

Early U.S. Auction Sales Containing Colonial Coins: Part Two – 1859 to the Civil War

by David F. Fanning

Introduction

The early and mid-1850s saw the development of the coin hobby in the United States, as references began to be published, the market slowly developed and collectors became increasingly sophisticated.¹ The years directly leading up to the Civil War played a pivotal role in ensuring that the nascent hobby survived the bloodshed to come. Despite the increasing tensions surrounding almost every aspect of American life, the leisurely and scholarly pursuit of numismatics established a foothold in the United States at this time, with auction sales being an important part of the hobby.

Whereas auctions took place infrequently for most of the 1850s, from 1859 to 1861 they began to be held with more regularity. In addition, the professional coin dealer was born around this time: while earlier numismatic auctions were conducted by firms that may have auctioned off a sale of furniture, paintings or hardware the week before, sales were increasingly being held by specialists who dealt almost exclusively in coins. That auctions were happening more often and were catalogued more professionally meant that the hobby was going through a period of enervation and vitality.

Coupled with this increased activity within the hobby as a whole was increasing interest in the colonial series.² Some of the foundational works on American numismatics, such as Joseph Felt's *An Historical Account of Massachusetts Currency* (1839), had focused attention on colonial issues. 1858 saw the appearance of John Hickox's *An Historical Account of American Coinage*; this, coupled with the 1859 publication of Montroville Dickeson's *American Numismatical Manual* did much to heighten interest in the pre-federal coinages.³ For these reasons, it is not surprising to find that there was considerable interest in colonial coins in the early years of the hobby and that this interest was reflected in auction sales of the period.

Augustus B. Sage: An American Numismatic Pioneer

The career of Augustus B. Sage (Figure 1) has been discussed at length by Q. David Bowers in his *American Numismatics before the Civil War, 1760-1860: Emphasizing the Story of Augustus B. Sage*.⁴ A numismatic *wunderkind*, Sage burst upon the scene in the late 1850s, becoming one of the very first U.S. coin dealers, cataloguing some important numismatic auctions, and helping to establish the American Numismatic Society, all while he was a teenager.⁵ Unfortunately, his early career was interrupted by service in the Union Army during the Civil War, and while he appears to have retained some numismatic interest following the war, his level of activity in the hobby was minimal, and he died at the age of 32.

The sale of the Henry Bogert collection was held at Bangs, Merwin and Company in New York, from February 28 to March 5, 1859.⁶ Catalogued by Sage, the sale is considered one of the most important of the antebellum period. Philadelphia collector Joseph J. Mickley bid on pieces in the auction,⁷ as did many other prominent numismatists. (Mickley's collection would eventually be sold by W. Elliot Woodward in a fantastic auction from October 28 to November 2 1867.) Bringing a total of \$2198.47, the Bogert sale set a new record for an American numismatic auction, and it contained more significant colonial material than any of the sales discussed in Part One of this article.

Bogert was a printer and an active numismatist, joining the American Numismatic Society in the year of its foundation and serving in the office of First Vice-President from November 3, 1858 to March



11, 1864.⁸ He was depicted on one of the small medals struck as part of Sage's "Numismatic Gallery" series in 1859,⁹ and was the father of the landscape painter George Henry Bogert. Another sale of material from his collection would be held in 1867.

Bogert's cabinet included a number of colonial delicacies in addition to some lower-end lots.¹⁰ A Chalmers shilling sold for \$13 to a buyer recorded only as RLS (almost certainly Robert L. Stuart), who also obtained a Castorland jeton in silver for \$8. Another collector, F.A. Paddock, made some very significant purchases, including a J CUT MY WAY THROUGH Higley copper for \$14.50 and a 1792 Washington Getz "half dollar" in silver for the astounding price of \$57. Coin dealer John Curtis won a pewter Continental Currency dollar for a bargain \$4.50 and a proof Small Eagle 1791 Washington cent for \$14, while the Large Eagle piece in the following lot sold to Mark Wilks Collett for \$10.50.

Sage also catalogued the collection of James D. Foskett, which was sold on June 7, 1859. Foskett was among those who helped establish the American Numismatic Society in 1858, though his interest seems to have abated quickly.¹¹ The sale was a decent one, though not outstanding. An Indian Peace Medal featuring Thomas Jefferson sold for \$5.50 to John Curtis, while a copper Castorland jeton went for the same price to Edwin Bishop. A number of early American coins and tokens were featured in the sale, including the following lots:

261. Curious Vermon Auctori. Struck over an Irish halfpenny of George III. Rare specimen.

[sold for 50 cents to "Dawson"]

267. 2 Frankin cents. 1787. Fine. [what we now call Fugio cents: sold for \$1.10 for the pair to Bishop]

274. Very rare Connecticut cent. ET LIB INDE. 1787. [sold to Sage himself for \$1.00]

275. Do. Do. Do. AUCTOPI CONNEC. 1787. [brought 44 cents to Curtis]

276. Connecticut Cent. INDE ET LIB. [purchased by "Lawson" for 33 cents]

277. Tory cent of Vermont. Head of George III. Rev. BRITANNIA. 1787. Very rare. [sold for 75 cents to C.A. Leveridge]¹²

Sage's last sale was that of the collection of Henry Whitmore, sold November 2–3, 1859. This sale did better than the Foskett sale, though neither were up to the level of the Bogert collection. Whitmore was another ANS founder, and served as a First Vice-President for a short period. His collection was stronger in U.S. federal coinage than was typical at the time, though it also included some interesting colonial material. A 1787 Excelsior copper (described as "Rev. Spread Eagle," possibly meaning what we now call the Large Eagle) brought \$17 to coin dealer Ezra Hill. A Kentucky token, or "Triangle cent," as they were frequently catalogued at the time, brought \$3.25 to Benjamin J. Gallagher. A Nova Eborac copper with figure seated to the left brought \$2.25 to Curtis, while a right-facing variety brought \$2 to William Leggett Bramhall. Those modern collectors who shake their heads at the high prices brought by some colonials can gasp in wonder at the seven cents paid by Curtis for a "curious type" of 1788 Connecticut cent and the two varieties of North American tokens bought by Sage for a dime apiece.

The Whitmore sale is the last catalogue ascribed to Sage, though it is possible he had a hand in others. Both his auction sales and fixed price lists (not discussed here) are avidly sought by collectors, all the more so since Bowers published his book on Sage.

Edward Cogan's Early Sales

Edward Cogan (Figure 2) started out around the same time as Sage, but ended up making a long-term career out of coin sales. As I mentioned in Part One of this article, his first few sales were not typical auctions. The coins being offered were kept at his shop, and collectors were invited to view them in person and submit sealed bids for them (with Cogan providing a minimum bid at which he bought in any lots passed on by the bidders). On



the appointed day, the envelopes would be opened and the coins awarded to the highest bidder, who was likely in attendance. No catalogues were prepared for these sales. Cogan did eventually print an edition of his first sale a few years later for history's sake, but his second through fourth sales were not printed in any form until numismatic bibliographer Emmanuel J. Attinelli printed them years later from the original manuscripts Cogan had used. Unfortunately for collectors today, Attinelli printed only 25 copies of each, and their survival rate has been atrocious: they are extremely rare, with only a few copies known. Numismatic bibliophile Charles Davis reprinted the first four Cogan sales in 1994, but as he limited his reprint to an additional 25 copies, they remain difficult to find.¹³

Cogan's second sale, held March 7–13, 1859,¹⁴ was of the collection of New York bookseller Charles B. Foote. The 273 lots included a number of colonial coins and Washington pieces. Some of the highlights included a 1785 Immune Columbia piece that brought \$10 and a 1787 Immunis Columbia that sold for \$7.50 (unfortunately, there is no record of who bought the coins in the Attinelli printing of this sale, nor is there any further information given on the varieties of these pieces). A 1792 Washington cent took top honors, selling at \$15. A collection of Connecticut coppers, consisting of 41 varieties, was sold as one lot for \$8.50. As the manuscript from which the catalogue was eventually printed was never intended to be distributed to potential bidders as would be the case with a conventional auction sale, there is no information given at all about the condition of the pieces being offered.

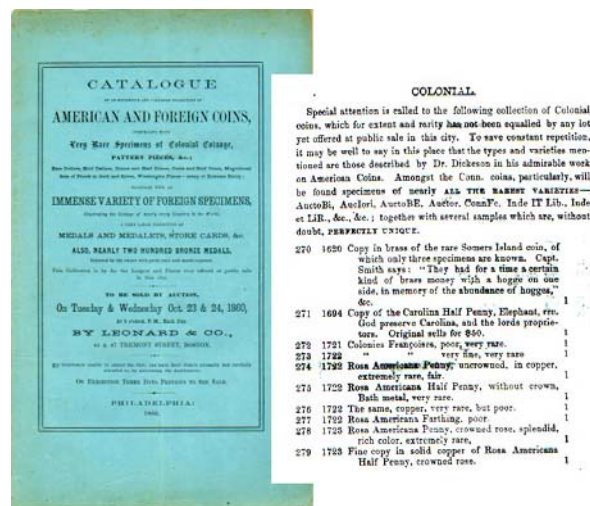
Two months later, Cogan offered the collection of Simon Gratz on May 21, 1859. The collection was modest, but included some interesting colonial material. A set consisting of a Pine Tree shilling, sixpence and threepence sold for \$11, while a twopence sold separately for \$3. A coin catalogued as being a "1783, Nova Cæsarea 'E Pluribus'" copper sold for \$4. A Castorland jeton (presumably in silver, though not stated as being such) went for \$8. As usual, Washington material ruled the day, with one 1791 Small Eagle cent selling for \$25 and another for \$20. (By comparison, a 1796 half cent sold for \$11 and an 1851 restrike proof Seated Liberty dollar brought \$15.)

Cogan's fourth sale was held on October 28, 1859, and consisted of the collection of W.C. Tripler. (In point of fact, the standard practice of the day among many coin dealers was to purchase collections outright and then sell them at auction: this was the case with the Tripler collection, which actually belonged to Cogan at the time of the sale.) The sale included some rare federal issues, including a 1794 dollar, 1797 half dollar, and 1831 half cent. Unfortunately, the colonial content is less impressive (this is especially unfortunate as this is the only one of these early Cogan sales to have the buyers' names recorded). J.N.T. Levick purchased a 1767 French Colonies sou for 60 cents and a Vermont Baby Head for 80 cents, while a Georgius Triumpho copper sold for \$1.50 to a buyer recorded only as Brooks (probably Henry M. Brooks, whose collection would be sold by Woodward in 1863). Again, this catalogue was printed from a manuscript meant only to be a record for Cogan himself, and not for use by others. Because of this, there are occasionally pieces described in the barest possible terms. Brooks was the purchaser of one of these items, described only as "E Pluribus Unum," for the advanced price of \$10.

W. Elliot Woodward's Beginnings

W. Elliot Woodward also began his numismatic career shortly before the Civil War, though his first few sales show little sign that he would develop into the preeminent numismatic cataloguer of his day. The first sale in which he took part (June 27-28, 1860, a rare catalogue that he referred to as Sale A, and which preceded his Sale 1), could have been significant for future researchers as it contained silver coins attributed to the Castine hoard. Unfortunately, John W. Adams describes it as "poorly catalogued" in his classic 1982 reference on 19th-century auction catalogues, and the sale was ended partway through.¹⁵ Likewise, Woodward's Sale 1 (July 31, 1860) contained a Lord Baltimore denarium, but is also regarded as having been sub-par work (it is also an extremely rare catalogue). According to a surviving annotated copy, a Pine Tree threepence was offered at the sale, but not listed in the catalogue. It was a found coin, located at a building site "on the corner of North and Main Streets."¹⁶

Woodward's Sale 2 (October 23-24, 1860) did contain some material of interest, especially to collectors of Connecticut coppers, of which many varieties were offered (Figure 3). Attinelli, who didn't even mention Woodward's name when describing his previous sale in *Numisgraphics*, notes that "upward of 100 varieties of colonial pieces are separately described in this catalogue."¹⁷ Included in this colonial group were 49 separate lots of Connecticut coppers (lots 302-350), with some noted as not being described in Dickeson.¹⁸ This interest in publishing the details of die varieties and resisting the typical business practice of lumping related varieties into a group lot is a sign that Woodward was dissatisfied with the usual cataloguing practices of the day, though this would not become truly evident until the publication of his groundbreaking catalogue of the Finotti sale in 1862.



Cogan Hits His Stride

With the December 19–20, 1859 offering of the J.N.T. Levick collection, Edward Cogan assumed center stage in the numismatic auction arena. While the sale itself didn't perform as well as the Bogert or Kline sales, this was Cogan's first sale to take place in the traditional auction format he was to retain for the rest of his career. It was also a substantial collection, comprising almost 1,000 lots that had belonged to one of the foremost collectors of tokens and storecards of the nineteenth century. While the colonial content was slim, it did include two Birch cents and was a significant enough sale that Cogan went to the expense of printing a post-sale edition of the catalogue, available on both ordinary and large paper, with the prices realized printed next to each lot. This bibliographic extravagance was continued for some of his following sales as well. The large-paper copies "are so rare as to be virtually noncollectible," according to Adams.¹⁹

Cogan's next sale, his sixth (May 21–22, 1860), was that of the Alfred B. Taylor collection, and included such desiderata as an NE shilling, a Lord Baltimore groat and a Kentucky token struck in silver (presumably Breen 1164). Pine Tree shillings brought between \$5 and \$7, with a sixpence going for \$5.25, and a threepence and twopence for \$5 apiece. Interestingly, a set consisting of Wyatt copies of the Pine Tree six-, three- and twopence went for \$11, just a few dollars shy of what the originals brought. An NE shilling described as "good" sold for \$25, while the Lord Baltimore groat went for \$28. The Kentucky token in silver found a home at \$35.

Collectors of New Jersey coppers may be interested in knowing how these pieces were described more than twenty years before the publication of the Maris reference:

- 593 Nova Caesarea, 1786, end of plough straight [brought 10 cents]
- 594 " " " inclining up [brought 10 cents]
- 595 " 1787, " different [brought 10 cents]
- 596 " " " inclining down [brought 20 cents]
- 597 " " wreath under the head [brought 20 cents]
- 598 " " knobs to end of plough [brought 20 cents]

While still below the \$2,000 mark in total prices realized, the Taylor sale is a very significant sale of the period.²⁰

The final Cogan sale worth discussing in this article is his eighth, of October 18–19, 1860. This sale included a number of rare colonials, many of them in unusually nice condition. The star of the show was

lot 661, an Excelsior copper (“spread eagle”) that sold to De Silva for \$32. An “Annapolis threepence” (Chalmer’s threepence) brought \$16.50 to Bertoch, while an Immunis Columbia piece (variety not stated) went for \$14.50 to De Silva. Other pieces of note include two proof Virginia halfpennies (one described as being on a large planchet, the other described as on a small one), which sold for \$5.25 and \$3.13 to Hoffman, a USA “Bar Cent” that went for \$9.25 to Ferris, a 1787 Auctori Plebis purchased by De Silva for \$8.25, and a tin Continental Currency “dollar” that brought \$7 from Wallace. The sale included a number of Pine Tree pieces, which sold for between \$5.25 and \$8.25 apiece. A Wyatt Pine Tree “penny” brought \$5.63 from Body, more than was paid for a genuine Pine tree shilling (of the “apple tree die,” according to the catalogue) by Bertoch.²¹

Other Antebellum Auction Sales

Though the sales of prominent dealers like Sage, Cogan and Woodward tend to be the focus of numismatic scholars delving into the early history of our hobby, it should be remembered that there were others active in the numismatic scene of the day. Indeed, of the 53 auction sales listed by Martin Gengerke for the period covered by the present article, only 15 involved the persons just named.²² Other dealers involved with coin sales during this time period include Ezra Hill, John Curtis and John Wiggin, and some collectors probably catalogued their own collections when they were sold through auction houses like Bangs, Merwin and Company, Leonard and Company, and M. Thomas and Sons (such as William Legget Bramhall, Edward Groh, and Benjamin Haines).

To take just one example, a sale was conducted on May 30, 1860 at the Tremont Street location of Leonard and Company, an active Boston auction house that regularly conducted numismatic sales during this period. According to Attinelli, this sale was the property of John K. Wiggin, “a well-known antiquarian bookseller and dealer in rare prints, as well as somewhat of a coin dealer.”²³ The sale is notable for almost entirely consisting of American coins at a time when this was far from the norm. Most remarkable, however, is the relatively high quality of the descriptions in the catalogue. While still brief and vague by today’s standards, they are decidedly above average for an 1860 auction catalogue, frequently noting differences even in die variety. (Bowers notes of the 1862 Wiggin sale that “the catalogue included descriptions that were much more detailed than the typical listings of the era,”²⁴ confirming in my mind that the same person — Wiggin himself — catalogued both sales.)

The colonial content of the sale is not especially impressive, but it does give us a good idea of what a typical sale of the time period would have included (Figure 4). Some selections include:

- 240 1652 Pine Tree Shilling, Good fair impression, very rare type, large size. [sold for \$3.00]
- 241 1652 Pine Tree Shilling, Fine condition, peculiar tree. [sold for \$2.75]
- 242 1652 “ “ Fair, oak shrub tree, very rare, small size. [sold for \$2.00]
- 247 1723 Rosa Americana Penny, with crown. Very good and very rare. [sold for \$1.50]
- 248 1722 Rosa Americana half Penny, without crown, Very good and very rare, pierced. [sold for \$1.25]
- 251 1737 Higley Copper, Value of threepence, &c., solid electrotype in copper, good and very rare. [sold for 50 cents]
- 258 1786 Vermontensium Res Publica. Very fine and very scarce varieties, one with 7 trees, one with 5 trees, very distinct. [2 pieces; sold for \$1.00, probably each²⁵]
- 266 1795 [Talbot, Allum and Lee.] Superb uncirculated proof, very rich color, extremely rare in such condition. [sold for \$2.00]

COLONIAL AND PATTERN PIECES.	
300	240 1652 Pine Tree Shilling, Good fair impression, very rare type, large size. 1
275	241 1652 Pine Tree Shilling, Fine condition, peculiar tree. 1
275	242 1652 " " Fair, oak shrub tree, very rare, small size. 1
	243 1652 Pine Tree Shilling, Fair, different variety, scarce, small size. 1
50	244 1652 Pine Tree Shilling, Poor. 1
225	245 1652 Pine Tree Sixpence, Very good, shrub tree, very rare. 1
225	246 1652 Pine Tree Threepence, Very fine, and very rare type. 1
150	247 1723 Rosa Americana Penny, with crown. Very good and very rare. 1
125	248 1722 Rosa Americana half Penny, without crown, Very good and very rare, pierced. 1
50	249 1723 Woods half Penny, Very good and scarce. 1
50	250 1767 Colonies Franceses, R. F., poor, but very rare. 1
50	251 1737 Higley Copper, Value of threepence, &c., solid electrotype in copper, good and very rare. 1
100	252 1773 Virginia half Penny, Very fine, rare. 1
50	253 1773 " " Fair, " 1
50	254 1773 " " Poor. 1
50	255 1785 Nova Constellatio, <i>AL. SP.</i> very fine, varieties, rarely found so good. 2
25	256 1785 Nova Constellatio, Different wreath and rays, poor. 2
40	257 1785 Nova Constellatio, U. S., very good. 1
100	258 1786 Vermontensium Res Publica, Very fine and very scarce varieties, one with 7 trees, one with 5 trees, very distinct. 2
100	259 1785 Vermon Auctori, Very good, varieties, scarce. 2

276 [1787 and 1788 Massachusetts] Half Cents, Remarkably fine, uncirculated, rarely seen in such perfect condition. [2 pieces; sold for \$3.25, probably each]

The sale also included a wide array of Washington pieces, with a “Washington Cent, 1791, small eagle, very fine, of *extreme rarity*” bringing \$15, a “superb proof” Large Eagle selling for \$10 and a “Washington Cent, 1792, ‘GENERAL OF THE AMERICAN ARMIES, &C,’ *lettered edge*, extremely fine, and of the *highest rarity* in such condition” going at \$14. As points of reference, a 1796 half dollar described as “*fine and excessively rare*” brought \$5 and a 1799 cent listed as “Remarkably fine, and of extreme rarity, date perfect” brought \$10.

Conclusion

The years leading up to the Civil War were ones of intense numismatic activity. Dealers such as John Curtis, Augustus Sage and Ezra Hill were at the height of their careers and long-term professionals like Cogan and Woodward were becoming established. The auction scene was busy, and early American coins, medals and tokens were receiving unprecedented attention. As the country following the Civil War would in many ways little resemble that which preceded it, the numismatic world would also change in many ways. That will be the focus of the next installment of this series.

Endnotes

1. See Part One of this article, published in *The C4 Newsletter*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 34-41.
2. Throughout these articles, the term “colonial” is used in its broad, common usage among U.S. numismatists, including in its scope the Confederation era coinage and also including issues produced during the federal era that for a variety of reasons continue to be perceived and collected as “colonial.”
3. It would be difficult to overstate the importance to and influence on U.S. numismatics of Dickeson’s book. Worthy of an article in itself, suffice to say that it was the standard guide to American coins for much of the nineteenth century. Later editions dropped the cumbersome term *numismatical* from the title and replaced it with the simpler *numismatic*.
4. Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Bowers and Merena Galleries, 1998.
5. Sage is often identified as the cataloguer of the 1855 Flandin sale (discussed in Part One of this article), but the fact that the sale took place when he was only 13 seems good evidence against this.
6. An addendum to the sale, dated February 28 but planned to be sold on March 5, was actually sold on March 7 (Bowers, p. 294).
7. Orosz, Joel J., “A Glimpse into the Lost World of Antebellum Coin Dealers,” *The Asylum*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 5-9. According to Orosz, Mickley was “one of the ‘big three’ American numismatists before the Civil War,” the others being Matthew A. Stickney and Robert Gilmer, Jr.
8. Adelson, Howard L., *The American Numismatic Society: 1858-1958* (New York: ANS, 1958), p. 348.
9. Bowers, p. 249.
10. The author would like to acknowledge Joel J. Orosz for providing information on the prices and buyers at the Bogert sale.
11. Bowers, p. 297.
12. Information regarding the Foskett and Whitmore sales comes from Bowers, pages 302–310. Bowers notes that the Vermont copper in lot 277 was probably a Ryder 13, as were the pieces offered in lots 297 and 306. Note that the bidder names that Bowers transcribes as Dawson and Lawson are almost certainly the same person: the handwriting on the copy he consulted is a bit unclear (though I’m inclined to go with Lawson).
13. *Priced Catalogue of the Public Auction Sales 1–4 of Edward Cogan, Philadelphia, 1858-1859* (Wenham, Massachusetts: Charles Davis, 1994).

14. The dates given in the catalogue of the Foote sale presumably indicate the period during which Cogan accepted bids for the items. The sale is a small one and certainly didn't require a week to sell.
15. *United States Numismatic Literature, Volume One: Nineteenth-Century Auction Catalogs* (Mission Viejo, California: George F. Kolbe, 1982; with an "Additions and Corrections" supplement published in 2001). Regarding the sale being terminated, see Emmanuel Joseph Attinelli, *Numisgraphics* (1876), reprinted in 1976 as *A Bibliography of American Numismatic Auction Catalogues, 1828-1875* (Lawrence, Massachusetts: Quarterman, 1976), p. 18.
16. Van Zandt, Frank, "McLachlan Set of Woodward Sales Stirs Interest," *The Asylum*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1995), pp. 13–20.
17. Attinelli, p. 20.
18. The author would like to acknowledge Charles Davis for providing some of the information used in discussing Woodward.
19. Adams, p. 18.
20. The author would like to thank Joel J. Orosz for providing information on Cogan's sale of the Taylor collection.
21. The author would like to acknowledge Frank Campbell, of the American Numismatic Society, for providing information on Cogan's eighth sale. I am unable to provide first names for any of the bidders cited as buyers in this sale, though "Hoffman" may be Francis S. Hoffmann and "Body" may be C.N. Bodey. The use of pseudonyms by established bidders may explain some of this; otherwise, it simply points out the degree to which we have lost sight of our numismatic ancestors.
22. Gengerke, Martin, *American Numismatic Auctions*, CD-ROM, 2002.
23. Attinelli, p. 18. Well-known he may have been, but Attinelli still had trouble getting his name right. The 1860 sale is attributed to *Wiggins*, while an 1862 sale is attributed to John K. *Wiggin* of the same city. The similarity of name and location, plus a similarity in cataloguing style, makes it clear that these are the same person. Q. David Bowers and Pete Smith have used *Wiggin* in their writing, and this would seem to be correct.
24. Bowers, p. 356.
25. Priced nineteenth-century catalogues can be confusing when it comes to group lots, as some dealers and auction houses would record the price brought by the entire lot, while others would want people to bid per piece and would record the price brought in that fashion. Careful comparison of lots and prices can usually help determine the manner in which such lots were sold in a given sale.

Captions

Figure 1 — Numismatic *wunderkind* Augustus B. Sage catalogued important auction sales in the years before the Civil War.

Figure 2 — Edward Cogan was among the earliest coin dealers in the United States and was perhaps the first to make it a long-term, consistently successful occupation.

Figure 3 — W. Elliot Woodward's Sale 2 included a decent selection of colonial coins and, though tersely composed by today's standards, suggested that he was dissatisfied with the cataloguing of the day. (Photo courtesy of Charles Davis.)

Figure 4 — Some of the colonials offered in the 1860 Wiggin sale, with prices noted in the margin.