

Coin Chronicles

The Newsletter of the Trenton Numismatic Club

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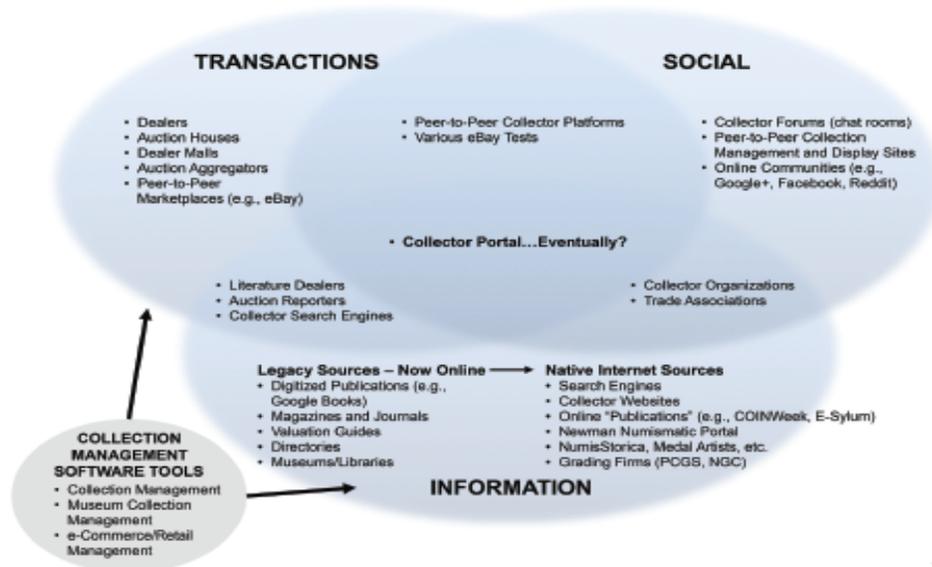
THE EVOLUTION OF MEDAL COLLECTING

PART 3: A Glimpse of the Future

by John Sallay

At one time or another, each of us has picked up a newspaper, read about the media and communications revolution or the aging Baby Boomer generation or globalization, and thought about the effect that these and other macro trends might have on our hobby of medal collecting. Indeed, if you haven't been reading about these trends in the newspaper, it is probably because you yourself are now spending more time online, searching out, buying, and researching interesting medals, and maybe even writing blog posts or online articles about your exciting recent discoveries. At the same time, it's almost impossible for any of us to look around a coin show floor, see all of those graying old friends and ignore the fact that very few of our Millennial generation kids – or hardly any Millennials, for that matter – seem to be interested in collecting medals. Perhaps you have also noticed, however, that some of the very best fine art re-

Figure 1
Medal Collectors' Digital Landscape



cently auctioned was purchased by newly wealthy Chinese collectors, and wondered when they may become interested in medals, too.

The first article in this series, "The Evolution of Medal Collecting, Part 1: eBay", discussed the emergence, growth, and current status of eBay as a medal collecting resource. Last issue's installment, "Part 2: Beyond eBay", provided an overview of the many other new transaction, information, and social aspects of the web that are now relevant to the hobby of medal collecting, and surveyed some of the major online resources now being used by medal collectors. It also explored some of the broader digital trends and possibly interesting web/mobile upstarts from similar collecting hobby arenas and mobile/social interaction generally. This final article in the series explores the possible impact of these new information technologies, discusses

the implications for us collectors of some broader social and economic trends, and speculates on the potential future evolution of medal collecting.

The Evolving Market

As discussed in the last installment and summarized in Figure 1, three major categories of collector activity describe most of what's now possible for medal collectors to accomplish online – conducting transactions, gathering information, and collector-to-collector online social interaction. A fourth set of activities that deals with collection and/or retail management is also now starting to move from the desktop to the cloud, but is still primarily a tool intended for use by a single collector or perhaps a few collaborators and so was not discussed at length. That last article described each of these three sets of activities and the overlaps in some detail, and provided lists of

In This Issue: Extra Extra Extra

This is the final part of John Sallay's article, the third of three parts.

Enjoy!

Joe Pargola

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COIN SHOW SCHEDULE

By Bill Liatys

November 2016

PARSIPPANY November 6th at Sunday 9 AM – 4 PM
Pal Bldg 33 Baldwin Road Parsnippany NJ

BURLINGTON November 13th Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM
Burlington Mason Lodge Route 541 Burlington, NJ

TREVOSE November 20th Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM
Trevose Fire House 4900 Street Road Trevose, PA

TRI-STATE COIN & STAMP SHOW November 27th Sunday 10 AM – 4 PM
Williamson's Restaurant 500 Blair Mill Road Horsham, PA

TRENTON NUMISMATIC FALL COIN SHOW
October 30 Sunday 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Ramada Inn Exit 7 NJ Turnpike 1083 Route 206 North Bordentown, NJ

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

President's Message

By Andrew Waholek

Hello to all! I hope everyone has had a wonderful month! We will be having our meeting on Monday October 24th 2016 at 7pm. Make sure to bring those new coins that you've acquired for some show and tell. I'm looking forward to seeing all of you there!

the websites most relevant to medal collectors, along with their URLs (web addresses) and brief descriptions. These exhibits with clickable links are still available on the MCA website at www.medalcollectors.org/News/index.html under the MCA news for December.

Obviously, it is now easier to buy medals online, find information about them, and communicate with other collectors. But what longer-term implications might emerge from the medals market moving increasingly online, digitized numismatic information becoming ubiquitous, and easy connection with just about anyone becoming commonplace? As outlined in Figure 2, the market for numismatic medals is likely to continue evolving rapidly. For example, more and more medals are likely to emerge from attics and jewelry boxes as collector values become more broadly known and potential buyers and sellers connect more directly. This dynamic is already happening, and the pace seems likely to accelerate. And there are lots of medals still out there waiting to be collected. For award medals with engraved names, it is possible to compare all market appearances over a period of time with original issuance records and begin estimating survival. In the case of Franklin Boston School Medals, for example, the market (and museum) appearance of the most common SC-11 variety over four decades is only a cumulative 5%. Even if double that figure now resides in medal collectors' collections, it is difficult to believe that all of remaining 90% of the issuance were melted down or discarded. The Four D's motivating sellers – downsizing, death, divorce, and debt – will continue

to apply, so many of these other pieces will eventually come out of hiding. Just another 10-20% of the total original issue would multiply the current collectible population considerably.

eBay has facilitated this process over the last fifteen plus years, and has matured as more and more people have used it and as similar peer-to-peer marketplaces have emerged. Although specialized niche collector marketplaces may siphon off some of the most collectible and valuable items, eBay will continue to dominate this function for the foreseeable future. As peer-to-peer transactions continue to gain market share overall, however, this disintermediation effect will put pressure on dealer margins, just as e-commerce has pressured margins in virtually every other retailing category over the last couple of decades. A good want list platform could increase this pressure, but so far, eBay's want-list ex-

periments have not been successful and a pure play platform has not yet emerged.

Auction aggregators such as Invaluable and LiveAuctioneers are still primarily auction management software for auctioneers and a participation tool for collectors. They have the potential to become the primary intermediaries themselves, however, and one could envision the traditional auctioneers becoming more like expert sourcing agents, like pickers in the antiques trade, with the aggregators becoming the main intermediaries. Existing brand strength of the traditional auctioneers will mitigate this trend in the near term, but in the long run the auctioneer's perceived fairness, expertise, and lot description capabilities will determine market power, since simple lot listings will probably become commoditized.

Dealers, too, will face continued pressure to establish a strong on-

Figure 2
Implications of Evolving Information & Communications Technology

Transactions/Market	Information	Social/Organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>More medals</u> emerge from attics as values become more broadly known • <u>eBay</u> matures; potential for being leapfrogged by niche collector markets • <u>Peer-to-peer transactions</u> increase as online information grows <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disintermediation puts pressure on dealer margins - Especially if a good want list platform emerges • <u>Auction aggregators</u> move to center stage, pressuring auction houses to demonstrate value added (expertise, logistics, customer service) • <u>Dealers</u> face pressure to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop strong online presence - Demonstrate deep knowledge - Promote more aggressively and broadly - Operate on slimmer margins • <u>Registries</u> possible in long term, after most medals are better catalogued • <u>Slabs</u> unlikely to take hold for medals • <u>Fakes</u> become a bigger issue • <u>Prices</u> rise significantly for rarest medals; stagnate for common items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Printed literature</u> moves online in a significant way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Google Books - Newman Numismatic Portal - Copyrighted items for a fee/price • <u>Museums' collections</u> increasingly online, comprehensive, described, and searchable • <u>Collector online display</u> becomes easier, acceptable, and common <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-permanent online collection - Temporary exhibitions, like ANA • <u>Effective permanent archiving</u> eventually becomes possible • <u>Highly specialized</u> print-on-demand books/catalogues proliferate • <u>Native Internet</u> publications continue to emerge, grow in sophistication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online-only periodicals - Websites/mobile apps - E-Books • <u>Comprehensive collector portal</u> may emerge, but unlikely to catch on • <u>Treasure hunt</u> driven by information, not just the medals themselves • <u>Popularity of medals</u> increases as information reveals their allure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer-to-peer</u> collector connections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Become easier and more common with better platforms - Enable closer collaboration on research and writing • <u>Collector organizations</u> become more important, more central to collecting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collections and libraries online - Increased scope of effort, engagement, and reach (e.g., webinars, MOOCs, services) - Member social connectivity - Administrative umbrella for subsidiary specialist clubs • <u>Big conventions and shows</u> become tougher to justify financially <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some move online - Online virtual conventions emerge



Trenton Numismatic Club

President : Andrew Waholek
Vice-President: John Janeczek
Treasurer: Randy Ricco
Secretary: Joe Pargola
Sgt at Arms: Gary Elmer
Committees:
Bourse: Bill Liatys
Randy Ricco
Programs: Ray Williams
Newsletter: Joe Pargola
Auction: Bo Bobjak

Trenton Numismatic Club is members of:



line presence, demonstrate very deep expert knowledge, promote aggressively and broadly, and even with all of this, operate on slimmer margins than in the past. Good marketing has always been important in numismatics – consider the success of Max Mehl, Heritage, and Dave Bowers's various firms – but the costs and other barriers to execution are now much lower. Jeff Shevlin, for example, has been successful with So-Called Dollar medals by using predominantly online marketing vehicles.

Online medal registries, such as the token and medal registry recently introduced by NGC, may eventually take hold, but not until most medal series are better catalogued, with convenient numbering systems for reference. Even so, these medal registries are likely to focus on existence and rarity rather than authenticity and grading, which are much less an issue for medals than coins. With massive and inexpensive cloud storage, slabbing will not be a prerequisite for these medal registries, because many medals are individually name-engraved, and high

resolution photographs stored in these online registries will show the unique toning, small handling marks, and minor defects necessary to identify specific individual medals. And although fakes will become a bigger issue with continuing improvements in material science and production techniques (e.g., 3-D printing of metals), high resolution registry photos will also allow collectors themselves to better judge authenticity. Recent MCA Advisory articles have focused on the many serious deficiencies of the existing grading service efforts to slab medals. Most of these deficiencies are likely to persist, but, even with a quantum leap in grading service medallic expertise, slabbing of medals is unlikely to take hold simply because it will serve little purpose for medals in the increasingly digitized, high resolution world.

With a larger supply, a more efficient marketplace for medals, and more information about relative rarity and about the medals themselves, prices for the rarest, most interesting medals should rise rela-

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Articles Wanted

If you have a topic you'd like to be covered in the Newsletter... write an article or submit your idea. Don't be shy....do it.

All entries are welcome. Articles will appear in the Newsletter as soon as possible and might be edited for space consideration, not editorial content.

Meeting Schedule

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

HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
ONE JUSTICE SAMUEL A. ALITO JR. WAY
HAMILTON, N.J. 08619-3809

Mailing Address: T.N.C. P.O. BOX 8122
Hamilton, New Jersey 08650

Visit our Website:

www.trentoncoinclub.org

tively more rapidly, while prices on the more common pieces will rise more slowly or even stagnate. This trend has been apparent across fine and decorative arts, antiques, and various collectibles categories, and is likely to hold for medals as well.

Information

Consider a medal collecting environment where essentially all of the information about medals ever published – books, periodicals, research papers, auction catalogues, and even archived defunct websites – are all publicly available and searchable online, at little or no cost, and on any digital device. Add to that catalogue descriptions with very good photographs of all medals ever produced, available from museum and/or collector websites, and you can begin to imagine what medal collecting may be like in a few decades.

The question is not if, but rather when, all of this information will be online. The required technology has been commercially available for at least a dozen years, and is now beginning to be applied to numismatics in a meaningful way. Google Books was introduced in 2004 and, in partnership with several major research university libraries, now has over 25 million titles of an estimated 130 million extant books available online, including many numismatic titles. Google has announced their intention to scan all of the world's remaining books within a decade. The timing does not depend on technology or costs, but rather on digital rights issues for the more recent editions, which are still being litigated and negotiated.

Obscure and rare numismatic publications will be filled in by the large

organizations such as the ANA, which has already digitized the entire run of *The Numismatist* for its members, and the ANS, which recently announced a progressive Open Access initiative to make all of its own publications publicly available online for free, under a Creative Commons license.

The Newman Numismatic Portal has come together over the last year or so, representing the combined forces of Wayne Homren's Coin Library project, the Eric P. Newman Numismatic Education Society, and several highly respected numismatic experts under the auspices of the Washington University in St. Louis. The NNP has begun digitizing decades of specialized periodicals and rare auction catalogues, and is dedicated to becoming the primary and most comprehensive resource for numismatic research and reference material, initially concentrating on U.S. coinage and currency. While copyrighted publications, such as Whitman's recent publications, will not be available anywhere for free, at least not immediately, the majority are likely to be available in easily accessible digital formats, and perhaps also with a print-on-demand option.

Museum collections including medals will also be increasingly available online, with high resolution photographs and detailed, searchable catalogue entries that will improve over time. To date, the ANS has catalogued (with photographs) only about 110,000 of its 800,000 numismatic objects. The ANA has catalogued online very few of its 275,000 objects, but will eventually get to that just as they recently brought their website into the 21st century and digitized The

Numismatist. Large university collections such as those at Harvard, Yale and Princeton, and the major encyclopedic collections, such as the British Museum's roughly one million numismatic objects, will eventually make catalogue entries and photographs of most if not all of their pieces available online.

It is difficult to foresee the extent to which private collectors will make catalogues and photographs of their collections available online. While some, like Ben Weiss and Dave Baldwin, have developed excellent custom websites and seem to have derived considerable personal satisfaction from sharing their collections online, security concerns and collecting gamesmanship has dissuaded others from even considering sharing their collections online. Why let a thief know what to look for, or a dealer to know how eager you may be to fill a hole with a piece he has available for sale? Even with the ANA's My Collection feature and some of the collector display platforms described in the last article, there is still not a convenient and easy-to-use online display tool, and many collectors still do not know how to set up a website or even take and upload reasonable quality medal photos.

Collector websites like Dave Baldwin's catalogue of Lovett tokens and medals (www.lovettokens-medals.com) can be constantly updated, as Dave's knowledge continues to build and he learns of new varieties, but eventually he will need to find a successor to take it over. The risk of information loss will not be so much an economic issue, since electronic storage will cost very little and will eventually be superseded by even longer last-

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ing and cheaper biologic archiving systems. Rather, the risk will be one of ownership transition and continued maintenance responsibility.

Many of these collector websites will eventually be converted to a more permanent format, such as an electronic or printed book. Based on collector websites or not, highly specialized numismatic books and catalogues will proliferate as collectors complete major portions of their collections, round out their research, or otherwise reach a culmination point, and want to share their accumulated knowledge and leave a lasting legacy. Very few of these new medallic references will catalogue die varieties because very few medals were issued in enough quantity to have justified many different dies. Rather, most of these publications will be organized around the various themes that medal collectors now use to define their collecting scope, such as professional topics, design themes, artists and medallists, historical events or time periods, countries of origin, and so forth. Vastly more medallic information will be available online to collate and synthesize, and the costs and other upfront hurdles that previously existed will be minimal.

Some of these publications will take the form of e-books, which are low cost to produce and sell on Amazon, and others will be made available as print-on-demand editions, just as Andy Harkness has done via Lulu with successive editions of his book on agricultural medals. While still effectively "vanity books", these new formats eliminate the previous barrier of upfront cash investment for a meaningful initial print run. Similarly, native on-

line publications along the lines of COINWeek and The E-Sylum will continue to emerge and improve over time, as standardized online publishing platforms improve and become easier to use.

One implication of an even more efficient marketplace in an information-rich environment could be that the "treasure hunt" aspect of collecting evolves from focusing on the medals themselves – the collector seeks out great medals to add to his collection, based on his superior knowledge and/or a deeper network of possible sources – to focusing on the information itself. Just as Pinterest is now used by Millennials (and a few older folks) to assemble collections of possible wedding dresses or favorite dogs, one could imagine a class of virtual medal collectors who don't actually own any medals, but collect photographs and information on this or that series of medals, using some platform hosted in the cloud, eventually becoming the preeminent experts for certain categories. The treasure hunt would be just as real, perhaps as gratifying, and certainly much cheaper! Even for the remaining collectors of the actual medals, the treasure hunt dynamic may evolve to focus on research that illuminates a particular piece and makes it more valuable, and less about finding a nice example of a medal that is already well-researched.

Another possible implication might be the more rapid growth of medal collecting relative to coins. While the ANA has about 25,000 members, the MCA counts fewer than 200 individuals as members. Certainly, more people than this collect medals and do not belong to the MCA, and not all coin collec-

tors would necessarily be interested in switching over to medals as most of us once did. But as medals become less abstruse, esoteric and impenetrable, and their stories come alive, perhaps more numismatists will become interested in medals. More online information and increasingly accurate translation tools may also feed greater internationalization of medal collecting. For example, more Americans might become interested in collecting, say, German medals as all of the necessary historical information and catalogues become available globally online and can be translated readily with little working knowledge of the language.

Social/Organizations

As peer-to-peer collector connections improve, and become even easier and more common with improved collector platforms, it will be possible for groups of collectors to collaborate more closely on research, writing and cataloguing. It has been possible for many years for a few collaborators to bounce successive drafts of a Word article back and forth via e-mail. Google Docs now enables real-time collaboration on the same scale, on the same kind of document that resides in the cloud. And Wikidocs offers the potential for collaboration among a much larger group. Without using too much imagination, one could envision a generic template-based platform for numismatic book-writing, with places in the template to insert text, footnotes, photographs, numbered catalogue listings, bibliography, and an automatically compiled index. Groups of collaborators could work together on a single docu-

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Figure 3
Implications of Key Demographic & Social Trends

Demographic/Social Trends	Some Possible Implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational progression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aging Baby Boomers - Gen X/Millennials coming of age • Shifting attitudes and tastes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Toward having experiences, away from owning "stuff" - Declining popularity of collecting physical objects - Social interaction online; collecting "friends" - Sense of time starvation; everything is a rush - Immediacy, superficiality (140 characters or less) - Individualism; it's all about "me" - Crowd sourcing becoming even more common - Away from traditional, toward contemporary and clean • Increased security and privacy concerns, both online and physically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Boomer retirement could be positive in near-term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall, more time for collecting interests - More career-capping publications, self-published niche research and catalogues - Splurging on ultimate rarities; own it now or never • However, Baby Boomers' ultimate demise without replacement by younger collectors could be quite negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less disposable income in retirement to buy medals - Large collections eventually sold off; extensive supply exceeds demand, driving down prices - Potential rush to exits? - Retiring dealers leave a gap • Popularity of medal collecting could go either way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decline, as collecting generally declines and pricing becomes deflationary, or - Grow, as more online information makes medals more accessible and/or coin collectors shift over to medals • Contemporary medals become more popular • Medal collectors embrace social media, either mainstream platforms (e.g., Facebook) or numismatic ones (e.g., ANA) • Research collaboration grows; more joint efforts emerge • Digital rights are reevaluated, becoming a larger issue

ment residing in the cloud, each writing, editing, uploading photos, commenting on each other's ideas, and then publishing the finished product on Amazon.

In the new hyper-connected environment, the role and major activities of traditional numismatic organizations is likely to change significantly as well. It may be tempting to say that their relative importance to the hobby diminishes as information becomes ubiquitous and collectors are better able to connect with each other directly. Rather, the major national organizations like the ANA and ANS are more likely to become even more important central clearinghouses – assuming that they adapt to this new environment.

These organizations' museum collection and display functions will continue to be important, but members are unlikely to tolerate large collections that are not fully online, searchable and well documented

with high quality photographs. Similarly, support for research and publications will continue or even increase, but all of that will need to be online, too, and regular print publishing schedules will eventually become irrelevant. Consider, for example, The New York Times, which still publishes a printed newspaper for some of us old-timers, but which is proactively superseding it with an online edition, iPhone app, e-mailed briefings and alerts. Thought-pieces under the Upshot banner and in the Sunday Review section are increasingly replacing pure hard news, which has become an immediately available commodity.

And as with most other not-for-profit organizations, the major numismatic organizations will increasingly focus on providing online services to members and member clubs – webinars, MOOCs (massive open online courses), social connectivity, online display

platforms, and possibly online administrative functionality for member clubs, which would facilitate more specialization. The ANA's new website, for example, places a heavier emphasis on the social aspects of the organization's mission. Members can post blogs, message one another, and create online collection galleries with photos and descriptions of items in their physical collections to share with other members. Some of these functions are still somewhat rudimentary and do not yet work entirely properly, but nevertheless represent an exciting new angle on the collector-to-collector social aspect of numismatics.

And does an ANA convention make sense when it could be done virtually and continually, according to demand? Virtually everything that now occurs at an annual ANA convention could be done online: auctions, bourse, exhibits, club meetings, seminars, awards ceremony -essentially all of it. The personal interaction would be diminished, and the chance to see and handle the numismatic items themselves eliminated, but so would be the considerable organizational expenses and attendee travel costs and time commitment. These major conventions are unlikely to be eliminated, of course, but their frequency, focus, and content are likely to evolve significantly.

Demographic & Social Trends

The Baby Boom generation (roughly 75 million Americans born from 1946 to 1964) is aging and is being superseded in many aspects of society by Gen X (about 80 million

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Americans born from 1965 to 1984) and the Millennial Generation (also known as Gen Y, born after that into the early 2000s) and numbering 75-85 million, depending on the cut-off date chosen). Baby Boomers have been avid collectors of just about everything, while the equally large subsequent generations are much less enthusiastically acquisitive. In the numismatic arena, speculation around the causes of this phenomenon includes the overall effects of the exuberant 1950s and 1960s, when the Boomers first came of collecting age, the mid-1960s switch from silver to clad coinage, which prompted many people to look through their pocket change for the older coins still in circulation, the aggressive marketing of the Franklin Mint and other collectibles firms, the commemoration of specific events like the Kennedy assassination, moon landing, or later the bicentennial celebration, the late-1970s surge in inflation...pick your favorite reason.

Whatever the causes of the Baby Boomers' interest in numismatics and the subsequent generations' lack thereof, the resulting shift in attitudes and tastes is mostly ominous for the hobby. The GenX and Millennials haven't completely repudiated owning "stuff", but they are more often looking to gather experiences instead, and this is inconsistent with the collection of physical objects just for the sake of collecting. To the extent that they are "collecting", they are collecting personal experiences, places visited, friends, and "views" and "likes". It is not that they have fundamentally different human needs, but they think differently and value different things. We all feel increasingly time starved and

Figure 4

Implications of Key Economic & Political Trends

Economic/Political Trends	Some Possible Implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy slowly recovering; cyclicity continues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S. steady; Europe still stuck; China growth slowing - Persistently slow growth in developed countries - Low inflation, low interest rates continuing • Rise of China (and India) • Increased concentration of wealth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rich getting richer; middle class incomes stagnant - Overhang of U.S. student loan debt among the young • Globalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater global connections in trade, people, finance, and information - Continuing homogenization of markets and tastes - Rise of a global middle class; converging buying power over the very long term - Continuing migration/assimilation (immigration) - Lower risk of major geopolitical confrontations • Sustained nationalism; increased focus on cultural patrimony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lost generation of collectors dampens demand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lasting impact of Great Recession - Gen X/Millennials without disposable cash • Slow price growth puts downward pressure on demand for medals and/or margins and transaction costs • Demand for exceptional medals increases; weak demand for more common pieces persists • Medal collecting goes global over the long term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S. collectors broaden scope, collect more globally - Cross interest in national numismatic organizations - Asian collectors become a factor at high end - Global middle class takes up collecting in the much longer term • Risks of legal/moral discontinuities in certain collecting categories (e.g., Indian Peace Medals, ancient coins)

rushed, and just about everything online is superficial and immediate, with Twitter's 140 character limit being almost emblematic. There is a growing sense of individualism (it's all about "me"), and paradoxically at the same time, a prevalence of crowd-sourced information. The aesthetic trend is away from the traditional to the contemporary and clean. Everyone is concerned with security and privacy, as a technology issue more than a generational issue, though attitudes on even this dimension differ across the generations.

Most of these trends are probably not news to you, but what happens as the Baby Boomer collectors move into retirement and beyond? In the near-term, as outlined in Figure 3, it could be quite positive for the hobby as these avid Boomer collectors have more time to pursue their collecting interests. We could see a surge of career-capping numismatic publications, as these aging collectors self-publish their

accumulated niche research and catalogue their lifetime of study and collecting. The market could become quite strong, especially for the very rarest pieces, as the retired Boomers splurge on items they may never again have the opportunity to acquire.

Longer-term, however, the Baby Boomers' ultimate demise without replacement by a correspondingly large group of younger collectors could be quite negative for the hobby. As some older collectors become more income constrained in retirement, lessening the overall demand, and others begin selling off their collections, increasing the supply, market prices might decline significantly. The more savvy collectors – seeing this dynamic beginning to unfold – might want to beat the rush to the exits by selling early, but this would only accentuate the downward price pressure. At the same time, older dealers

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would be retiring from the business, but this downward market spiral could accelerate that trend, leaving a bigger hole sooner.

If this dynamic were to unfold, the popularity of medal collecting could decline or it might actually grow. On one hand, the decline of the collecting population and market pricing could lead to a deflationary spiral of medal prices and further choke off new demand. The lower prices and explosion of information on medals, however, might mitigate the decline, and might even entice more coin collectors to shift over from collecting coins to collecting medals. While this shift in collecting interest would not be good for coins, even just a small number of new medal collectors could significantly reinvigorate our small numismatic niche.

Some of the other generational shifts in attitudes and tastes might also be reflected in the evolution of medal collecting. For example, one could envision contemporary medals becoming relatively more popular, at the expense of earlier artistic styles. And perhaps social media will become more popular with medal collectors for use in their hobby, whether it be the mainstream platforms like Facebook or the narrow numismatic sites like the social elements of the ANA's member website. This greater social interaction might naturally lead to more and more research collaboration, howbeit with an increased awareness of digital rights issues. Copyright issues, especially for photographs, are generally not now well understood by collectors, but this will change as this greater collaboration leads to more online publication.

Economic & Political Trends

At this writing, the world economy has been recovering in a slow but steady fashion from the 2008 financial meltdown and subsequent Great Recession. There has been some considerable financial market volatility in early 2016 that some analysts ascribe to the combination of very low oil prices and slowing growth in China, but the Main Street economy is still growing and the longer term expectation is for more of the same – volatile financial markets, slow but steady growth in the United States, a continuing slower recovery in Europe (with an overhanging concern about fiscal and political integration), and continued growth in China, India, and other developing countries at a somewhat slower rate than the last few years.

Within the United States and other developed countries, the increasing concentration of wealth among a tiny fraction of the population will continue to be a topic of debate, and perhaps ultimately force Congressional action. According to a recent Oxfam report, the wealthiest 62 individuals now control more of the world's wealth than the lower half of the entire world population. The present trends of the very rich getting richer and the income of everyone else stagnating seems unsustainable, especially as more and more of the college educated young people come to grips with the magnitude of their student debt obligations and the broader societal implications of this increased concentration of wealth.

Globalization will continue to be a major economic theme, with ever greater global connections in trade, people, finance, and information. This will lead to continued homogenization of markets and

tastes and, ultimately, to the rise of a global middle class and a convergence of buying power in the very long term. In this context, migration (immigration from an American perspective) will increase and the risk of geopolitical confrontation should decline. Yes, nationalism will continue to be part of global human nature, but hopefully will play out in more in symbolic ways, and less in full blown shooting wars.

Again, these trends are probably not revelations to you and probably not controversial if you have been paying attention to the news lately. Nonetheless, what impact could all of these economic and political trends have on our hobby? As summarized in Figure 4, even separate from the anti-collecting values of Gen X and Millennials, the continuing slow recovery from the Great Recession and overhang of student debt mean that many of these younger folks simply do not have the disposable cash to enable them to collect anything simply for the sake of collecting. This economic reality will reinforce the general downward pricing pressure described earlier. Nevertheless, it will only take a few of the increasingly wealthier "one percent" to show a keen interest in medals for the prices of the rarer, most highly desirable medals to skyrocket.

With increased global homogenization of information and buying power, together with the online tools discussed in Part 2, we should see greater cross-national interest in medals. Even now, we Americans are already more interested in and better able to collect European medals. This broadening interest will lead the large national

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numismatic organizations to build a greater international following. And just as wealthy Chinese collectors are driving up the prices of high-end fine art, perhaps before too long we will see some of them become interested in medals as well. The rising global middle class will become interested in medals at some point, but probably in the much longer term.

A growing global interest in medals, together with resurgent nationalism and growing appreciation of cultural objects, may increase the risk of ownership claims on any medals that may be considered cultural patrimony. Certain UNESCO conventions, international law, and various national laws (including but certainly not limited to American laws) protect various categories of tangible objects and even "intangible cultural heritage". While we have been accustomed to buying and selling medals with little more than a handshake, sometimes for cash, the rules for buying and selling some categories of collectibles like medals may change.

You may have read about various major museums repatriating invaluable ancient artifacts to their countries of origin, or be aware of the claims of Native American groups on certain objects they consider to have spiritual meaning, or heard about the recent legislation severely constraining the sale of antiques containing ivory. While a collector of, say, Indian Peace Medals might scoff at the idea of a tribal group someday claiming ownership of pieces in his collection, such is surely possible.

Collector Psychology

It is debatable whether collectors are born or made. If the collecting

instinct is inbred, then fundamental collector psychology may mitigate the impacts of these broad social trends on the hobby. There will always be collectors, and some of them will collect medals. On the other hand, if the underlying motivations for collectors to collect medals relate more to upbringing and other social dynamics, then the demographic, social, economic, and political trends summarized above may become self-reinforcing, as the impacts of these trends affect the underlying psychological motivations of subsequent generations of collectors.

Many of us would probably say that we collect because we are intellectually curious individuals who value the tangible connection to the past and appreciate the beauty, artistry and craftsmanship of the objects we collect. Psychologists and social scientists would not disagree that these interests do play a role, but would generally point to deeper motivations. Separate from the condition of abnormal, pathological hoarding, Sigmund Freud, for example, believed that a strong collecting instinct grew out of an individual's effort to compensate for a loveless childhood and/or an attempt to impose order on a chaotic world. Carl Jung, on the other hand, believed that collecting is simply a basic human instinct taken to an extreme – that our hunter-gather ancestors evolved to hoard valuable resources that would help them survive, and that as a species, we have a deeply ingrained need to collect items of possible future value. Under this theory, medal collectors just express this urge in a venue that is not explicitly productive, in a somewhat more intense way than

the average human being. More recent psychological thinking points to two broad categories of collector motivation, as summarized in Figure 5: 1) developing a sense of achievement and enhancing one's self-image; and 2) social status and feeling of competence. In collecting, we can set and achieve an obtainable, tangible goal of completing a collection and thereby achieve a sense of closure, perfection and mastery. There is the anticipation and eternal optimism of the hunt, and the exhilaration of capturing an object of desire, leading us into a state of "flow". Dedicated collectors hope to achieve a sense of fame, perhaps even the possibility of immortality, based on their reputation as a successful collector, an excellent catalogue of their collection, their donations, and their research and writings. Some also seek the possibility of financial gain, although this seems to be a secondary consideration for most true collectors.

Collecting also enhances our feeling of social connection, status, and expertise. An article in *The National Psychologist* a few years ago traced the origin of modern collecting to seventeenth and eighteenth century "aristocratic collectors, the



An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.

Benjamin Franklin



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Figure 5

The Evolution of Medal Collecting: A Glimpse of the Future?



landed gentry, who roamed the world in search of fossils, shells, zoological specimens, works of art and books. The collected artifacts were then kept in special rooms ('cabinets of curiosities') for safe-keeping and private viewing. A 'cabinet' was, in part, a symbolic display of the collector's power and wealth."

Even today, our collections enhance our sense of self-esteem, credibility, and personal uniqueness in the world. This motivation is about gaining social acceptance and the approval of experts or others we respect, but it is also somewhat competitive. The camaraderie is good, and particularly so when it confers power and social status. The friendly rivalry can sometimes turn

to petty jealousy, though, when someone else outbids us on something we "shoul-da bought" or has a differing point of view on, say, the authenticity or history of a particular piece.

Ultimately, it seems likely that collectors are both born and made. Whatever the mix of underlying factors, basic collector psychology will work together with various demographic, social, economic, and political trends to drive the long term evolution of medal collecting.

Evolution of Medal Collectors and Collecting

As said jokingly in Part 2 of this series of articles, it is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future.

Nevertheless, to summarize, it seems likely that with so many Baby Boomer collectors approaching the pinnacle of their collecting careers, we could see many more culminating research publications, major auctions of important collections that were decades in the making, and a run-up in prices of the rarest and most desirable pieces as the remaining collectors compete for once-in-a-lifetime buying opportunities.

If this aging cohort of collectors is not replaced by equally acquisitive generations of Gen X and Millennial collectors, however, this wave of Boomer-driven enthusiasm could ultimately crest and then crash on the beach. Infor-

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mation and communication technology will both enhance this demographic challenge and help mitigate it, but shifting social attitudes and tastes seem to be mostly negative for the hobby. The rise of China and the long-term rise of a global middle class, with the buying power to collect, should be positives for medal collecting, but probably not to a significant extent within our lifetimes.

The explosion of online numismatic information should be self-reinforcing, as more and more basic numismatic data available online creates opportunities for more and better comprehensive catalogues, research, and synthesis. While it is impossible to predict what new technologies might emerge that might impact what we collect, how we collect it, and how we enjoy it with each other, it is clear that even just the more intensive application of existing information technologies will have a profound effect on our hobby. The major national numismatic organizations have been very slow to embrace these not-so-new-any-more technologies, but they now seem to "get it" and are headed toward maintaining if not enhancing their relevance.

Continued application of these technologies to marketplace functions will also impact the commercial dimension of medal collecting, with shifts in relative market power, business models, pricing, and margins. Aggregators

and some other intermediaries should continue to play a larger and larger role, making the overall market somewhat more complex, but the continued steady growth of peer-to-peer interaction may also make some transactions simpler, more direct, and more economically efficient. Several interrelated trends point to the price levels of medals increasing significantly for the rarest items, but stagnating for more common pieces.

Where From Here ?

The biggest wild card, however, will be the impact of individual personal initiative. While all of these technology, social and economic trends are either inevitable or well beyond the influence of numismatists, let alone medal collectors, their impact on the hobby can be either mitigated or enhanced by effective individual and collective action. Engaging a new generation of collectors, for example, depends on our encouraging young numismatists to explore medals, trying to get already dedicated coin collectors interested in medals, and even finding ways to engage the broader public. Some collectors might not want to encourage more collecting competition, but this is extremely short sighted since virtually all of us (or our families) will inevitably be selling our collections, and hopefully not into a void. Similarly, the emergence of a specialized

numismatic book writing platform will depend on the initiative of an individual, working alone, in a small company, or in one of the large organizations – putting in the effort to make it happen.

While it is not possible to predict the future, or the timing of expected future events, one can still gain a great deal of insight by paying attention to the major technology, demographic, social, economic and political trends as they unfold. And we can consider the impact they are likely to have on our medal collecting and in our lives. By anticipating the probable effects, we can not only adjust course as needed, but we can also begin to take some initial and collective initiative to help shape it. So keep collecting.....and always keep recruiting.

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