

TOP 10

AMERICAN NUMISMATIC BOOKS

OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Important works continue to inform and teach today's collectors.

REGARDLESS OF THEIR AREAS of interest or levels of expertise, coin collectors today have access to thousands of books, catalogs and periodicals

that answer questions, assist in attribution or simply provide an enjoyable evening's reading. Even a casual collector on a modest budget can fill an entire bookshelf with useful numismatic literature in surprisingly little time.

It wasn't always so. In the 1850s, when the numismatic hobby first became widely popular in the United States, only a handful of works on American coins, medals and paper money had been published. Much of what was available was aimed more at merchants, economists and government personnel than hobbyists, though occasional works were issued for amateur historians. With the hobby's growth in the 1860s and beyond, the number of publications appearing about U.S. coins began to slowly

increase. By the end of the 19th century, the savvy collector could have built a sizable library.

The following 10 classics of American numismatic literature were written and published in the 19th century. For each reference, I've provided some context about its importance and continuing significance. I've also noted other, earlier works where relevant. Some of these publications are justly famous and remain useful today. Others are rather obscure, though they were noteworthy in their day.

1) *The Early Coins of America* by Sylvester S. Crosby (1875)

Though the following list is in no particular order, most would agree that Sylvester Sage Crosby's (1831-1914) foundational work is the single-most important contribution to 19th-century U.S. numismatic literature. Few names in the history of the hobby are afforded such unalloyed respect and admiration. A watchmaker by trade, Crosby



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The distinctive appellations Maris assigned the various die varieties gave these numismatic workhorses of the first U.S. Mint a dignity and classical charm.

put his meticulous professional habits to good use in his avocation as a numismatist. A student of the history and coinage of the American colonies, he exemplified the dictum that it falls largely to devoted amateurs to do the real work of numismatics.

Crosby began publishing works on coins in the late 1860s, most notably in the April 1869 issue of the *American Journal of Numismatics*. His article “The United States Cents of 1793” appeared in that issue, accompanied by an outstanding photographic plate compiled by J.N.T. Levick that depicted the various die varieties. That same year, Crosby began assembling the materials that would form the nexus of *The Early Coins of*

America. Crosby was a member of a committee assigned by the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society to write a work on early American numismatics. As those who are involved in committee work will not be surprised to learn, he soon found himself the *only* member doing any work, and the immense task fell completely to him.

That Crosby completed the book at all is noteworthy. That he combined careful historical documentation with close numismatic study is remarkable. That his work remains the foundation upon which all subsequent numismatic studies of Early America are based is extraordinary.

First published as a complete book in 1875, extracts began appearing as early as 1873.

2) *Varieties of the Copper Issues of the United States Mint in the Year 1794*

by Edward Maris (1869 and 1870)

This was the first stand-alone monograph on a specific area of U.S. coinage. The author, Edward Maris, was a Quaker physician who would go on to write the standard work on New Jersey coppers in 1881. Maris’ work on the 1794 large cent had a lasting effect on this branch of

the hobby, despite that it began to become obsolete with the 1879 publication of Édouard Frossard’s *Monograph of United States Cents and Half Cents Issued between the Years 1793 and 1857*. The distinctive appellations Maris assigned the various die varieties—the Patagonian, Venus Marina, the Coquette, the Roman Plica—gave these numismatic workhorses of the first U.S. Mint a dignity and classical charm that have never been shaken, even though today the names have been replaced by mere numbers.

The work was issued in modest pamphlet form in 1869, with a very rare second edition appearing in 1870. The Maris monograph was finally supplanted by Frossard’s 1893 *Varieties of United States Cents of the Year 1794*, written with the collaboration of W.W. Hays.

3) *Catalogue of John W. Haseltine’s Type Table of U.S. Dollars, Half Dollars & Quarter Dollars* by John W. Haseltine (1881)

The first auction catalog in this Top 10 list, it is one of the few such publications to become a standard reference. While colonials had been masterfully covered by Crosby, and early coppers were being dissected by Maris and Frossard, John Haseltine turned his attention to U.S. silver coinage.

Though the *Type Table* itself served as an auction listing of Haseltine’s own collection, the descriptions were so detailed and so carefully written that it could be used as a guide to all U.S. silver varieties. Indeed, Haseltine intended to create an illustrated edition, noting in his introduction to the sale, “At a future time, if I should decide to issue a work upon this subject, each variety will be given a name to more easily distinguish it, and plates be given of those pieces that have but slight differences, in order that collectors could more readily determine them.” Unfortunately, he never published such a work.

Not remarkably, the catalog itself was used as a standard reference for quarters, half dollars and dollars for many years, requiring the combined 20th-century works of A.W. Browning, M.L. Beistle and M.H. Bolender to supplant it. It finally fell into

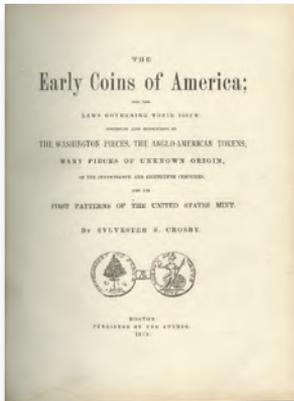


PHOTO: ANA LIBRARY

▲ NO. 1: The foundation for subsequent works on Early American coins.

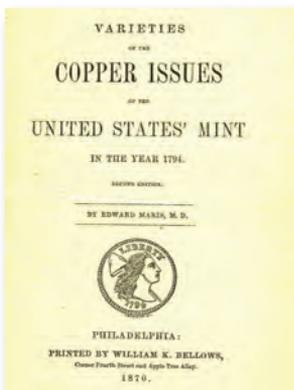


PHOTO: DAVID FANNING

▲ NO. 2: Modest pamphlet with a lasting effect.

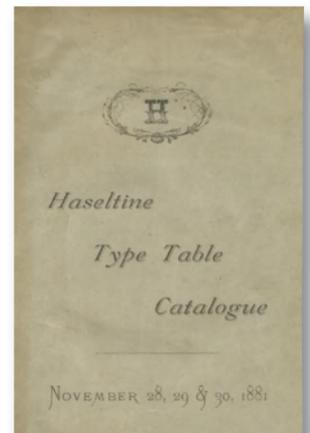


PHOTO: ANA LIBRARY

▲ NO. 3: For many years, a standard reference.

Keep in mind there were no standard price guides at the time, and much of the information we take for granted had yet to be recorded.

obsolescence in 1950. It should be noted that the Fall 1993 issue of *The Asylum* (the quarterly journal of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society) featured an article by Charles Davis that demonstrated the probability that the *Type Table* was mostly the work of numismatist J. Colvin Randall.

If Haseltine's (or was it Randall's?) *Type Table* did much to provide a taxonomy for the varieties of U.S. silver coins, another 19th-century publication helped expand the range of study of both silver and gold coins. *A Treatise on the Coinage of the United States Branch Mints*, by Augustus G. Heaton (1893), is the formal title of the work more widely known as *Mint Marks*. Heaton's short book (less than 60 pages) promoted the collecting of coins by mintmark as well as by date. While Heaton wasn't the first to suggest such a thing, his treatise listed the products of the branch Mints and provided essential information about them. (Keep in mind there were no standard price guides or even general listings of U.S. coins at the time, and much of the information we take for granted as readily available had yet to be recorded.)

4) *The American Numismatological Manual of the Currency or Money of the Aborigines, and Colonial, State, and United States Coins* by Montroville Wilson Dickeson (1859, 1860 and 1865)

The first attempt at a true encyclopedia of U.S. coinage, Montroville Dickeson's work, coupled with an 1858 volume by John H. Hickcox, *An Historical Account of American Coinage*, was a quantum leap forward in what had been published on the subject. While both Dickeson's and Hickcox's works are admirable for the time, Dickeson won the quest for longevity, seeing his work appear in three different editions. (The latter two changed the title's awkward "Numismatological" to the more tidy "Numismatic.")

The Hickcox volume, though in some respects a better book, enjoyed only one edition of 200 copies, thereby limiting its distribution and influence. (It wasn't reprinted for over a century.) It also focused much of its attention on Early American issues, giving short shrift to federal coinage. Walter Breen mentioned Dickeson's work in his *Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins*, describing it as a "pioneering effort to cover the same material as this Encyclopedia, before the necessary comparison methods were developed."

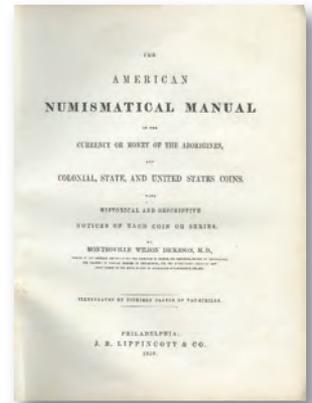
Both Dickeson and Hickcox could draw inspiration from Jacob R. Eckfeldt and William E. Du Bois' *Manual of Gold and Silver Coins of All Nations, Struck within the Past Century* (1842), though that book was written less for collectors than for "the commercial world" and covered modern world coins, not just those of the United States.

5) *Catalogue of the Numismatic Collection Formed by Joseph J. Mickley, Esq., of Philadelphia* by W. Elliot Woodward (1867)

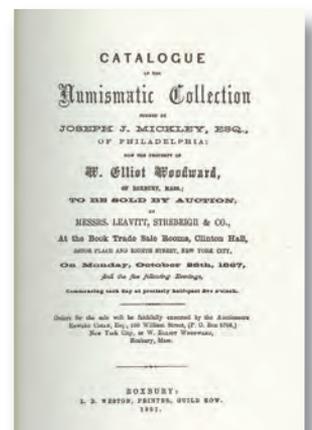
With the increasing popularity of coin collecting in the late 1850s came the first coin dealers. While people previously had occasionally dabbled in coins, now gentlemen were hanging out their numismatic shingles. Most of their business was conducted through auctions, and their catalogs were avidly collected as the most accurate price guides available.

One of the most notable of these coin dealers was W. Elliot Woodward of Roxbury, Massachusetts. In 1867 he sold the collection assembled by Joseph J. Mickley, an auctioneer the likes of which had never been seen. The massive catalog was nearly 200 pages long and listed 3,349 lots, and yet the quality of the contents was as impressive as the quantity. Indeed, numismatic researcher John W. Adams has called the Mickley holdings "perhaps the greatest U.S. collection," a superlative that seems entirely justified.

The sale featured astounding rarities and brought very strong prices. Early numismatic bibliographer Emmanuel J. Attinelli stated that the \$750 brought by Mickley's 1804 dollar was "probably the highest sum ever paid in this country for a single coin." The sale is especially important for colonials, early U.S. copper and silver, medals, numismatic literature, patterns, proofs, Washingtonia and British coins. (Most of Mickley's U.S. gold had been stolen in a massive



▲ NO. 4: A treatise on American coins.



▲ NO. 5: Impressive auction catalog.

PHOTOS: ANA LIBRARY

The Bushnell sale is especially important to the study of large cents, colonials, medals, tokens, patterns and Washingtonia.

robbery earlier in the year, prompting him to sell the remainder of the collection.) It is unquestionably the most important American auction sale to take place in the period before the use of photographic plates.

6) *Catalogue of the Celebrated and Valuable Collection of American Coins and Medals of the Late Charles I. Bushnell* by S.H. and H. Chapman (1882)

This catalog is a landmark of U.S. numismatic literature, being among the most important of the photographically plated, 19th-century American numismatic auction catalogs. The Bushnell collection was the stuff of fables, being well known, yet little seen. After Bushnell's death in 1880, a number of prominent dealers attempted to obtain the collection, but it was the young Chapman brothers who, to the surprise of many, made off

with the prize. The sumptuous catalog the Chapmans prepared was heavily criticized, most prominently by Ed. Frossard in *Numisma*. He gleefully recorded a number of mistakes the brothers made. Errors aside, the catalog is a masterpiece and a fitting homage to the collection.

The Bushnell sale is especially important to the study of large cents, colonials, medals, tokens, patterns and Washingtonia. The catalog was produced in large format, listed 3,000 lots and, perhaps most important, included 12 photographically printed plates illustrating pieces

from the collection. The Chapman brothers charged \$5 for the plated publication, a rather high price at the time, but the deluxe format helped bring future consignments their way. Over the next few decades, the brothers integrated high-quality photography into most of their better catalogs, making them extremely collectable today.

Other dealers experimented with the inclusion of photographic plates in their catalogs, though rarely with the success of the Chapman brothers. One especially notable plated sale is that of the Lorin G. Parmelee collection. Held by the New York Coin & Stamp Company (Harlan P. Smith and David U. Proskey) on June 25-27, 1890, it is

particularly significant for its colonial coins, patterns, and U.S. federal copper, silver and gold coins. While the front-line collection was smaller than some of the others mentioned here (1,443 lots), the quality of the coins was extraordinary. Parmelee was in the habit of acquiring entire collections, skimming for upgrades and new additions to his cabinet, and disposing of the rest at auction—a practice that resulted in a truly astonishing collection. That said, the New York Coin & Stamp Company catalog is generally regarded as an underwhelming effort, and its importance lies in the quality of the collection within it.

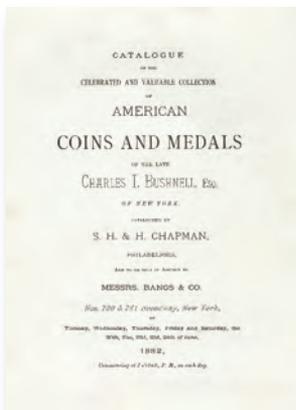
7) *The Medalllic History of the United States of America, 1776-1876* by J.F. Loubat (1878-81)

One of the most aesthetically pleasing American numismatic works of the 19th century, Joseph Florimond, Duc de Loubat's outstanding work on U.S. medals is also renowned for its historical accuracy and numismatic excellence. It was issued in a variety of editions and states, though most (perhaps all) the differences appear to be relegated to the title page and Loubat's constantly growing list of affiliations and aristocratic titles.

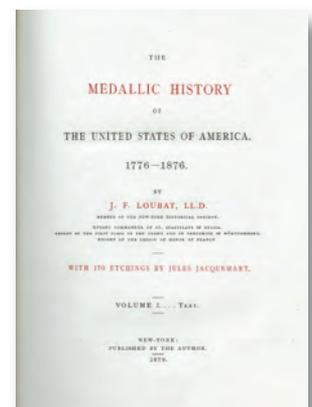
The two-volume work features extraordinary engravings by Jules Jacquemart that illustrate the medals commemorated. Its production values were of the highest standards, and it would have few peers among books published today. The 1908 volume of the *American Journal of Numismatics* opined that "his sumptuous work on the Official Medals struck by the authority of the United States marked an epoch in our medallic history." If the execution of the work itself were not distinguished enough, a handful of copies are known in deluxe bindings, apparently reserved by the author for presentation.

The collecting and study of medals was a pursuit more popular in the 19th century than the one that followed it, though the field is witnessing a revival of interest today. Indeed, the very first numismatic work ever published in the United States, an 1821 article by James Mease entitled "Description of Some of the Medals Struck in Relation to Important Events in North

PHOTOS: ANA LIBRARY



▲ NO. 6: Large-format catalog with photographically printed plates.



▲ NO. 7: Numismatically excellent and historically accurate.

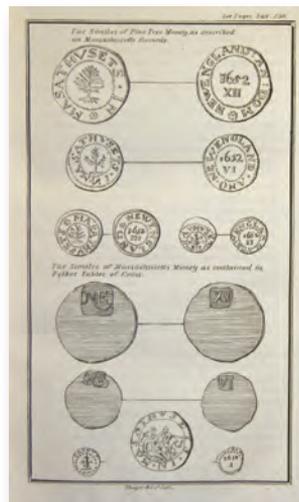
Later in the century, the collecting and study of paper money became more widespread, and a number of quality works were published.

America,” was devoted to American medals. Two landmark works on American medals published during the later 19th century are W.S. Baker’s *Medallic Portraits of Washington* (1885) and C. Wyllys Betts’ *American Colonial History Illustrated by Contemporary Medals* (1894). The latter was published after the author’s death and was edited from his notes by prominent numismatists Lyman H. Low and William T.R. Marvin. Both works remain essential references today.

8) An Historical Account of Massachusetts Currency by Joseph B. Felt (1839)

This is the oldest work on the Top 10 list, and the first to deal substantially with paper money as well as coins. The importance of Joseph B. Felt’s publication was acknowledged early on by collectors, though Henry Phillips Jr. bemoaned its scarcity as early as 1865. It is underappreciated by numismatists today, who rarely recognize its foundational status. The volume is based on two lectures Felt delivered before the Massachusetts Historical Society, which, along with the New-York Historical Society, was one of the few organizations to publish works on numismatics before the 1850s.

Later in the century, the collecting and study of paper money became more widespread, and a number of quality works were published. Perhaps the most notable ones on colonial and Continental paper money were those by Henry Phillips Jr. His *Historical Sketches of the Paper Currency of the American Colonies, Prior to the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, First Series and Continental Paper Money: Historical Sketches of American Paper Currency, Second Series* (1865-66) are especially important. Later in the century, the collecting of Confederate States of America issues became popular, and several books were published that attempted to list these notes. The most famous are the very rare works by Raphael P. Thian, including his *Register of Issues of Confederate States Treasury Notes* (1880).



▲ NO. 8: Underappreciated foundational work.

9) The American Journal of Numismatics, published by the American Numismatic Society and the Boston Numismatic Society (1866-1924)

The original *American Journal of Numismatics* was the outstanding numismatic periodical of 19th-century America. First appearing in 1866 under the auspices of the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society (soon shortened to the American Numismatic Society), the *AJN* published short articles of general interest to collectors; book reviews; auction notices; and other commentary. It also published significant scholarly articles that did much to legitimize the study of coins as a serious pursuit.

In 1869 the *AJN* published Sylvester S. Crosby’s groundbreaking article on 1793 cents, which was illustrated by an actual photographic plate depicting the varieties. Important contributions to the journal were made through the years by such numismatic luminaries as William Sumner Appleton, Edgar H. Adams, Lyman H. Low, W.T.R. Marvin, Malcolm Storer, Albert Frey, George M. Parsons, Benjamin Betts, Howland Wood and others. In later years, the *AJN* became known for publishing outstanding works on ancient coins, with regular contributions by Edward T. Newell and Agnes Baldwin. The *AJN* is of extraordinary importance, and no great library on American numismatics is complete without a set.

While the *AJN* was the preeminent numismatic periodical of 19th-century America, I would be remiss if I failed to mention another prominent periodical—*The Numismatist*. First published in 1888 by founder George F. Heath of Monroe, Michigan, it started out as a rather modest, though useful, publication. It predated the establishment of the American Numismatic Association and served as the vehicle through which Heath made the case for another national hobby organization. While its 19th-century volumes are perhaps not as important as those of the *AJN*, it went on to grow into the enormously important and influential publication we continue to enjoy today.



▲ NO. 9: Preeminent numismatic journal.

PHOTO: DAVID FANNING

PHOTO: ANA LIBRARY

Many of the works he described are of extraordinary rarity, and their inclusion may have been enough, in many cases, to preserve them.

10) *Numisgraphics* by Emmanuel J. Attinelli (1876)

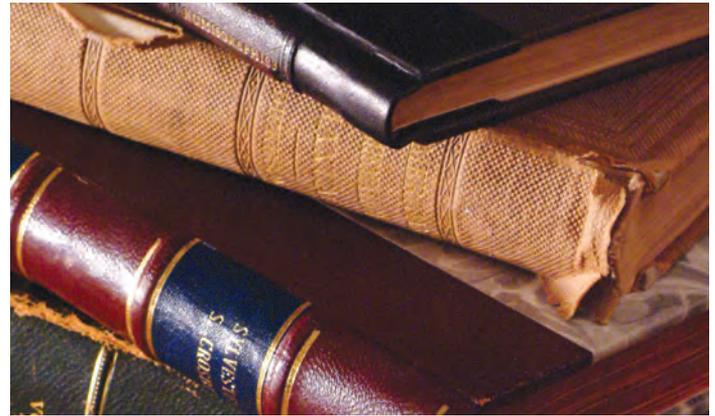
This last entry on the list may come as a surprise to some, but without it much of what is known about Early American numismatic publications would be lost. The subject matter of Emmanuel Attinelli's book is given in its full title: *Numisgraphics, or a List of Catalogues, in Which Occur Coins or Medals, Which Have Been Sold by Auction in the United States, Also, a List of Catalogues or Price Lists of Coins, Issued by Dealers, Also, a List of Various Publications of More or Less Interest to Numismatologists, Which Have Been Published in the United States.*

As this seemingly endless title attests, his work is the first full bibliography on American numismatic literature. This very rare publication carefully recorded auction sales, fixed-price catalogs, articles, books, serials and other works of interest to coin collectors. Today's researchers are greatly in Attinelli's debt. Many of the works he described are of extraordinary rarity, and their inclusion in this thin volume may have been enough, in many cases, to preserve them. Remarkably, he missed almost nothing of importance.

One would be mistaken to assume that Attinelli's book is a dry listing of titles, however. The bibliography is heavily annotated,

with much information recorded about early collectors and dealers and their careers, reputations and scandals. (And if you think scandals in numismatics are a recent phenomenon, Attinelli will quickly disabuse you of that notion.) He was truly a pioneer, and he wrote his bibliography at a time when the hobby was shifting from an older, scholarly, leisurely pursuit to an active industry dominated by younger, more energetic dealers.

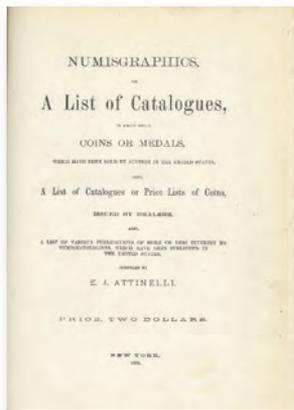
Much had changed since Attinelli's only real predecessor, William S.F. Mayers, published a brief article entitled "The Literature of American Numismatics" in *Norton's Literary Letter* in 1859. Original copies of Attinelli's catalog are very rare and rather expensive when offered for sale. Happily, the work was reprinted in 1976 by Al Hoch's Quarterman Publications, making it available to a much wider audience.



▲ **THE BOOKS' CAREFUL TYPOGRAPHY**, outstanding bindings and other physical qualities make them especially appealing to numismatic scholars and collectors.

There are a number of different reasons to form a numismatic library: for attribution, provenance research, historical background and other general information. Including the classic works of the past is important both for what they continue to teach us today and for what they tell us about the history of our hobby. The relevance of a work published more than 100 years ago can come as a surprise to collectors accustomed to obtaining most of their information online. But, just as there is charm, beauty and fascination to be found in old coins, there is much of value to be discovered in the books of our predecessors.

Assembling a library of numismatic classics can also open the hobbyist's eyes to collecting such literature as a hobby. While some acquire numismatic publications purely for their informational value, others have embraced these works as a hobby unto itself and see themselves as preserving the history of coin collectors and those who came before us. Still others grow to appreciate fine printing and typography, outstanding bindings or other physical qualities of book production and history. Just as there are countless ways to go about collecting coins, the collecting of numismatic literature can be fine-tuned to reflect one's own interests, skills and means. ■



▲ **NO. 10:** More than just a listing of titles.

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