Bill Shamhart, owner of Numismatic Americana, Inc. (NumismaticAmericana.com), is a PCGS Authorized Dealer and, like many dealers, he's also a collector. Bill started collecting coins as a boy. Growing up in Missouri, he began shoveling snow at the age of 16 to earn money which he would then take to the bank to buy rolls of coins. Two years later, in 1976, he set up his first table as a dealer at a coin show and worked the shows for another four years until he was offered a full time position in the hobby. Bill specializes in U.S. coins, world coins struck by the U.S. Mint, and numismatic Americana. When asked to be more specific, he said, "Any coin that is pretty!" Bill is known for having a "great eye" for both beauty and technical aspects of coins. His mission is to make coin collecting fun through history. Simply said, Bill loves coins. For the past 12 summers, he has supported the ANA by giving seminars and teaching others about coins and coin grading. His seminar "Advanced coin grading and problem coins" is wildly popular. In 2009 he was honored with the American Numismatic Association's Presidential award for his service. And, in 2013, Bill was awarded the ANA's honorary Doctor of Numismatics degree. Bill collects various things, which includes a type set of U.S. coins and currency from Warrensburg, Missouri. Among his favorite collections is his U.S. Assay Medal collection. He likes the fact that the medals are beautifully designed and were made for the individuals who honorably served on the commission. Bill currently lives in Chester, New Jersey, with his son who is in high school. When he is not dealing in coins, you can find him shooting either trap or sporting clays.
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Founded in 1792 by the United States government, the U.S. Assay Commission was established to supervise the annual testing of gold and silver coinage produced by the U.S. Mint to ensure the metal content met specifications. Members of the commission, which were composed of prominent private citizens including numismatists, were appointed every year. Beginning in 1860, to thank the members for their service, each commissioner received a medal struck by the U.S. Mint commemorating famous persons, topics and places. It is not clear why this tradition was started. It may have been the result of Director of the Mint, James Ross Snowden’s desire to expand the medal department at the Mint. The medals were produced every year from 1860 through 1977, except 1862-1866 and 1954.

Most U.S. Assay medals are rare. With the exception of 1977, it is estimated that mintage ranged from 50 to 200 pieces each year. The 1977 Martha Washington medal was the only issue that was made in quantity and offered to the public. In the 1800s release of the medals was tightly controlled and limited to members of the commission, Mint officers, treasury officials, and occasional president if he was featured on the medal. Distribution policy was relaxed from 1900 to 1910, then controlled again from 1911 to about 1918, then more widely distributed from 1920 to 1935. After 1935, a very stringent policy was put in place. Medals of the 1940s and 1950s are very difficult to locate. In the early years, restrikes may exist because the dies had not been destroyed. However, after about 1910 most dies had been defaced, destroyed, or secured. The Assay Commission was abolished in 1977 by President Carter which was passed into law in 1980.

There is no absolute size for the diameter of the medals but they range from approximately 33 mm to 76 mm. In the early 1900s a number of 40 x 57 mm rectangular issues were struck and in 1976 and 1977, 76 x 60 mm oval issues were struck. Metal content is primarily copper (bronze after 1901) and silver, but issues were also struck in aluminum and white metal. One issue each was struck in nickel and gold. In 1974, 1976 and 1977, prior to the commission’s demise, the medals also were struck in pewter.

There is a vast array of designs which cover subjects such as Moneta from Greek mythology, places such as the Philadelphia Mint, U.S. presidents such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and famous persons like David Rittenhouse, the first director of the Mint. The designs are not only interesting, but beautiful as well.

Recently, with the guidance of numismatist, William Shamhart, Jr., PCGS began grading the medals of the United States Assay Commission. Bill’s collection, the Numismatic Americana Reference Collection (N.A.R.C.) is one of the finest and most complete ever assembled and can be viewed in its entirety in the PCGS Set Registry. The complete set requires 180 issues. Bill’s set is currently 45.56% complete and has a weighted grade point average of 62.34. The medals occasionally can be found in auctions and when Bill can, he adds to and upgrades the collection.
BILL SHAMHART’S TOP TEN FAVORITE MEDALS FROM THE COLLECTION:

1861 Copper U.S. Assay Commission JK-AC-2
PCGS SP65 BN - Population 1, None graded higher
Subject: Longacre Pattern for the 1859 Half Dollar
Engraver: James B. Longacre • Size: 33 mm

1871 Copper U.S. Assay Commission JK-AC-10
PCGS SP65 RB - Population 1, None graded higher
Subject: Archimedes
Engraver: William Barber • Size: 33 mm

1868 Copper U.S. Assay Commission JK-AC-4
PCGS SP66 BN - Population 2, None graded higher
Subject: End of the Civil War
Engraver: William Barber • Size: 33 mm

1875 Copper U.S. Assay Commission JK-AC-14
PCGS SP67 BN - Population 1, None graded higher
Subject: Archimedes
Pedigree: San Francisco Fine Arts Museum
Engraver: William Barber • Size: 33 mm

1870 Copper U.S. Assay Commission JK-AC-8
PCGS SP67 BN - Population 1, None graded higher
Subject: Standing Moneta
Engraver: William Barber • Size: 33 mm

1890 Silver U.S. Assay Commission JK-AC-33
PCGS SP65 - Population 1, None graded higher
Subject: Benjamin Harrison
Pedigree: San Francisco Fine Arts Museum
Engraver: Charles E. Barber (obverse) and George Morgan (reverse) • Size: 33 mm

Aspire to Greatness. Join the PCGS Set Registry®.

The free, interactive PCGS Set Registry program has revolutionized coin collecting around the world. Established in 2001, the Registry now hosts over 70,700 sets. In addition to every major U.S. coin series, it offers many world coin categories including Australian, British, Canadian, Chinese, Costa Rican, Cuban, French, German, Japanese, Mexican, Panamanian, Philippine, Puerto Rican, Russian, South African, Spanish, and Swiss coins.

The PCGS Set Registry gives collectors from all over the world the opportunity to safely show off their PCGS-graded coins in a secure online environment, and compare their collections to some of the greatest ever assembled.

Registration for the PCGS Set Registry is free. To learn how you can participate in the program, visit PCGS.com and click on the Set Registry link, or call 800-447-8848.

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