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# **Programs for public service and awareness at the museum of the American Numismatic Association**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The American Numismatic Association was founded in 1891 as a means toward facilitating and sharing interest in numismatics on the part of people everywhere. In 1912, the ANA received a charter from the Congress of the United States in recognition of the value of the educational mission which provided its impetus. In order to obtain this charter, officers of the Association gave testimony to describe their purpose and goals. Central among these was the establishment of a museum which would be devoted to fostering awareness and appreciation of the role of coinage and related materials in the course of civilization. This institution would collect, preserve and utilize numismatic items for the betterment of society, with the idea of reaching out to a general audience to a greater degree than had theretofore been customary among learned societies and scholarly cabinets.

With 29,000 members at present, the Association has grown to become the world's largest organization of collectors and students of coinage and related materials. Its national headquarters were established in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1966. Here, a full-time staff of 30 (and three more part-time), perform a range of functions to serve the membership and the public. A convention department plans and manages two major congresses annually, with attendance numbering from 5,000 to 25,000 participants. An editorial department publishes the monthly journal, *The Numismatist*, convention programs and other printed matter. Separate departments manage accounting functions; computer-related services; membership enrollment, recognition and benefits programs; marketplace complaint mediation; and educational course offerings and special classes. The ANA Library (the "Resource Center") is the largest circulating numismatic reference collection, available on loan to members without cost other than that of postage.

The ANA began forming its own collection in 1927, loaning these materials to the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington D.C., to assist with the development of that great national cabinet. It was not until the 1960s that the ANA was actually able to begin creating the museum envisioned and promised 55 years earlier. It has taken more than 30 years for this museum's collections and functions to develop to the point where they can now essentially offer an example, a case-study for making an important contribution to society (even with a relatively small budget and staff and, in many respects, a modest collection).

Today, the Museum of the American Numismatic Association presents a variety of resources, programs and services both for the members of the Association and the general public. Some of these resources, programs and services are of a traditional nature, undoubtedly familiar to everyone in the field of museology; others are certainly much more unusual in the context of museological activity. This paper will survey these functions, highlighting particularly those less frequently encountered in other museums.

## **CABINET**

The ANA Museum's collection is now one of the larger ones in the world, numbering roughly 300,000 specimens. In the United States, it is the third in size, after those of the Smithsonian Institution and the American Numismatic Society, in New York. The ANA's U.S. legal tender paper money collection is pre-eminent thanks to gifts from J. Roy Pennell Jr., Norman Liebman and, especially, Aubrey and Adeline Bebee, but other areas are not comparably strong.

On the whole, the collection is relatively comprehensive in terms of representing the broad extent of numismatics even while, it lacks depth. There are, however, a number of specialized collections of significant educational and research value, and some individual rarities of considerable fame. Of the latter, the U.S. 1804-dated dollars and 1913 «Liberty Head» 5-cent piece are perhaps the most renowned individual examples. Major holdings include the Kenneth Keith collection of Mexican coins and medals and the Robert T. Herdegen worldwide collection (especially strong in German States' thalers). Overall, the cabinet ranges from ancient Greek (about 1,500 pieces), Roman (about 2,500 pieces) and Byzantine (about 1,000 pieces, including one good sized hoard) coins to a full range of oriental coinages (Islamic, Indic, Chinese), to virtually any series. For the first 40 years of its existence, the ANA collection was intended to be exclusively of modern, foreign coins; a field that remains one of its major strengths.

The general collections of paper money, medals, tokens, checks, credit cards, world-wide traditional money, coining and medallic sculpting implements, models and other related art works are not enormous. But, in most of these areas, too, there are valuable series. The ANA cabinet is undoubtedly one of the most actively utilized in the world, although it is probably the only major collection not stored horizontally in trays, and is therefore less convenient to manage for access and security.

## **FUNCTIONS**

The various functions of the ANA Museum include a typical assemblage of «normal» monetary museum activities. These would be exhibits in the

galleries and traveling exhibits, organized guided tours in the galleries as well as formal lecture presentations and other educational programming, collections management and research, and photography. Some aspects of these programs and services will be individually delineated below.

Another area of activity for the Museum is the set of programs called «ANA Collector Services». These include: identification of specimens; consultation on collections management; conservation; secure insured collections storage; and photo and video documentation. The primary program offered under Collector Services, however, is the ANA Authentication bureau (ANAAB), which certifies items determined to be genuine and reveals falsifications. Another major service is provision of opportunity for members to have their collections graded and encapsulated by a third-party commercial grading service (NGC). These less well-known functions will be highlighted separately.

## **PERSONNEL**

The ANA Museum's functions and its Collector Services are implemented by a full-time staff of five, headed by myself as curator. They include the Museum registrar, authenticator, office manager and office assistant. Our staff photographer works part-time, on a contractual basis. The Collector Services occupy nearly the entire effort of our authenticator, office manager and office assistant, the major time component of the photographer and a portion of the time of the registrar (who handles the photographic documentation and ordering) and myself (I examine and make determinations on every item submitted for authentication). Public inquiries are handled by all five. The primary traditional museum activities are handled almost exclusively by the registrar and myself.

## **RESEARCH/RESPONSES TO INQUIRIES**

The Museum staff responds to hundreds of inquiries a month, via telephone, written correspondence, e-mail and walk-in visits. Such requests vary in terms of the information required, of course, from general information to rather profound research, including examination of materials in the cabinet.

## **ACQUISITIONS**

Donations probably comprise more than 99% of the ANA's acquisitions for the cabinet. These are routinely received at a rate of close to 1,000 items per month. From time to time, individual purchases and exchanges have been made in an effort to broaden the holdings. In the same vein, a variety of other material has been accepted on loan, primarily for exhibition purposes.

Items as they are received by the Museum are recorded and given a «TD» (temporary identification) number. The staff attributes every acquisition, then prepares and sends, as needed, an acknowledgement letter, a bill of sale/exchange form, Deed of Gift or loan agreement form for completion and return. Cataloguing the acquisitions includes: research, organization, determination of acceptability, creation of records (both manual and on a computer data base), labeling and filing into storage. A constant backlog of work persists in this area. At present, over 82,000 have been entered on the computer system.

The Museum's accession record-keeping system is according to the now standard trinomial designation of acquisition year, sequential acquisition and individual item number (i.e. 1999.1.1 would be the first item in the first acquisition of this year). Similar record-keeping processes govern handling of loans.

## **EXHIBITS**

The Museum's exhibition space is probably the most extensive in the United States; usually 2,000 to 3,000 specimens are mounted for viewing in a changing variety of thematic exhibits. It includes 150 display vitrines/cases with interior lighting and background panels mounted on a slant to facilitate viewing. Other features include display panels, free-standing minting/printing equipment and a facsimile «period room» showing the former workshop and tools of medallic sculptor and engraver Gilroy Roberts (1905-1993), designer of the well-known John F. Kennedy half dollar. The Museum's exhibits are planned, organized, written, installed and maintained by the staff, with a number of new attractions added each year, so that both «permanent» and «temporary» features can attract and inform visitors.

The staff also prepares and circulates a series of traveling exhibits (six, at present, of various sizes) designed primarily for the benefit of individual coin clubs holding membership in the ANA. A new activity in this area is development of "on-line exhibits" on the ANA's web-site at [www.money.org](http://www.money.org).

## **TOURS**

Visiting groups request organized tours of the Museum on an average of about once a week. These are routinely scheduled and presented by the staff, mostly to groups of school children.

## **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING OUTREACH**

The Museum staff teaches seminars and workshops as part of the ANA's general education mission, and also present occasional programs on specialized topics by request. Classes are given at the ANA's annual

Summer Seminar program and at the two annual conventions as well as at other venues when called for.

## **VOLUNTEERS, INTERNS AND STUDENTS**

The ANA Museum also offers opportunities for involvement in some professional activities by outside parties. Our volunteer organization is called FANAM (Friends of the ANA Museum) in honor of the Indian gold coin of that name. These individuals are recruited, screened and instructed to assist in collections management activities. In 1989, we created the Museum Internship in Numismatics program for suitably qualified, interested graduate or advanced undergraduate students to obtain experience working with coins and related materials. Each normally works ten weeks during the summer, helping with attribution and cataloguing and focusing upon a particular project geared as much as possible toward the student's own expertise. Through the federal government's student financial assistance «work/study» program, we are able to hire temporary, part-time curatorial assistants from among qualified local university students, interns ("Museum Internship in Numismatics"); and university students (through the federal government's «work/study» financial aid).

## **COLLECTOR SERVICES**

A major effort on the part of the Museum staff is in the area of Collector Services-programs designed to assist collectors, dealers and the general public beyond the immediate context of the Museum itself. These services are partly of kinds rarely provided by monetary museums, or museums in general, for that matter. This is the result of responding to a clear desire and need felt by the membership, overcoming considerations of credibility and liability.

Authentication Bureau (ANAAB) Protecting collectors from forgeries has been a basic concern of the ANA since its inception. We have developed the world's largest reference photo-file archive (about 2,000,000 images) through this work. For set fees, we examine all coins, tokens, medals and certain paper money for authenticity and issue a photo-certificate of authenticity if the specimen is deemed genuine. We issue notes on other items, explaining our determinations as to why they cannot be certified.

Items are also received for research, variety attribution and mint error confirmation. All are processed by the museum office manager, photographed and evaluated by the authenticator and curator; an additional hundred or more outside specialist consultants also have made themselves available for expertise in their fields. When needed, scanning electron microscope (SEM) surface analysis is available through the cooperation of Colorado College, on the campus of which the ANA Headquarters/Museum is located.

Beyond the certificates issued, we offer an "Authentication Plus" option, for which we write descriptive letters on whatever aspects of their coins the owner care to have pursued further.

This year, the ANA has agreed to take over the work of the International Bureau for the Suppression of Counterfeit Coinage, and publication of its Counterfeit Coin Bulletin, heretofore projects of the International Association of Professional Numismatists (IAPN). By this means, we hope to expand awareness and protection for the collecting public throughout the world.

Encapsulation/Grading On a contractual basis, for the benefit of those members to whom this activity is valuable, Collector Services operates as a submission center for third-party grading and encapsulation of coins by Numismatic Guarantee Corporation (NGC). This firm seals coins into clear plastic holders containing a brief description of the coins and the numerical condition grade assigned by the NGC staff. This service, again, is provided for standardized fees.

Conservation The ANA undertakes a limited amount of work in conservation of numismatic items. Primarily, we attempt to remove surface contaminants and stabilize specimens. We remove coins from lucite embedments and eliminate polyvinylchloride (PVC) residue, and can sometimes also remove incrustations, discolorations or other surface debris.

Consultation Basically, this service is analogous to appraising and advising—two practices ordinarily avoided by museums. Most of those using this service are not themselves numismatists, or even coin collectors, but rather people who have little or no idea what considerations may be pertinent for buying or selling coins. We explain to them the use of numismatic literature, the activities of coin dealers and auctioneers, market place forces, differing kinds of appraisals, etc., and provide general estimate ranges of values on their coins in terms of published data. We refer them to the specialist dealers who are members of the ANA, advertising in *The Numismatist*. Our service is popularly seen as providing impartial, independent opinions making people feel much more comfortable in numismatics. Fee schedules encourage individuals to become members.

Secure, Insured Storage Safe, deposit (bank) boxes in the ANA Museum vault are rented to, members for keeping their personal collections in a safe, climate-controlled environment. Through its membership department, the ANA also provides access to low-cost insurance coverage underwriting for numismatic collections.

Photography The Museum/Collector Services photographer provides images for all of the Association's own needs and custom photography work for the public. A major part of the work is documenting all of the submissions received and creating the prints intended to become part of the certificates of authenticity issued by our ANAAB. All incoming parcels received are opened under video camera surveillance for security documentation. We will also prepare video documentation of collections for individual owners. Microphotography is available for research, as is scanning electron microscopy capability, mentioned earlier.

## **CONCLUSION**

Serving the ANA membership, and the public is the constant focus of the Museum of the American Numismatic Association, and the duties which its staff is called upon to perform are extensive and in some cases unusual. Some operational statistics pertaining to the most recently completed fiscal year may be illustrative.

Items donated	10,325
Items purchased	70
Items entered onto database catalogue	1,970
New exhibits prepared	10
Museum tours given	44
Seminars, workshops and lectures presented	13
Custom photo orders	40
Authentications performed	634
Items submitted for NGC grading	8,282

I think it is clear that with a mission to serve society, a small staff with modest resources can make valuable contributions. It would also seem clear, however, that this dedication leaves little room to pursue academic research and publication of individual interest to the staff members. Serving entails sacrifice. This case-study of a museum devoted to the benefit of the numismatic public at large is not so much an appeal to others to undertake similar endeavors but an effort to demonstrate possibilities and to, look at functions of monetary museology in a broad scope. We invite all our colleagues to join us in expanding international networking, in their own vast fields of expertise.