

A changing hobby: Numismatics in 1959, and beyond

By Jesse Robitaille

This is the final story in a two-part series highlighting the Waterloo Coin Society's 60th anniversary.

Much has changed in the world of numismatics since 1959, when the one of Canada's longest-running coin clubs, the Waterloo Coin Society (WCS), was formed by Bill English amid the height of the hobby's popularity.

Six decades after coming together for its first meeting in March 1959, the WCS celebrated its 60th anniversary alongside local politicians and numismatic dignitaries, including Royal Canadian Numismatic Association (RCNA) Executive Secretary Paul Johnson.

"It's a very significant milestone, not only here in the Waterloo area but also in Canadian numismatics," said Johnson, who has been a WCS member for more than 20 years and gave a keynote presentation at the 60th-anniversary meeting this March.

"Our club is one of the strongest, most active clubs in Canada."

Soon after forming, the WCS joined what was then known as the Canadian Numismatic Association – a precursor to today's Royal Canadian Numismatic Association (RCNA) – as chapter 18.

"Displays of gold coins provided the primary attraction," reads a short meeting summary published in a 1959 issue of *The CN Journal*, the official journal of the RCNA. "These ranged from a tiny half-dollar of California to more imposing Canadian and U.S. \$10 pieces along with foreign gold and silver money."

With 21 members, the nascent WCS was led by an executive that included English as its president, Heinz Herzog as vice-president, Marlene Schultz as secretary, Ed Stahley as treasurer and Ronald Phaff as a director.

BEFORE THE WCS

While the WCS' formation was a sign of numismatics' strength in Canada, "serious" coin collecting began in that country nearly a century earlier with the establishment of the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society of Montréal in 1862.

"This group met regularly and issued a publication until the 1930s entitled *The Canadian Anti-*

quarian and Numismatic Journal," said Johnson, who's a life member of the RCNA, Ontario Numismatic Association (ONA) and American Numismatic Association (ANA).

"These issues included a wealth of numismatic information on a variety of subjects."

The next clubs that came into being were the Toronto Coin Club and Ottawa Coin Club, the latter of which is now known as the Ottawa Numismatic Society.

"The Ottawa club had a wealth of well-known collectors, including Major Sheldon Carroll, Fred Bowman and J. Douglas Ferguson," said Johnson. "They all contributed greatly to early coin collecting in Canada. Many collectors in the club came from all across the country."

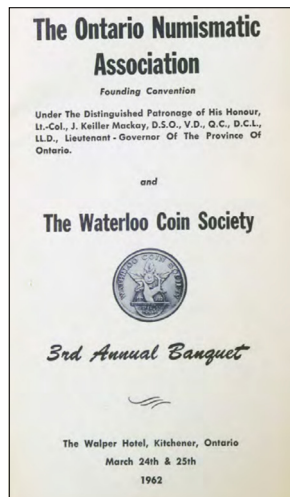
CNA, ONA FORMED

In 1950, collectors in Canada came together to form a national organization known as the Canadian Numismatic Association.

"Growth in the early years was rapid as interest in Canadian numismatics reached heights never known before," said Johnson, who added local clubs began forming "all over Canada" in the following two decades. "Some of the earliest formed clubs came from Calgary, Hamilton, Regina, Vancouver and Winnipeg."

Since 1952, *The Charlton Standard Catalogue of Canadian Coins* has been issued annually. The 36-page 1958 edition lists a 1948 silver dollar in Uncirculated condition at \$30 and a 1914-dated \$10 gold coin – also in Uncirculated condition – at \$60.

"I supposed it's all relative because wages were considerably lower at that time."



Also in 1952, the U.S.-based newspaper *Numismatic News* – a predecessor to *CCN* – began being published weekly. About a decade later, in 1963, its Wisconsin-based founder Chet Krause created what was then known as *Canada Coin News*.

"But really, there weren't that many publications available in Canada in 1959," said Johnson. "There were certainly no computers or Internet, where the majority of numismatic business is now transacted. Of course, third-party grading wasn't developed until the 1980s."

Back when the WCS was formed, there were fewer than 20 coin clubs throughout Canada and "very few coin shows and not many coin shops," Johnson added.

"In 1959, collectors had few options when purchasing coins for their collections. Coin shops were not prevalent and coin shows were not a regular event."

Instead, collectors found dealers listed in *The CN Journal* and sent written requests for price lists.

"There were certainly fewer coins to collect in the 1950s, too," said Johnson, who added only one commemorative – the 1958 silver dollar – was issued by the Royal Canadian Mint in the late '50s. "It was a simpler time, when collectors zeroed in on filling their Whitman coin albums."

In 1959, the Canadian Numismatic Association held its sixth annual convention in Regina, Sask.

"It was the first time the convention was held outside of the province of Ontario. The event brought collectors from across

Founding members of the Waterloo Coin Society played a significant role in forming the Ontario Numismatic Association, Johnson said.

Canada together for a very successful conference that set the stage for future conventions."

That year, the Mint also issued its comprehensive annual report, which collectors "looked forward to receiving," Johnson added.

"Mintages for every denomination were listed along with detailed information for the avid collector."

THE SIXTIES

As the 1960s rolled around, collectors acknowledged the need for a provincial organization to oversee the hobby in Ontario.

"Many members of the Waterloo Coin Society were instrumental in the establishment of the ONA in 1962," said Johnson, who added the first ONA Convention was held in Kitchener that March. "It was a very successful convention with more than 700 collectors and dealers attending from all across Ontario and 229 people at the banquet."

Across the country, coin shows were springing up in cities like Toronto, where Torex was held for the first time in 1962 "with a huge attendance of collectors," Johnson said. "Coin collecting was booming in the 1960s in a big way."

In 1963, the aforementioned *Canada Coin News* publication began publishing out of Iola, Wisc., before moving its operations north to Canada.

"It really filled a void for collectors," said Johnson, who became interested in coin collecting two years later, in 1965.

"I was quite involved in the Peterborough Coin Club back then as a junior. I organized a junior coin club in the city and started the national organization called 'Canadian Young Numismatists,' which was actually formed here in Waterloo during the 1973 ONA Convention."

Paul Johnson, executive secretary of the Royal Canadian Numismatic Association (RCNA), highlighted the Waterloo Coin Society's 60th anniversary with a keynote presentation on the evolution of numismatics over the past six decades.

Continuing as a collector throughout his life – while many others let their hobby fall to the wayside in an effort to balance work and family – Johnson rose through the ranks of "Organized Numismatics."

"My involvement in numismatics for the past 54 years has increased my knowledge in various areas, such as history, geography, economics, politics, dealing with people, business deals, writing skills and educating others. It's a fascinating hobby that can take you into many different areas."

The act of collecting, he said, is "strong in human nature: we have a deep-born urge to gather and collect."

"Numismatics is a wonderful outlet for this urge. This hobby has allowed one to fill the basic collecting instinct in a particularly satisfying way," said Johnson, adding he began by filling holes in his Whitman album but has since evolved into topical collecting, including medals related to architecture as well as the centennial of Canadian Confederation. "I find this much more satisfying and challenging than filling holes."

Over the years, he has travelled to conventions across Canada – every province except Newfoundland – as well as 34 states.

"Numismatics in Canada, from my perspective, has changed over time," he said, adding the introduction of third-party grading in the 1980s and the advent of the Internet in the following decade were two of the "most significant changes."

"There have been highs and lows in the hobby, but coin collecting is still one of the most popular hobbies in the world. Numismatics is a worldwide hobby enjoyed by millions of collectors. From its humble beginnings, coin collecting has evolved to be one of the foremost and well-known hobbies." 🍁

Cambridge show well organized, attended



Show CIRCUIT

By Jeff Fournier

A long-running coin show made its 28th appearance on the numismatic show scene on March 9.

Originally organized and hosted by the Cambridge Coin Club, the show was taken over by the Waterloo Coin Society (WCS) beginning in 2014. This year, several hundred people passed through the doors.

"For many, many years now, even when the Cambridge Coin Club was running the show, cash donations have been accepted for the Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank at the front door, and we continue to do that instead of charging admission," said Brent Mackie, show chair.

ating; in fact, we have collected and donated several thousand dollars over the last few years," added Mackie, who noted there's a long list of club volunteers who assist with security at the show.

CCN columnist and a WCS member Sean Sinclair was roaming around the parking lot during the show, watching for any suspicious behaviour and ensuring there was no damage to vehicles or anyone loitering around them.

Other volunteers were wondering around the bourse and keeping an eye on the dealers' tables.

VOLUNTEERS ESSENTIAL

Mackie was able to talk to the dealers at the show



Alan Roy (left) and Len Trakalo pose for CCN at the recent Cambridge Coin Show, held March 9 at the Cambridge Newfoundland Club. Photos by Jeff Fournier.

By forgoing an admission charge, Mackie said, everyone is able to attend the show and enjoy everything it has to offer – no matter their age or financial means.

"On top of that, we also donate the club's profits from the show to top that up," said Mackie, who added a portion of the show's profits are also donated to the Royal Canadian Numismatic Association (RCNA).

"Historically, people have been very, very generous coming into the show and do-

throughout the day as he made multiple rounds of the bourse.

"Aside from the odd little minor issues, which always come up no matter how well the show is organized, feedback from the dealers and the public has been consistently positive – not just today, but year over year as well."

Speaking of organizing the show, the WCS generally gets upwards of 24 volunteers to work on the day of the coin show. In terms of planning the show ahead of time, there



Left to right: Brent Mackie, chair of the Cambridge Coin Show, works alongside Waterloo Coin Society (WCS) Secretary Peter Becker and WCS President Maher Babbili.

are about six members of the executive who carry the greatest load.

SHOW BENEFITS

Coin shows such as the annual Cambridge event offer many benefits for the collector, Mackie said.

"One of the benefits of having a club-run show versus one that is privately run is that it helps support numismatics in your community," he said, adding the Cambridge show not only helps the WCS but also the local community.

"Anything we're able to generate from this show, from a financial standpoint, helps us give back to local collectors. Also, because it is such a highly regarded show, we get a lot of people out to the show and that helps us to keep the costs for the dealers' tables relatively low. It's a great show for people to come out to whether they are buying, selling or trading. We've traditionally collected several new members for our club at our show and have done so today as well."

The WCS offers membership discounts at its shows, where anyone who's signing up for the club can save \$5 off their \$15 regular membership fee.

"As an ongoing benefit of belonging to the WCS, the club helps our members by paying for the RCNA's 'Numismatic Correspondence Course,' both part one and the more expensive part two," said Mackie. "Any WCS member in good

standing who takes the course, completes its tests and submits the certificate of completion back to the club will have their \$65 cost of that course reimbursed to them."

Think about that deal for a moment – a \$65 value for only the cost of a \$15 annual membership. That's quite the bargain.

Mackie is also pleased with the location of the show – the Cambridge Newfoundland Club on Dunbar Road in Cambridge, Ont. – adding "we love it here."

And how does Mackie envision future Cambridge shows?

"I think we're in a pretty good position right now," he said, adding organizers made "a rather significant change a couple of years ago" by reconfiguring the dealer table layout.

Feedback from that change – not only from dealers but from members of the public and the club – has been "overwhelmingly positive," added Mackie.

"There's a very clear path around the room. There's less congestion than there had been in the past. Every dealer has their own back table now. Every single dealer table is a standard size."

As for future shows, Mackie said he's aiming to maintain the successful status quo.

"I think we have a pretty good recipe here at this point, and as they say, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'"

Mackie also noted the show's concession booth, which is run by the Newfoundland Club, has a great selection of items at reasonable prices and is another plus for the show.

For anyone who would like to attend the next Cambridge Coin Show, it will be held March 14, 2020, at the same location on 1500 Dunbar Rd. in Cambridge, Ont. 🍁



Lorne Barnes (left), one of the dealers at the Cambridge Coin Show, poses with Royal Canadian Numismatic Association President Henry Nienhuis.