEORGE FREDERICK KOLBE**  
 Fine Numismatic Books  
 Post Office Drawer 3100 • Crestline, CA 92325-3100  
 Tel: (909) 338-6527 Fax: (909) 338-6980

George's ANA Action Pack ad for the sale of the Champa Library, March 1994. Author's Library.

### THE MOST IMPORTANT AMERICAN NUMISMATIC LIBRARY EVER SOLD

The Magnificent Library formed by ARMAND CHAMPA will be offered in a series of THREE PUBLIC SALES, starting with the summer 1994 ANA CONVENTION and culminating at the 1995 ANA Convention in Anaheim.



The ad offered limited hardbound edition catalogues available on a subscription basis only, and invited interested parties to call for details. So call I did, on March 9, 1994, encountering a smoldering George Kolbe. He told me that he and Champa had entered into negotiations in the spring of 1993 for George to auction the Champa Library. Armand had two big aspirations for the sale: to garner the first million-dollar realization for a numismatic literature auction, and to create such an *event* that it would draw a flock of new collectors into the hobby.

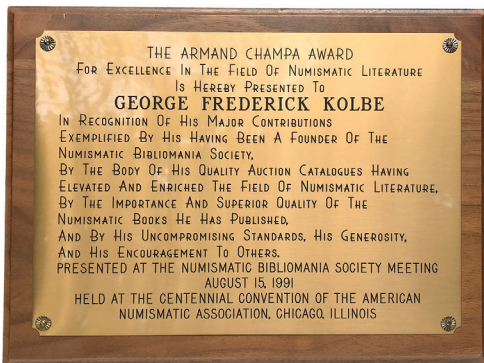
Kolbe and Champa met several times in Las Vegas to discuss the arrangements. George traveled to Louisville in July 1993 to evaluate and appraise the Champa Library. In February 1994, they struck a deal over the telephone that the first of three public sales would be held in conjunction with the 1994 ANA convention in Detroit. As part of their verbal agreement, George promised to conduct a \$30,000 advertising campaign to promote the auctions. But Armand then raised a new request: for George to reduce his customary commission from 15% to 10%. Kolbe countered that he could not do both: if he were to lower his commission, he would have to halve the ad budget. Champa grudgingly agreed to leave the commission at 15%.

Kolbe, by now out of pocket more than \$2,500 for travel and advertising expenses, began making arrangements for the first sale, by then only a few months away. Abruptly, on February 16, 1994, Champa sent him a half-page fax reneging on the agreement. George attempted to be philosophical about it, but he had spent considerable time upon the negotiations, and was now forced to cancel the announced 1994 ANA Convention auction. I joked with George that it was a good thing that the Brady Bill, with its five-day waiting period for the purchase of a handgun, had recently passed. George joshed back that, as far as he was concerned, the waiting period was almost over!

The handshake deal had simply evaporated. In a fine illustration of Samuel Goldwyn's observation that "An oral contract isn't worth the paper it's written on," Champa was able to wriggle out consequence-free because the written contract that the two men had painstakingly negotiated had never actually been signed.

Subsequently, Champa chose Auctions by Bowers and Merena to sell his collection, and they engaged Charles Davis to catalog it. Champa got the large ad campaign he desired, and the million-dollar realization he coveted. The suite of four sales did not attract the great wave of new collectors he had envisioned, but perhaps we should leave the summary to the entertainer Meat Loaf, who was wont to croon, "But don't be sad, cuz two out three ain't bad."

Many others would have brought suit. Kolbe did not, but he did use his wit to good effect. At the 1996 ANA convention in Denver, George, John W. Adams and I were

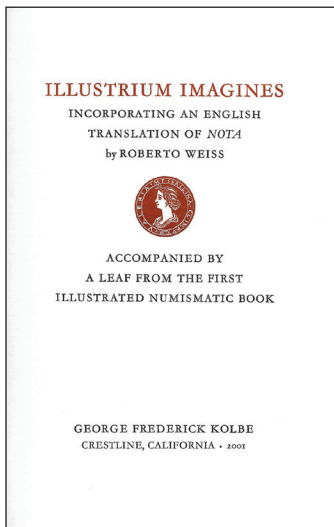


George's 1991 Armand Champa Award plaque, NBS Archives

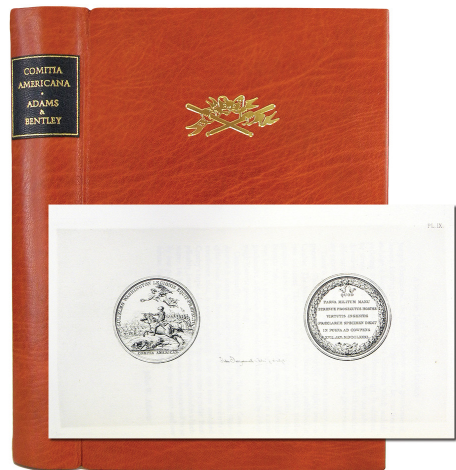
walking from the convention center to dinner. We chose the most direct route to the restaurant, only to have George spy the sign reading “CHAMPA Street.” He stared at it a few moments, then exclaimed “Nahhhh,” and led us to the parallel Stout Street in order to reach our destination. Connoisseurs of irony will also note that the Numismatic Bibliomania Society had named George the winner of its (then) highest honor back in 1991: the “Armand Champa Award.” That award was subsequently discontinued because its namesake never fully funded it.

The Kolbe Champa sales that never were are more than counterbalanced in George’s legacy by the landmark library sales of John W. Adams, Harry Bass, John J. Ford, and the Stack Family that followed. These sales were replete with the rare, the obscure, and the arcane that only George could fully describe, from a Henry Whipple fixed price list to the fulminations of “Antiquarian” against Benson Lossing in defense of Samuel Breck’s *Continental Paper Money*. These Kolbe catalogues, all issued in special editions that define excellence in binding and presentation, endure as core references in the field.

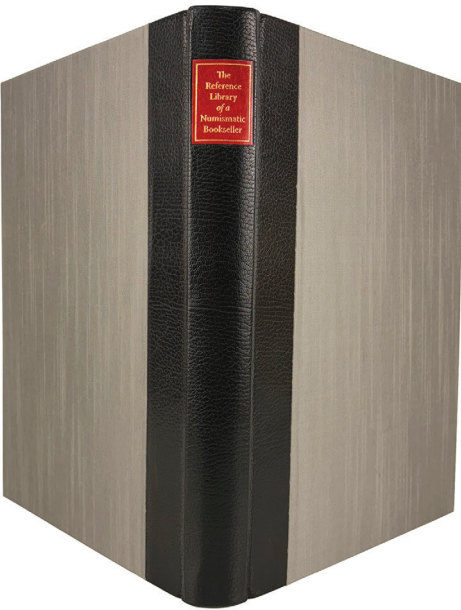
The contributions of George Kolbe to the arts of the book and of the medal are likewise imposing. George forged a friendship and a bookmaking alliance with Henry Morris, the celebrated proprietor of the Bird & Bull Press. Among their collaborations were two leaf books of enduring beauty and importance. The first, published in 2001, was *Illustrium Imagines, Accompanied by a Leaf from the First Illustrated Numismatic Book*. Leaves were taken from an incomplete and disbound copy of Andrea Fulvio’s 1517 *Illustrium*, allowing 151 copies to be produced on Arches mouldmade paper. The second is a splendid edition of John W. Adams’ and Anne Bentley’s *Comitia Americana and Related Medals*, printed by letterpress with accompanying clamshell box, and containing a leaf from J.F. Loubat’s *The Medallic History of the United States of America*. Printed by Morris on Frankfurt mouldmade paper, in an edition of



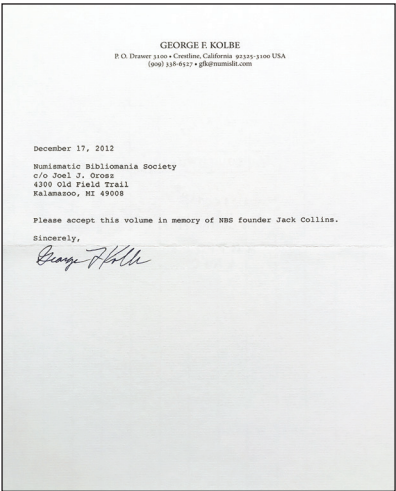
Title page of George’s *Illustrium Imagines* Leaf Book.



Adams’ and Bentley’s *Comitia Americana*, from Bird & Bull Press.  
Photo courtesy of Kolbe & Fanning



George's *Library of a Numismatic Bookseller*, large paper copy. Photo courtesy of Kolbe & Fanning



Transmission letter from George for the inaugural book in the NBS Library, NBS Archives



George receiving the first NBS Kolbe Award from David Sundman at the 2010 NBS meeting at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Marc Ricard on right. NBS Archives

only sixty copies, it is a superb example of the bookmaker's art.

George also created a seal for his business that he later uttered as a token, with the central device of an open book surmounting a fluted column, surrounded by a glory of rays and foliage, with the motto "VERITAS · VISV · ET · MORA" around the perimeter. Kolbe put this attractive token to good use, embedding it into the regular softbound, special hardbound, and deluxe hardbound editions of his June 1 & 18, 1990 Sale 44, *Selections from the John W. Adams Library*. It is also featured in Henry Morris' 1989 book *Trade Tokens of British & American Booksellers & Bookmakers: With Specimens of Eleven Original Tokens Struck Especially for the Book*.

Another of George's contributions to the book arts also made history for the NBS. His *The Reference Library of a Numismatic Bookseller*, written in 2012, and published in an edition of 150 copies, with ten on large paper, comprises a splendid annotated bibliography of the references George had used to produce his superb catalogs and price lists. On December 17, 2012, he donated one copy to the NBS, in memory of co-founder Jack Collins. In my capacity as the Society's Historian, I noted that this book was the first ever accessioned by the NBS: thereby establishing the Society's library. George would be gratified to note that this library has since doubled in size, with a 2023 donation from Len Augsburg of the first copy of *The Asylum Cumulative Index, Volumes 31-40 (2013-2022)*, which Len bound as a demonstration at the 2023 ANA Convention. Nor can we omit from our examples a book *about* George, David and Maria Fanning's *Fifty Years of Numismatic Bookselling: A Tribute to George Frederick Kolbe*, consisting of testimonials from twenty-eight of George's compatriots, and an invaluable bibliography of the master's auction catalogs.

Two through lines are readily discerned in George Kolbe's life: his bibliopolism, and his pet project, the NBS. The body of scholarship as recorded in his catalogs and books provides a solid bedrock upon which the hobby will build its future. Kolbe co-founded the Society with Jack Collins; he served as the first editor of its journal, *The Asylum*; and in 1983, when the NBS seemed to be dying in its cradle, he had ridden to its rescue at the Long Beach show. Further, in 1996, when Martin Gengerke found he could not continue as Editor of *The Asylum*, it was once more George saving the day by once again taking the editorial reins, getting the journal back on a regular publication schedule, and relinquishing it as a healthy journal to Tom Fort at the end of 1997.

It was more than fitting, therefore, that in 2010, the NBS created and named its highest award in George's honor: "The George Frederick Kolbe Award for Lifetime Achievement in Numismatic Literature," and even more apropos that the first recipient was the man himself. The splendid Kolbe Medal, designed by the Ricards, father Charles and son Marc, has been awarded to but a handful of the immortals—such as John W. Adams, Dan Hamelberg, and Charles Davis—in the fifteen years since: it is truly an *earned* distinction.

To paraphrase Tennyson, though much has been taken from us in George's passing, there is still much that abides. The Numismatic Bibliomania Society will always be George Kolbe in an institutional form. Founding one numismatic bibliophilic organization proved to be a preamble; in 2017 he conceived and, along with five other founding members, established the Attinelli Fellowship, an honorary society that recognizes excellence in the collection, preservation, and study of numismatic literature.





George F. Kolbe and John W. Adams at The Country Club, Boston, 2010. NBS Archives

Jack Collins sniffing a leather binding, at Long Beach Expo, 1983; Walter Breen at right. NBS Archives



George and Joel Orosz examining the large paper *Numisgraphics*, Boston Public Library, 2013. Photo by David Fanning



Its annual dinner meetings have already become the stuff of lore among numismatic bibliophiles.

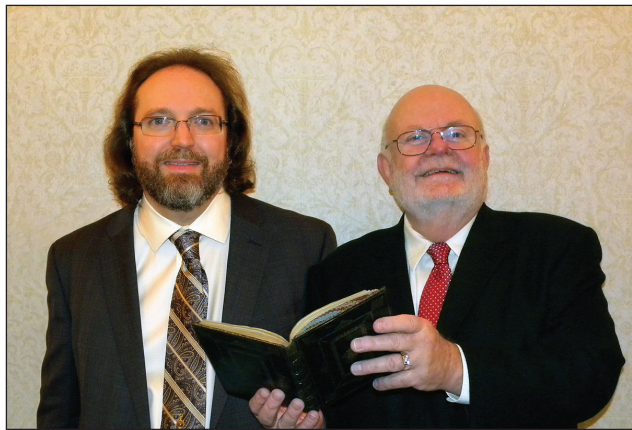
Any attempt to memorialize the man in full is doomed to fall into the biggest bugaboo of numismatic bibliophiles, *incompletion*. George did so much, for so many, for so long, that his life can never be fully captured, or entirely appreciated, by even the most conscientious of would-be Plutarchs. I will always cherish memories of the evenings at ANA conventions in which George would suggest that we have a nightcap together and discuss the issues of the day, with his wicked wit made even wickeder after consuming a couple of adult beverages. Browse through the back issues of *The Asylum*, and delight in stories that range from the sublime to the not. For an example of sublimity, see Vol. 33, No.1, January-March 2015, in which George recounts his visit to the Boston Public Library, in company with David Fanning and me, during which he confirmed the existence of one of the ten large-paper copies of Attinelli's *Numisgraphics*, rumored since 1878, but never before found in the wild. For an example of the not-so-sublime, see Vol. XIII, No. 3, Fall 1995, recounting a death-defying ride to the Newark Airport with pioneering numismatic literature dealer James A. Brown. If you want to extend the tribute to the *completely* non-sublime, George was lauded in print in John Nicholson's peculiar little guidebook, *High Profits in Old Coin Books* (1988).

George was even able to achieve sublimity in wit anonymously, in the 1992 Martin Nathaniel Daycious affair (Kolbe's central role was finally revealed by Len Augsburg in his 2025 NBS Symposium presentation, published elsewhere in the current issue).

The simple fact of the matter is that, for the past fifty-eight years, George Frederick Kolbe has been the truly indispensable man for numismatic literature dealers and collectors. In this field, if you name it, he founded it, or saved it, or grew it, or realized its Platonic ideal. He has been so interwoven with our warp and our weft, so omnipresent in our hopes and our realizations, it seems a fool's errand to contemplate carrying on without him.

Even in his absence, however, George still supports us. He took great pains, for example, to assure that his business would continue, by bringing into partnership David Fanning to carry his escutcheon forward. The result of his foresight is that Kolbe & Fanning endures for the field and its devotees. We who were fortunate enough to be George's friends will never cease missing him, but we also will never stop benefitting from his example, and from his works. Godspeed, George: your presence is still fresh, and your banner ever waves.





(top and center) David and George at the 2010 ANA.  
(bottom) David and George at the New York Book Sale in 2013.

# My Partner, George Kolbe

By David F. Fanning

George Kolbe was my mentor, my colleague, and my friend, and for thirteen years he was my business partner. As a mentor, he was generous and patient. As a colleague, he was encouraging and thoughtful. As a friend, he was steadfast and kind.

Others have written about George's life and career, including a number of people who knew him for longer than I did. It says something about him that there is no shortage of people lining up to talk about what a good guy George Kolbe was. My experience of him as a business partner is, however, unique to me, so I've decided to focus on that aspect of our relationship in this short remembrance.

George and I came to know each other over the course of the decade following the Bass library sales of 1998–2000. We'd interacted a bit when I was in high school in the 1980s, which is when I first became familiar with his catalogues and joined the NBS. A high school student's budget, however, didn't encourage regular interaction with a bookseller of George's caliber—at least my high school budget didn't. While I did manage to buy a thing or two from him during those years, we had to wait until I reacquainted myself with the hobby in 1999 to actually get to know each other. After nearly a decade's absence spent in college and graduate school, I rediscovered numismatics and, in particular, numismatic literature at that time, and George was one of the first people I called.

Those phone calls became a regular part of my numismatic activities. I began to rebuild my numismatic library bit by bit (the budget still wasn't especially robust) and I loved talking about the things I was collecting at that time—mostly 19th-century American auction catalogues and periodicals. George became a part of a small but growing circle of numismatic bibliophiles with whom I regularly spoke about our shared passion.

When the 2001 *Additions and Corrections* supplement to John W. Adams's *United States Numismatic Literature: Volume One* was being prepared, I shared the information I had been compiling on the catalogues of Ed Frossard with George and John. I was appointed the editor in chief of *The Asylum* the following year, and these activities brought George and I into even more frequent contact. By the time George was writing the first Ford library catalogue in 2003–2004, I was among the people he asked to review his draft.

The more involved I became with the world of numismatic literature, the more George and I seemed to end up talking. So when I issued my first fixed price list of numismatic books in 2003, it was an obvious topic of conversation. George was very encouraging of my attempts to develop a side-business in numismatic books, and over the next few years I issued several more fixed price lists. I tried to emulate George's style of cataloguing and at the same time develop a style of my own. I studied how he wrote his catalogues and learned as best I could from his efforts.

In 2008, George invited me to come visit him in California. That trip changed my life, and the life of my family, though at the time it seemed simply like a good op-



George and David at lot viewing for the 2011 New York Book Sale.

portunity. The two of us spent a few days together in early April, talking for hours and looking at books. We found that we had more in common than just an interest in coins and books. I remember taking a walk with him near his home in the San Bernardino Mountains, the two of us walking slowly, not heading in any particular direction, just talking.

Early in this trip, he asked me why I hadn't held an auction—why I had only issued fixed price lists. The reason was simple: I'd need a good consignment, and I hadn't really given anyone reason to think I could pull off an auction of my own. Besides, why consign to me when you could consign to George?

George addressed these two problems with one solution: he'd give me a consignment. A consignment large enough and valuable enough to comprise an entire auction. We spent the next couple of days putting it together, sifting through boxes in his basement and garage, pulling books off shelves, going through file cabinets. I would routinely find items that I was certain George wouldn't consign to me because he could obviously sell them for more money himself—and just as routinely, George would add them to the increasingly large pile of material we were preparing to ship to Ohio.

I didn't recognize at the time that this whole auction idea—George's auction idea—was essentially a test. George knew I could write a catalogue reasonably well, but he didn't know if I was much of a businessman—and he wanted to find out. He knew he couldn't just consign mediocre material to me if he wanted to give me a fair trial, so he included a number of genuinely good books in the consignment. It was up to me to show him if this idea was good or bad.

This was emblematic of George's attitude in our early years together. He would encourage me, provide me with material, answer questions, front money when necessary, and in general help get me started. He was a mentor. It was up to me, however, to sink or swim. If, despite his help, I couldn't make it—then, well, there's the breaks.

Two years and three auctions later, George and I were business partners in everything but name only. He'd fed me multiple consignments and I had produced catalogues (auction and fixed price), attended shows, taken out advertisements, written press releases, and developed a customer base. In addition, I'd started helping him out with his New York auctions, most notably the Twinleaf and Bassoli library sales, and



the first Stack Family sale. It was time to make things official.

George always knew what he was doing, even if he wasn't always sure how things were going to turn out. As usual, he fronted money and inventory and advice when we were setting up our partnership in 2010, and I provided that elegantly phrased commodity known as sweat equity. We drew up the basic terms of the partnership together, and I found a local lawyer to make it all legal. The lawyer, my accountant (soon to be our accountant), and I all thought the operating agreement was skewed in my favor, but George wasn't concerned about that. The whole idea was that the partnership would provide him with a pathway to retirement that left behind a legacy, and would provide me with a new career and the opportunity to build upon a thriving business.



George and David at the Waldorf Astoria in New York in 2017.

In the early years, George and I often traveled together, and most decisions concerning the business were jointly made. We took a table at the 2010 ANA convention in Boston, the first of many, and held our first public auction at the 2011 New York International Numismatic Convention, a tradition we maintained through 2018, by which time the costs involved in holding a book auction in New York outweighed the benefits as internet bidding became more popular. We cultivated relationships with the ANA and the ANS and worked together to develop our clients' libraries. George traveled by himself to Osnabrück to bid in the 2010 Künker sale of the Bendig & Poindessault libraries, while I attended the 2013 IAPN Congress in Leipzig.

As a business partner, George combined a deep knowledge of both the subject matter of numismatics and the commercial aspects of that field with a hands-off management style that was meant to encourage me to take increasing charge of the business as time went on. A few years had convinced him that we had very similar mindsets when it came to the business (I'll always remember how we spent a weekend independently appraising Herb Kreindler's massive library only to find that our estimated valuations differed by around 5%). One of my proudest moments was at a show when I overheard George, in conversation with a longtime customer, say that I was a better businessman than he was. By 2015, a lot of the decisions regarding the day to day business were being made by me, or by me and my wife, Maria.

Maria began working for the business early on, helping out here and there at first, but quickly becoming more active and involved. This involvement was not discussed

in the business documents drawn up between me and George and had not been intended when we set up the business, but George welcomed Maria's input from the beginning, recognizing that she brought skills to the business that both of us lacked. Her mindset was *not* the same as George's and mine, and we both came to recognize that this was essential in keeping the business fresh and open to change.

And change was in the air. The internet had revolutionized the world in all sorts of ways, but it was a bit slow to affect the rare book market. As time passed, however, the new technologies available to booksellers—and to book buyers—became more attractive and effective. At the same time, many numismatic titles that had long been considered “bread and butter items” to a bookseller became freely available online, and a gradually increasing number of readers found that they were just fine getting by with a digital copy of basic reference books. The market for numismatic books, always a niche market, became unsettled and uncertain.

Navigating these changes was difficult, and in some ways George felt that he was bowing out at the right time. He wanted very much, however, for the business to continue. We arranged for online bidding for the first New York auction we conducted as the new firm (the 2011 New York Book Auction), but we were encouraged to do so by others. We continued to use the same company to provide online bidding in the next few New York auctions, but the number of people using it was small. And neither of us was technologically savvy enough to be particularly comfortable with it.

Maria helped us get to where we needed to be able to thrive online. She was much more comfortable with the online world than either me or George, and far less likely to become frustrated with the technology involved. Beginning with Sale 134 in 2014, all of our sales included live online bidding, and more and more people began to take advantage of it. Now, of course, most of our clients bid this way. George always gave Maria and me the credit for bringing the business successfully into the internet age, but the truth is that I was riding Maria's coattails on this. Still am, in fact!

One of the ways that George remained a vital part of the business was by interacting with older clients whose collecting days may have entirely preceded my involvement with the firm. As our partnership continued, George was personally acquainted with fewer of our clients, making the longtime relationships he had with some of our customers all the more important to him. In many cases, these relationships grew far beyond the dealer/customer basis on which they had begun, and quite a number of them developed into true friendships. Calling some of these friends to let them know of George's death was a very difficult task for me, as they have all become friends to me and Maria as well.

Any attempt to write a tribute like this is going to seem like a failure to the person writing it. George changed my life and the lives of my family by giving me an opportunity to join forces with him, combining my small fledgling business with his successful and well-respected enterprise. And with Maria's involvement, he encouraged the development of what has become a family business, treating her with the same respect with which he always treated me. His loss is a heavy blow for us, but our gratitude toward him makes the task of continuing his legacy seem a light burden, one we take on with pride.





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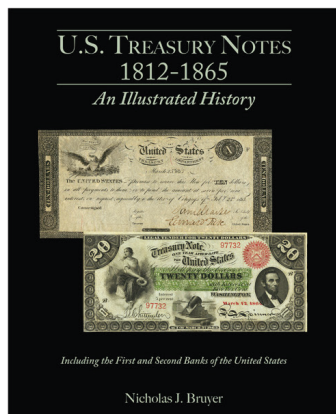
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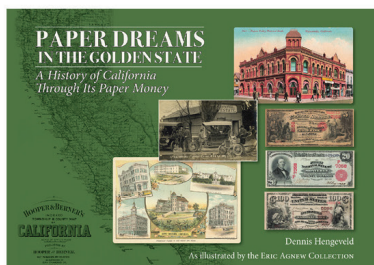
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