

MEDALLIC WASHINGTON
A Catalog of Struck, Cast and Manufactured Coins, Tokens and
Medals Issued in Commemoration of George Washington
1777-1890

by Neil Musante
(Two Volumes, Spink & Son, 2016)

Neil Musante's new book on the medals, tokens and federal coinage related to George Washington is a beautifully produced, painstakingly researched, and well-written catalogue that every serious American numismatist will want to own *and* read. The dozens of mini-chapters synthesize previously published research on the most important pieces, and Musante has added his own considerable new findings and thoughts. With nearly 900 pages of crisp color photographs illustrating essentially all the pieces – which are described in detail, including die varieties – the book is both valuable for study and beautiful even to just flip through. Importantly, it establishes a new, chronological numbering scheme that is much more logical and convenient than the Baker (Rulau/Fuld) numbers used for the last 130 years. *Medallic Washington* will undoubtedly become the new standard reference on the subject, and a classic in its own right.

Just as George Washington is the Father of Our Country, medals and tokens showing his image have been a preeminent series of American collectibles from the beginning of numismatics in the United States. Following the publication of Washington Irving's biography of George Washington in five separate volumes between 1855 and 1859, the medals relating to Washington became the most desirable items on the American numismatic market. Wealthy private collectors like William Spohn Baker and William Sumner Appleton were in hot pursuit, and Mint Director James Ross Snowden began to assemble the first major public collection for display at the U.S. Mint.

Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the rarest Washington medals brought as much or more than the most desirable American rare coins. In the Chapmans' 1882 Bushnell sale, for example, a set of the Washington Seasons medals sold for \$150 and a Washington Getz Large Eagle Half Dollar brought \$365, compared with nice examples of an NE Shilling at \$51,

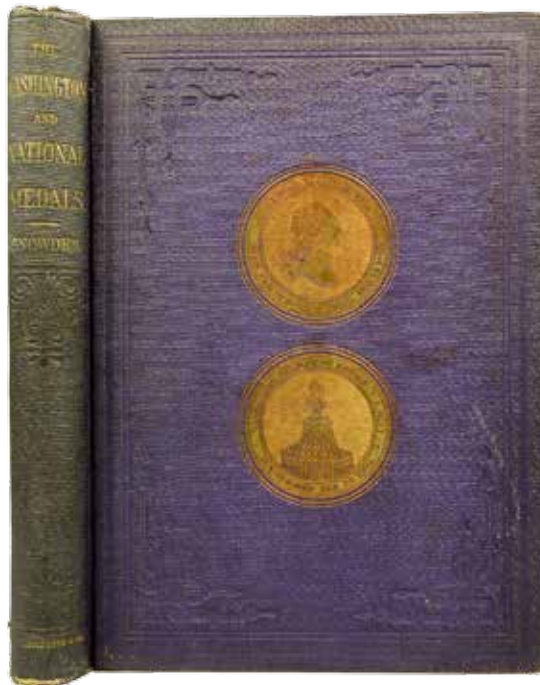
a 1793 chain cent at \$41, a 1794 silver dollar at \$81, and even Bushnell's Brasher Doubloon at a relatively reasonable \$505. While these prices may seem like a pittance today, keep in mind that in 1880 an entire 60-hour work week earned a manual laborer about \$8 and a skilled blacksmith or carpenter about \$11. More recently, Washington medals and tokens

have been a key focus of some of the most serious American collectors, like F.C.C. Boyd, John J. Ford, and MCA's own past-president David Menchell.

As Neil Musante describes in a thorough introduction, several early lists of Washington medals and tokens were relatively incomplete and mostly comprised the pieces in the collections of their authors. *The Medallic Memorials of Washington in the Mint of the United States*, by James Ross Snowden (1861) was a record of the small collection of 138 medals that Snowden assembled for display at the U.S. Mint. In 1873, William Sumner Appleton published a list of his collection in a series of issues of the *American Journal of Numismatics*, and in 1876 published

an addendum, bringing his list to 354 Washington pieces.

William Spohn Baker's *Medallic Portraits of Washington* was the first definitive catalogue of Washington pieces, consisting of a text list and descriptions of 651 medals and tokens organized topically on about 250 pages, with very limited, commentary. Other subsequent lists didn't add much. *The Early Medals of Washington*, published by Wayte Raymond in 1941, was a thin pamphlet with only 42 mostly early medals listed, but all pictured for the first time. Krause Publications reprinted Baker's work in 1965, adding 14 photographic plates at the back. *Washingtonia from the Estate of F.C.C. Boyd*, by Jack Collins (1991) was actually a fixed price catalogue of 702 items that Collins had acquired from John J. Ford for resale, with 36 plates illustrating nearly 500 medals, a few of which had not been listed by Baker.



Snowden's 1861 classic on Washington Medals

Collectors have continued to use the Baker numbers, partly because the only other recent catalogue of Washington-related numismatics was the 1985 *Medallic Portraits of Washington, Centennial Edition*, by Russell Rulau and George Fuld. Rulau and Fuld retained the Baker organization and numbering scheme, adding letters before the Baker numbers to designate entirely new and unrelated items, and inconsistently applied letters after the Baker numbers to designate a given variety in various metals, such as A for silver, B for copper, etc. It was essentially an illustrated price guide to Baker, as it provided small newspaper-quality photographs of many items, a small amount of historical background and estimated values. Rulau and Fuld also added sections on a few related Washington series not covered by Baker, such as the 1789 and 1793 inaugural buttons and the Society of the Cincinnati badges. They attempted to bring the listing into the 20th century, but it is spotty after the 1930's listings. A second edition published in 1999 provided a few additions, numerous corrections and somewhat updated pricing.

In addition to these catalogues, a number of scholarly journal articles and/or book chapters have detailed the research on selected individual Washington medals. For example, Francis Paul Prucha, S.J. included a 15-page chapter on the engraved Washington Indian Peace Medals in his *Indian Peace Medals in American History* (1994), also with two pages on the Washington Seasons Medals. John Adams and Anne Bentley have a 15-page chapter on the Washington Before Boston medal in their *Comitia Americana and Related Medals* (2007). And Tony Lopez's research into the Warrior and Sage (aka Voltaire) medal led to his article "Mystery Solved? Voltaire, 1777 Franklin, Hume and D'Eon Medals" in the *The MCA Advisory* Volume 11, June 2008.

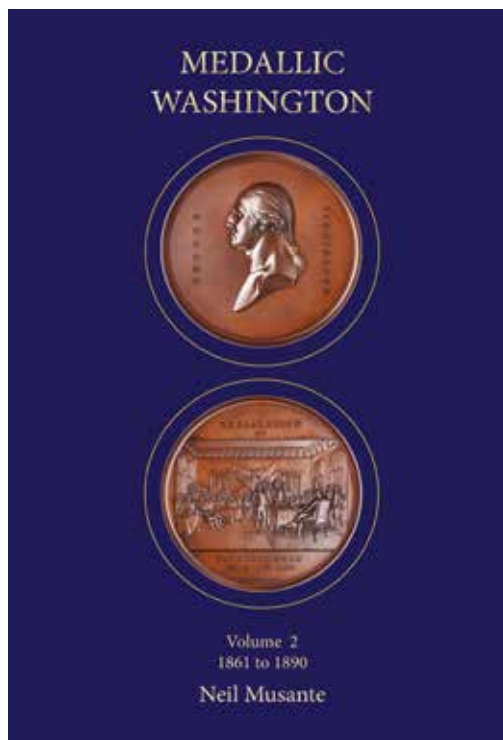
Neil Musante has built on and expanded this formidable foundation of previous research and cataloguing to give us a complete revision of Baker, arranged chronologically, with

some exceptions to reflect variety and die relationships. The work covers essentially the same scope as Baker, however, extended through 1890 to include the 1889 inauguration centennial medals as well as several other important pieces issued just after Baker's work was published. In all, over 1200 medals and tokens are listed with excellent color photographs of each obverse and reverse, with credit to the owner. Then, detailed traditional obverse and reverse prose descriptions of each medal are provided, with each followed by a table of technical information such as metals used, weight and size measurements, cross references to prior listings, rarity estimates and technical notes.

Weighing in at almost exactly six pounds, the two volumes break just prior to the Civil War. Volume 1 covers the period 1777 to 1860 and reads like a chapter book, in that the catalogue listings for nearly every one of the early medal series is preceded by a few pages of historical background and detailed comparisons of the die varieties where appropriate. Many of the individual catalogue listings are also followed by additional discussion of the engravers, production details, known pieces, collector provenance of the rarities, and all sorts of fascinating additional tidbits.

Volume 2 picks up with the Civil War years in 1861 and concludes in 1890, just prior to the Columbian Exposition. This second volume is more a catalogue continuation only, with a one-page introduction on "The Civil War Years", one page on "The Later Medals", and relatively limited historical notes concerning individual medals. At the end of the second volume, a brief bibliography and index are followed by acknowledgments and list of photo credits.

Among the most important positives of Neil Musante's *Medallic Washington* are the comprehensive research and synthesis, the chronological organization, the beautiful photographs and sumptuous production. Beyond the considerable amount of new information not previously



published, Musante has woven together all of the relevant information about the various Washington-related numismatic items into a series of interesting “stories.” The brief but thorough introduction on the history of Washington medal catalogues, major collections and exhibitions is extremely useful in putting this new work into context. It helps explain why a new numbering system is called for, to replace Baker’s confusing thematic arrangement, which Rulau and Fuld tried to maintain, and only made worse.

These stories build on the foundation of facts with some significant inference, in a few cases to the point of speculation. Musante is always very clear about where his musings surpass the facts, and his narratives are thought provoking. His arguments are well made in most cases, such as in the revised Washington Before Boston die progression. Others are somewhat inferential, as in the creation order of the Halliday and Sansom Presidency Relinquished medals. A few of the discussions are more speculative – for example, the story behind the Washington Market Chowder Club medal – but nevertheless plausible and interesting to read, and a good basis for future research.

The chronological organization is a significant advance over the Baker/Rulau/Fuld theme-based approach. Baker’s topical organization may have made sense in the late-19th century, when far less information on these medals was available, but the Rulau/Fuld attempt to maintain and build on Baker’s scheme made their book extremely difficult to use. For example, Baker’s number 287 (Washington Bookplate Medal) was listed in Rulau/Fuld in various metals as 287 (silver), 287A (bronze), 287B (white metal); as a variety 287F, in bronze with HARZFELD’S SERIES removed from the die; then extended to A-287 for a completely unrelated Sulgrave Manor medal, B-287 for a Sulgrave ceramic plate, C-287 for a unique hand-engraved Mary Ann Washington medal that is not related to any of these, and then D287 (sic, no dash) for the Battle of Cowpens Comitia Americana medal (with letter additions A through G of this for striking in various metals). This last medal is otherwise significant, but was included here only because the subject William Washington was a cousin of George Washington. Musante has cleared up most of this confusion and eliminated the riff raff.

Medallic Washington is lavishly illustrated and beautifully produced. It is published on heavy coated paper, and sewn into very attractive gilt embossed cloth bindings. The author has assembled crisp color photographs of the best available example of nearly every medal listed, and in the process documented important public collections, like those of the Pennsylvania Historical Society (Baker’s collection, bequeathed to them in 1897) and the Massachusetts Historical Society (Appleton’s collection, given to them by his son in 1905), as well as several major contemporary private collections. The photographs are shown individually with the relevant descriptions rather than

grouped into signatures, as in Christopher Eimer’s otherwise terrific *British Commemorative Medals and Their Values*. This makes Musante’s book easier to use, since the reader is not asked to flip back and forth between the descriptions and the photos. Spink & Son deserves much credit not only for publishing Neil Musante’s commendable manuscript, but also for creating such a beautiful bibliographic object. It reinforces their reputation for quality, attention to detail, and dedication to participating significantly in the American numismatic market.

While there are no major issues or weaknesses with the book, there are several minor disappointments, including a certain limitation in scope. As comprehensive as the work is, it lists pieces only up to 1890. Strictly unique hand-engraved items, for example, the engraved Indian Peace Medals, the Inaugural Buttons of 1789 and 1793 and the Society of the Cincinnati medals, which appeared in Rulau/Fuld, are excluded. Their exclusion however, is generally understandable, as Musante explains in his introduction, that each is a large topic unto itself that has been well covered elsewhere, as in “Washington Oval Peace Medals”, by George Fuld (Chapter 6 of *Peace Medals, Negotiating Power in Early America*, published by the Gilcrease Museum, 2011), *George Washington Inaugural Buttons & Medalets, 1789 & 1793* by J. Harold Cobb (1963, revised 1968, and updated by Kirk Mitchell in 2005), and *The Insignia of the Society of the Cincinnati*, by Minor Myers, Jr. (1998). The 1890 cut-off, on the other hand, creates an excellent opportunity for a Volume 3!

The book would benefit from a few more technical appendices sometimes found in some other medallic references, such as an alphabetical index of legends and a cross-referencing concordance of the Baker/Rulau/Fuld numbers to the new GW numbers. This would make looking for the new listing a bit easier. Further, it would be nice to have estimated values, albeit representing a snapshot in time, since most Washington medal values do not fluctuate all that dramatically even a few years hence. Future researchers may wish that even more original sources were cited in footnotes, but this limitation also makes the book more readable and may be an acceptable trade off as opposed to a deficiency. Also, according to Musante a price supplement is in the works that will include a Baker/Rulau/Fuld cross-reference that will be supplied with each set.

There do not appear to be any large, obvious mistakes, but there are a number of small proofreading errors – typos, mis-attributed photo credits (including several of my own), and inconsistent data. For example, on page 162, the table for the Gen. Geo Washington shell states seven known, but the text at the bottom of the page specifically identifies eight known pieces – not that big of a deal, but certainly avoidable. A supplied errata sheet does correct many of these mistakes, but who refers to an errata sheet?

All told, Neil Musante's *Medallic Washington* is a new classic, beautifully produced, painstakingly researched, eminently readable, and well worth the \$165 price. Among other things, it reminds us of why the Internet will never completely replace the printed book. Collectors of medals,

tokens and federal coinage related to George Washington will love it, as will numismatic bibliophiles generally, and it has the potential to attract some new collectors to this historic and important series.

GW-09-P1 Washington Before Boston — First Paris Mint Issue

circa 1789

Baker-47; Snowden-03; Appleton-01; Raymond-01;
LBS-06.2; Shurtleff-01;
Fisher-02



TAC

- Obverse:** Obverse 2
- Die erosion showing immediately below the curl of Washington's hair.
 - Die erosion also begins to show above the E of the word ADSEPTORY, above the R and below the M of the word SVPREMO. The chip in front of Washington's face is very small but visible.
 - The last A in AMERICANA touches the rim decoration.
 - All of the O's in the legend are round.
 - All letters slightly uneven in placement.

- Reverse:** Reverse 1
- Four legs and hooves visible under Washington's horse in the group immediately to the right of the foremost hind leg.
 - The pole to the left of the soldier farthest to the left is long, but does not quite touch the rim.
 - The O in the word PRIMO is round, and the top of the letter R is unbroken.
 - In exergue, the second I in MARTII aligns below the second R of RECUPERATUM
 - There are periods after the numbers XVII. and MDCCLXXVI. in the date.
 - The hat in front of Washington's face is large (two sections).

Edge: Plain

GW	Metal	Diameter		Edge		Wt.	Rulau	R	Notes:
09-P1		mm	1/16	mm	gms		Fuld		
	Gold	68.04	43	4.59	246.8	47	VR		Washington's medal is at the BPL
	Silver	67.96	43	5.33	169.3	47A	VR		Washington's medal is at the MHS
	Bronze	69.2	43	5.6	154.6	47B	VS		

There are rumors of a second gold example, thus the very rare rating as opposed to unique. Its existence would seem possible, given that Duvivier displayed a gold example at the Exhibition of the Académie Royale in 1789. It is possible, although unlikely, that this would have been the same one presented to Washington. It is also possible that the gold medal exhibited by Duvivier was the joined set of shells with the error reverse shown on the next page. *Mason's Coin & Stamp Collector Magazine* for December 1868 (vol. II, no. 9, p. 83) stated that seven in silver and twenty in bronze were known. The Adams/Bentley survey reported ten in silver and about forty in bronze. After the Comitia Americana medals were struck, both dies went into storage. The obverse took on some rust on the shoulder at the base of the neck. The reverse die likely became unusable.