

# Part 1 - 1939

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*The idea for an organization of numismatists living in mid-western states was born in Chicago in 1938. Lee F. Hewitt, editor of Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine, reporting on the August, 1938, meeting of the Chicago Coin Club, states that his club had voted to team up with his magazine to host a Central States Numismatic Conference in the Spring of 1939. All clubs in the "Central Area" were asked to co-operate. A fund of \$100 was made available to "provide entertainment."*

In his September, 1938 issue, Hewitt noted that a Central States Numismatic Conference had been definitely set for late Spring, 1939. The next issue of his magazine was to have the date and hotel plans. Preliminary planning for the "Conference" called for a Saturday and Sunday meeting with "every minute packed with numismatic activity."

For some unknown reason, the next issue of the *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* did not contain 'Conference' information. Readers had to wait until the March, 1939, issue to learn the details. Indeed, the stage was set for the first-ever Central States Numismatic Conference at the Hotel Congress in downtown Chicago, April 22 & 23, 1939. The hotel's beautiful Florentine Room was secured for the Conference, the same room that hosted the 1933 ANA convention.

Seventeen midwest coin clubs and the *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* were listed as Conference sponsors. The registration fee was set at \$2.00, a sum much less than actual cost. This small fee paid for a banquet, medal, badge, demonstrations and other souvenirs. Quite a bargain even for 1939! The April, 1939, issue of the Scrapbook contained this invitation: "Attend the Central States Numismatic Conference, Chicago, April 22-23. All the features of a national convention crowded into two days: educational demonstrations, roundtable discussions, exhibits, an auction, etc."

Exhibits were certainly encouraged at the Conference. Through the courtesy of a Chicago firm, exhibits were to be placed in brand new locked cases measuring 18 x 30 inches. All exhibits would be fully covered by insurance and protected by Pinkerton Detective Agency guards. Potential exhibitors were encouraged by Exhibit Chairman William Evans to make reservations no later than April 10 to ensure having their names and exhibit descriptions in the Conference program.

Other advertised features of the 1939 Conference included a "high powered" auction to be conducted by the Chicago Coin Club, and two educational programs featuring the ANA president J. Henri Ripstra, M. Vernon Sheldon and Dr. R. E. Davis. Program topics included: "Troubles of a Coin Maker" and "Cleaning and Preserving Coins."



1939 - Chicago: Conference attendees filled the banquet room at the first official Central States gathering. Veterans of the numismatic world seated at the head table at the extreme left included (left to right) : Dr. J. M. Henderson, chairman of the ANA board of governors; J. Henri Ripstra, ANA president; R. L. McBrien, Chicago Coin Club president; William G. Rayson, Chicago Coin Club director; Herbert W. Walker, ANA vice president; and Harry X Boosel, ANA board member. *(Photo courtesy of Richard N. Wiltberger and CSNS Archives.)*

The Central States attendance committee distributed registration cards to several midwest coin clubs. Early registration was urged so that attendees would have their names published in the Conference program. Projected attendance was 200 with fully half that number anticipated from Chicago. Lesser numbers were predicted for Milwaukee, Kansas City, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Madison, the Quad Cities and Burlington, Iowa.

Other planned Conference activities were a Saturday evening banquet, door prizes, entertainment, a general meeting for clubs to share ideas, Sunday field trips to the planetarium, aquarium, Field Museum and the "world famous Maxwell Street Market."

The obverse die of this token was used in 1864 to strike political tokens for Abraham Lincoln's second presidential campaign.



A souvenir of the  
Central States Numismatic  
Conference  
Chicago, April 22-23, 1939



The April, 1939, issue of the *Scrapbook* also contained two commercial ads promoting attendance at the Central States Conference. One proclaimed "Welcome to Chicago to Collectors and Dealers" from R. Green's numismatic bookstore on Bryn Mawr Avenue. The other featured a photo of the CSNC headquarters hotel, the Congress.

By all accounts, the Central States Numismatic Conference was an unqualified success. Ted Hammer, *Scrapbook* feature writer, proclaimed that "every minute was filled with interesting features." He noted that "they had to run out and find Lee Hewitt to get him to take a bow for conceiving the midwest organization plan." Regarding the exhibits, Hammer exhorted: "To yours truly, there never will be any better convention feature or drawing card than excellent displays, and the Chicago meeting was replete with these!"

There were 29 exhibits at the CSNC with an estimated value of \$50,000. The list of exhibitors reads like a "Who's Who" of numismatic pioneers: Dr. Walter Hewitt Judd, B. Max Mehl, M. Vernon Sheldon, James Friberg, James Kelly and Arthur B. Kelley. The exhibits were open to the general public from 1 to 3 p.m. on Sunday with an estimated 1,000 persons viewing the displays.

Approximately 250 collectors and dealers attended the Conference. The first day began with a three reel movie, "Making a Medal." J. Henri Ripstra, ANA president and metallic sculptor, answered questions between reels.

The Saturday evening banquet began with taking the official attendees' photograph. A copy of this photo was donated to our Central States archives during our 63rd convention in Columbus. Old Gold cigarettes were distributed by "Miss Old Gold" during the meal. An auction followed with 259 lots sold at an average lot price of \$3.00. The June, 1939, *Numismatist* noted that the "the ladies played cards during the sale."

On Sunday, April 23, an open discussion of club activities was held. Several club representatives expressed concerns, offered suggestions and shared club activities for the benefit of all. One common topic was finding ways to attract youth to the hobby. (Sound familiar?) This discussion was followed by presentations on cleaning coins.

At 11:30 a.m. a business session was conducted for the discussion of forming a permanent organization. Lee Hewitt chaired the meeting. The first successful motion was to form a central states group for the following thirteen states: ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA, MO, WI, IL, IN, MI, KY and OH. A motion to name the organization Central States Numismatic Federation lost out. Our present name, Central States Numismatic Society, was then adopted. As the purpose of the new society was to provide for an annual convention, the dues were set at the very low figure of 25¢ per year.

The following officers were named: President - Arthur B. Kelley of St. Louis; 1st V.P. - Dr. R. E. Davis of Chicago; 2nd V.P. - Hubert Polzer of Milwaukee; and nine (9) Board Members: Dr. Walter H. Judd of Omaha, Earl F. Barger of Chicago, Dr. Richard G. Hellman of Kansas City, Clifton Temple of Detroit, R. R. Reynolds of Flint, MI, Ted Hammer of Burlington, IA, H. W. Walker of Warren, OH, Dr. E. D. Skeen of Gary, IN, and M. J. Carls of Racine, WI.



1956 - Indianapolis: Banquet attendees posed for the traditional formal photograph at the 14th anniversary convention held at the Claypool Hotel. Photo courtesy of Chester L. Krause (visible in lower left corner) and the CSNS archives. How many others can you identify?

The next order of business was forming a committee to write by-laws. Then the group selected Burlington, Iowa, as the site for the 1940 convention. President Kelley later appointed Eric Newman from St. Louis as the first CSNS Secretary-Treasurer. Newman was a 27 year old lawyer and vice president of the newly formed Missouri Numismatic Society.

One interesting highlight of the first-ever Central States convention was a live radio broadcast by Bill Brimelow from Elkhart, IN. He was interviewed by Chicago station, WLS, from the convention floor. This proved to be a good draw for public attendance.

Two follow-up reports on the Central States convention were those of the Chicago and Milwaukee clubs. J. Henri Ripstra congratulated the Chicago Coin Club and the CSNS Committee for successfully sponsoring the convention. "Everyone at the Milwaukee Numismatic Society meeting of April 28 agreed that making the conference an annual affair would do a great deal toward promoting numismatics throughout the middle west."

The Central States Numismatic Society has fulfilled this objective for over 63 years and is still going strong!

Special thanks are due to Carl Wolf, past president of the Chicago Coin Club, for sharing copies of articles from his club's publication, *The Bulletin*. Tribute is also due to the late Lee Hewitt, editor of *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* from 1935 to 1967. In the May, 1987, issue of the Chicago Coin Club's *Chatter*, we learn that "Lee was instrumental in the

**formation of the Central States Numismatic Society and has been cited as one of their 'founding fathers'. " He received the CSNS Medal of Merit in 1959 and for years held the title of Honorary President.**