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TEN FAVORITE BUST AUCTION CATALOGUES

by Karl Moulton

By attending several JRCS meetings at ANA conventions in the past, it has been confirmed that many members understand and appreciate the necessity of collecting numismatic literature. Being a dealer in this material has afforded an in-depth knowledge of what's between the covers of most United States catalogues.

Recently I was asked by JRJ editor Brad Karoleff to submit an article about important Bust coinage auction catalogues. The following list represents the author's opinion about the top two core reference catalogues for each separate silver denomination.

BUST DOLLARS

1) August 8, 1975 ANA Sale by Superior. Although not listed, the primary consignor was A.J. Ostheimer. The catalogue contains over 250 lots of Bust Dollars, every one of them attributed and plated life-sized in clear, B&W plates.

This was the first ANA convention for the author. It was a different time when the dealers displayed not only coins, but a little class as well. Business suits were still worn and the banquet was an important part of the camaraderie for numismatists.

This catalogue also contains a very impressive run of Seated coinage. I'll never forget Jerry Cohen handing me the 1876-CC 20-cent piece (purchased the evening before at the auction for \$45,000) and remarking, Look at the word LIBERTY. It's doubled. That's how you tell if it's genuine.

This catalogue was one of the largest ANA sales to date. The event (held at the Ambassador Hotel downtown) was as exciting as the catalogue is today, 25 years later.

2) April 8, 1954 Davis-Graves by Stack's. George Davis was an astute 19th century collector who died in 1890. Included in this important catalogue is the 1794 dollar w/stars in copper — ex-Parmelee; along with 67 attributed lots with 27 B&W plates. Naturally, there is an 1804 Dollar offered. This was the Robert Coulton Davis specimen (no relation to George) which was then owned by Henry Graves.

Included with the pedigree of the 1804 Dollar is contemporary documentation relating to the validity of this piece. One 1878 letter, which is reprinted in the catalogue, comes from William E. DuBois, Assayer and Curator of the Mint Collection, which is now housed in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

In his *certificate of authenticity* DuBois states ..this Dollar is one of the original issue — and not a restrike .. This was an outright lie! He even lied about how he spelled his own last name. Talk about a credibility gap

The appearance of the restrike 1804 Class III dollars was first witnessed just two years earlier when John Haseltine (a rather prominent dealer whose office was located directly across the street from the Mint) offered one for sale in January 1876 for \$600. There were no takers.

Although it has never been suggested before in print, the author believes these Restrike 1804 Dollars were struck by DuBois and distributed by Haseltine for selected numismatists in Philadelphia for the nation's centennial celebration that was being held in that city. This theory can be partially confirmed by S.H. Chapman's dialogue found in the 1913 Lyman catalogue which states, when I entered this business in 1876, these dollars were being put on the market by a certain Mint official (in all probability W.E. DuBois) now long deceased. DuBois died in 1881. That's strong contemporary validation from someone who was actually there.

Interest had been peaking as there were two different 1804 Dollars auctioned in the previous two years (Sanford-1874, Cohen-1875); along with at least one 1804 Electrotypes (Idlers). Although they were clandestine products, these U.S. Mint souvenirs may have been born in the spirit of national pride.

HALF DOLLARS

1) Although there have been a number of significant offerings over the years, for completeness and condition my vote would be the April 6, 1997 Louis E. Eliasberg Collection by Bowers & Merena. Rarities abound with 2 proof-like Uncirculated 1796 15 and 16-stars offerings. There's also a 1797 in Mint State, an 1801 in Mint State, and a Gem 1815/2. The finest 1817/4 is plated full-page and comes with three pages of background and pedigree information. Several early Proof issues are catalogued, along with the Crushed Lettered Edge restrikes of 1833 — 35. The Reeded Edge Bust portion includes an 1836 Proof and an 1838-O Proof with pedigrees on other known examples. This milestone collection was expertly catalogued by the Bowers & Merena organization, making it a must have item.

2) May 5, 1977 Getty by Bowers & Ruddy. This overlooked sale contained a comprehensive run of high-grade Bust Halves. There are over 400 lots with many enlarged B&W plates of over-dates and clashed dies, etc. Although it was not a complete variety set, it represents one Bust Half Nut Club member's attempt at doing so in the finest obtainable condition. If you don't have one of these, you should.

BUST QUARTERS

1) October 4, 1979 Herbert Bergen by Abner Kreisberg. Bergen was purchasing coins from Max Mehl auctions back in the 1940's when he was offering some of the finest

and most complete collections ever formed. Bergen specialized in Bust Quarters. His collection was nearly complete by variety except for the two 1827 over-date issues (which he thought were too high priced). Among his holdings was the unique 1807 Plain Edge Bust Quarter in Mint State (now in the author's collection). This piece was first described by Lyman Low in 1909 and has an illustrious pedigree with numismatists such as William Woodin, Hillyer Ryder, H.O. Granberg, and Wayte Raymond having owned it in the last century.

The Bergen catalogue has most of the coins plated in color and B&W; however, the plates are not sharp or enlarged. Still, it remains one of the best collections of correctly attributed Bust Quarters ever auctioned.

Bergen lent his research notes about corrections and new varieties not listed in the original Browning work to R. Duphorne for his rather worthless book about Early Quarter Dollars that was published in 1975. If Mr. Duphorne does indeed exist, he has never come forth to accept the credit or blame for this particular volume.

2) November 12, 1990 Fred Mathews Collection in the Chris Shenkel catalogue by Bowers & Merena. Hidden away in the Shenkel catalogue is one of the more complete, high-grade collections of Bust Quarters to ever come onto the market. It was quietly put together by Mathews, a car dealer and entrepreneur.

There are nearly 80 attributed lots with 55 sharp B&W plates. There are even examples of the 1815 — E and 1825 — E counter-stamped issues. For the latest discussion about the E & L counter-stamp issues, the reader is referred to Q. David Bowers book *American Coin Treasures and Hoards*, p. 117-121.

This author has been actively researching the early Large Size Bust Quarters and plans a new book about them sometime in the future. Any members who wish to participate in a confidential uncirculated Bust Quarter census by variety, please contact me at the address given at the end of this article.

BUST DIMES

1) October 22, 1981 Harold Bareford by Stack's. This is a close call with several other sales. The reason for this particular catalogue to be first is due to the condition of the material and the fact that all 53 lots are pedigreed by Bareford to earlier sales. It is difficult to find well-plated and described catalogues on early Bust Dimes, and the clear B&W plates are life-sized and double-sized for clarity.

Bareford, like Bergen, bought heavily in the late 1940s and 1950s. This means he had his choice of many fine collections. Interestingly, it was at this sale that the five authors of the *Early U.S. Dimes 1796 — 1837* book got together for the very first time and cemented the idea to create the standard reference that is used today. Allen Lovejoy, one of the authors of the aforementioned book and whose own collection was most impressive, was a special consultant in cataloguing the Bareford Dime collection.

2) November 29, 1995 Waldo Pat Bolen Collection in the NUMISMA 95 by David Akers / RARCOA. Bolen had obtained every date and mint-mark dime except for one, the unique 1873-CC No Arrows, which he bought when it became available in the 1996 Eliasberg collection sale. His dime set was sold the previous year and included many

uncirculated examples of Bust coinage. The only Bust coin of the 55 plated in color and B&W that did not have any remaining lustre was the 1829 Curl Based 2 in Very Fine. Everything else was top end quality.

For those who like to get a cross-section of early Bust coinage in a single catalogue, this particular sale offered a Gem 1794 Dollar along with 16 plates of other early Bust Dollars.

BUST HALF DIMES

1) It would be extremely difficult to top the May 20, 1996 Louis Eliasberg Sale by Bowers & Merena. By the time you pass the Colonials, Patterns, Territorial Gold, Early Copper and the first million dollar coin — the 1913 V nickel, you finally arrive at the Half Dimes. Starting with three 1794 Gem Mint State examples is something that has not been duplicated. All the rarities are here in top grades, and all are plated in color and/or B&W. Examples of the 1796/5 and 1797 15 and 16 stars in Mint State provide plenty of looks. There is a well-struck 1802 along with the finest 1803 Large Date in the early series.

The Capped Bust run offers many Gem Uncirculated pieces, including several catalogued as Proofs. All are attributed with interesting narratives on die varieties, die states, striking characteristics, etc. Oh yes, the equally impressive Bust Dime section follows and makes for a must have item in every numismatic library.

2) April 10, 1969 R.L. Miles by Stack s. Although the variety collector may take exception to including this catalogue, it remains one of the finest and most complete collections of Half Dimes ever offered; along with every other U.S. denomination. Miles was a collector of quality coins, and this catalogue contained his silver and copper coins (the U.S. Gold was sold earlier in 1968). The early Half Dimes include a 1794 and 1795 in Mint State. There is a fully proof-like 1796. The 1797 15-star is Uncirculated. The 1802 is Extremely Fine (ex-Anderson/DuPont 1954), and the very scarce 1805 is a well-struck About Uncirculated. In all 13 early Half Dimes are plated in B&W.

The real value of this catalogue is the chance to see the rest of Miles collection, which includes numerous high-grade Bust Dimes, Quarters, Halves, and Dollars.

At the risk of being verbose, I would like to add the October 27, 1982 U.S. Gold Coin (Eliasberg) catalogue by Bower & Ruddy for the early Federal Gold issues. This then would be my 10 (plus 1) favorite Bust coinage catalogues to have in a reference library.

There are many others that were not chosen due to lack of usable plates, initial expense, and/or the catalogue descriptions. We must remember that cataloguers are not primarily interested in the background of any certain issue. For the most part, they are laboring under time constraints and concentrate on the selling aspect rather than doing research. What information that is found in the catalogues usually comes from some other source.

All of the catalogues listed, plus hundreds more, can be acquired from numismatic literature mail bid sales, internet offerings, and selected fixed price lists.

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