

The History of Central States

Part 3 - 1941

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The Milwaukee Central States convention in 1941* almost set an attendance record for all such shows -257, second only to the 1938 ANA Convention in Cincinnati. The two previous CSNS conventions were outstanding from the point of "something doing every minute." Lillard W. Culver, the third anniversary convention general chairman, promised that Milwaukee intended to outdo the other cities, Chicago and Burlington. He announced that the convention program was being planned around "six exceptional features," two of which were a two-session auction and a "Mammoth Exhibit."

*"The Grapevine"***, a CSNS convention publicity sheet stated: "There will be display cases for all and plenty of police protection day and night." The expected registration fee was \$2 which included the banquet. As it turned out, the actual cost of the banquet was only \$1.50 and no additional charges were made. Hubert Polzer of Milwaukee had become CSNS president due to the untimely death of newly-elected president Professor R. Edward Davis of Chicago. Mr. Polzer appointed his friend and fellow Milwaukee resident, Robert E. Meder, as CSNS secretary-treasurer.

The Hotel Pfister at the corner of Wisconsin and Jefferson served as convention headquarters, April 26-27. The Pfister was located in downtown Milwaukee and was the regular meeting place of the Milwaukee Numismatic society.

An ambitious sight-seeing tour of Milwaukee was planned for the ladies and included stops at the Milwaukee Art Institute, Mitchell Park Conservatory, Mount Mary College, Marquette University and several of Milwaukee's famous breweries. It was also advertised that Milwaukee was easily accessible by plane, train auto or boat with four airports, five railroads, several bus lines, and five passenger steamer docks.

The March, 1941 issue of *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* contained a display ad with the simple message: "Spend a Pleasant Numismatic Weekend in Milwaukee, April 26 & 27." The April issue featured a full-page ad from Dayton, Ohio dealer, James Kelly, inviting one and all to take part in his CSNS auction.

Robert Meder, CSNS secretary-treasurer, predicted the exhibit would be the "largest showing of numismatic material ever displayed in the Midwest." He based this on the fact that 50 persons had requested exhibit space in Milwaukee. Meder announced that 125 cases would be needed and that Racine and Chicago coin clubs were going to help furnish some.

Reviews of the 1941 CSNS Milwaukee convention revealed that predictions of size and scope were not without merit. Thirty-two exhibits filled nearly 125 cases with ancient, medieval and modern coins, paper money, tokens, medals, gold bars and numismatic books. Exhibitors included such numismatic luminaries as Albert Grinnel, Lloyd Gettys, Dr. J. Hewitt Judd, M. H. Bolender and Lee Hewitt.

The Chicago Coin Club's June, 1941 *Bulletin* noted that "a number of the 250 members and visitors said it was one of the best which they had ever attended." The ladies were entertained with bus rides (a two-hour bus tour of the city by charter bus) and card games and "unanimously expressed themselves as having a good time."

One interesting development at the convention was the CSNS board's vote to award a plaque to the local club which performed outstanding work for the 1941-1942 season. Morton and Joseph Stack, well-known New York City dealers, offered to donate the plaque. It was planned by Stack's to be the finest award ever offered to a coin club. All clubs in the 13 Central States were eligible to win the plaque. Judging was accomplished by the CSNS board upon the basis of written reports covering the activities of each club.



1977 - Milwaukee: 1976 Chicago convention chairman William Pettit (standing right) officially passed the Stack's traveling trophy to 1977 Milwaukee chairman A. P. "Del" Bertschy. For years the elaborately engraved and enameled plaque, covered with embedded coins and medals, circulated within the Central States area. Daniel C. Brown (foreground), popular Denver, CO dealer, was master of ceremonies for the awards banquet.

At the convention business meeting, officers were elected for the coming year: President - Dr. J. Hewitt Judd of Omaha, First Vice President - Ignatius T. Kopicki of Chicago, Second Vice President - C.T. Shelby of Muncie, IN, and nine directors: Leon Belt of Iowa, Earl Barger of Chicago, Hubert Polzer of Milwaukee, Arthur Gray of Saginaw, MI, Arthur Kelly of St. Louis, Richard Yeoman of Racine, WI, James Kelly of Dayton, OH, Rual Forsythe of Illinois and Paul Edwards of Minnesota.

Interestingly enough, the Milwaukee convention did not have a bourse. Chairman Culver explained that other conventions were in town at the same time as CSNS and it was necessary to share hotel facilities with two other groups. This made it impossible to secure a permanent bourse room.

The convention banquet was attended by 196 people which may have been a record attendance for such events. The speaker was Rev. A. G. Weiler of Racine who spoke informally and amusingly about incidents in his collecting career.

The auction called by James Kelly featured over 1300 lots in two sessions. Lots were sold at a rate of 275 per hour. Top lots sold were an 1852 U.S. assay slug for \$270 and an 1876 \$3 gold proof realizing \$225!

The annual education program was held Sunday morning and featured an "Information Please" format. Three experts from the Chicago Coin Club gave short presentations on engraving, counterfeiting, prestrikes and counterstamps followed by questions from the audience.



Philip J. More, CSNS president, 1966-68



Dr. F. Stevens Epps

The venerable Dr. F. Stevens Epps dominated the Central States scene for years, serving as president (1962-1964) and twice as secretary-treasurer (1957-62) and (1964-73).

It was decided to hold the 1943 convention in Des Moines, Iowa. Newly elected CSNS president, Dr Judd, appointed the first female officer of the society. Mrs. Harriette Hammer of Iowa as secretary-treasurer. Mrs. Hammer was a charter member of Central States and attended the 1939 meeting in Chicago at which CSNS was born.

*** 1941 witnessed the design and approval of the Central States logo. The familiar oval with a map of the thirteen states was designed by Chicago artist Anton Jerger. The logo is still in use today.**

**** The Grapevine was most likely the first CSNS publication. It served the single purpose of publicizing the 1941 Milwaukee convention.**

An Historical Footnote

After the publication of my first installment of "History of Central States" which appeared in the Spring, 2003 issue of *The Centinel*, I received an interesting letter from my friend, Pete Smith. Pete wears many numismatic hats, one of which is historian for the Northwest Coin Club in Minnesota. He enclosed a copy of the program from the 1951 Central States convention which was held in Minneapolis. The introductory paragraph contained this bit of historical revelation: "We of the Northwest Coin Club feel honored that the Central States Numismatic Society has seen fit to return once again to our beautiful city. The word 'return' is justly used since it was here the idea for such a society was formed during a gathering of some of the boys at the 1936 ANA convention. So welcome back home, folks!"

I then consulted the multi-issue "History of Central States" authored by past president and past secretary-treasurer, Dr. F. Stevens Epps, from July, 1965 and onward in the *Centinel*. Sure enough, he observed that "prior to the actual organization of (CSNS) such an organization was suggested and talked about" at the 1936 Ana Convention in Minneapolis.

My next research took me to the January, 1951 issue of *The Numismatist* to see if the planners for the 1951 CSNS convention were mentioning discussions leading to the Society's birth. Lo and behold, we read the following: "During the 1936 ANA convention in Minneapolis, members from Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Ohio got to talking about an organization composed of members from those and adjoining states. The Central States Numismatic Society was formed as a result. As Lee Hewitt, one of the organizers, has said, 'The idea started in Minneapolis and bloomed in Chicago where the first convention was held in 1939.'"

I also contacted my good hobby friend, the well-published author, Bob Julian, who has an extensive library of numismatic literature including most back issues of *The Numismatist* and *The Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine*. I carefully read and reread all the 1936 through 1938 issues and focused on the 1936 ANA convention proceedings and subsequent reports from all coin clubs in our Central States region. Here is what I found. First: there was no mention of a discussion or any formalization of plans to organize collectors in the mid-west found in the 1936 ANA reports. Second: the earliest reference to such an organization comes in the Milwaukee Numismatic Society's meeting report of June 25, 1937 which stated in part "We were informed by Mr. Ripstra (Chicago Coin Club president and later ANA president) that plans were in the making for the formation of a mid-west association of numismatists."

The next mention of such an organization is that detailed in my first *Centinel* article, namely, the actions of the Chicago Coin Club in 1938 to host a Central States Numismatic Conference in the Spring of 1939. Interestingly enough, Dr. Epps credits one Frank C. Ross of Kansas City as writing to Lee Hewitt in the Fall of 1938 urging that such an organization be formed and that the Chicago Coin Club act as initial sponsor.

1961 Minneapolis:



A rather youthful Ray Lefman (top center), 1960-1962 CSNS president, introduced the governors attending the awards banquet. From left: Russell E. Porter, C.A. M. Smith, Ben Stocker, Paul E. Olson, *Leo G. Terry*, *Michael Dolnick*, Ray M. Janda, F. Stevens Epps, John Maxim, Sol Kaplan and *Erwin C Gerber*, (Editor's note: Please help with identification of these gentlemen! I question my spelling and identification of the individuals whose names appear in *italics*. Photo from the Ray O. Lefman collection.

The conclusion that must be drawn from Pete Smith's discovery of the 1936 "idea" for Central States, from Dr. Epps' writings, the 1937 remarks of J. Henri Ripstra and the 1951 Minneapolis CSNS convention reports is that informal discussions were indeed underway three years before the actual birth of Central States in April, 1939.

I thank Pete for sharing his findings and ask all readers to do likewise.



1978 - St Louis Convention chairwoman Bernice "Bink" Stevenson enjoyed the moment during awards presentations with Harold H. Berk, 1976-1978 CSNS president.