

Kolbe Honored for Lifetime Achievement

A numismatic bibliophile combined his love of books and coins to forge a successful career.

➤ George Frederick Kolbe was born in 1941 and began collecting coins when he was 9 or 10 years old. He started selling them in the mid-1960s. Soon, he was buying current and out-of-print reference works on various numismatic topics and auction catalogs. Over several months, his appreciation of books and coins grew into a fledgling career as a numismatic bookseller, long before many spe-

guished himself as a promoter of numismatic literature. His scores of auction catalogs and fixed-price lists provide extensive descriptions of the books being offered, covering both their significance as repositories of information and their value as collectable items in their own right. He was the first numismatic bookseller to provide background information relevant to the books' histories and explain their importance as scholarly sources and artistic objects. The original research contained in his catalogs is an invaluable source of information.

Kolbe has cataloged and conducted more than 150 numismatic literature auctions since 1976 and has issued dozens of fixed-price lists and other publications. The titles featured in these sales span the numismatic spectrum and include works published since the early 16th century. Some are written in languages other than English.

Kolbe has had the opportunity to sell some of the most notable libraries ever brought to market. His sale of highlights from the John J. Ford, Jr. Library achieved the highest price for a single-day numismatic literature sale—\$1.66 million. He also sold the Stack Family Library for record prices and the Harry W. Bass, Jr. Library for more than \$1 million. His sales of texts for the benefit of the ANA and the American Numismatic Society (ANS) generated funds for new acquisitions, and he has appraised literature donations to the ANA and ANS on behalf of donors, free of charge.

In 1979 Kolbe cofounded the Numismatic Bibliomania Society, and twice has served as editor of its journal, *The Asylum*. The society honored Kolbe by naming its highest award after him—the George Frederick Kolbe Award for Lifetime

Achievement in Numismatic Literature. He belongs to the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, International Association of Professional Numismatists and, since 1987, the Rittenhouse Society. He also is a fellow of the Royal Numismatic Society.

In addition, Kolbe has published references about books, coins and medals. His support of niche titles has meant that valuable, but not commercially viable, research is available to collectors. In 2012 he wrote and published *The Reference Library of a Numismatic Bookseller*, recording the most comprehensive collection of numismatic bibliographies ever assembled, including works published in other languages, dating from 1579 to the present.

In 2010 Kolbe joined forces with David Fanning, Ph.D. to form Kolbe & Fanning Numismatic Booksellers, LLC. Kolbe celebrated his 50th year as an expert in numismatic literature in 2017. To honor the occasion, 28 numismatists contributed to the text *Fifty Years of Numismatic Bookselling: A Tribute to George Frederick Kolbe* published that year. In the introduction, Fanning wrote, “One of the revolutionary aspects of George’s catalogues was his introduction of formal bibliographic descriptions to an area of the hobby that was used to seeing simple lists of authors and titles. Part of this was salesmanship... but part of this was also an effort on his part to educate others, to share his knowledge.” Fanning describes Kolbe as an eager student, adding that “he never declined a consignment because he was unfamiliar with an area, but instead took it as an opportunity to learn about that new area.”

Says Kolbe, “The ANA has been a positive part of my life in numismatics for over fifty years. Thank you for this signal honor.”



PHOTO: ANA ARCHIVES

▲ Lifetime Achievement Award recipient George Kolbe was the first numismatic bookseller to provide detailed background information about the books in his auction catalogs.

cialized in the field.

Kolbe was a familiar face at antiquarian bookstores in Southern California and acquired a bounty of books. In May 1967 he began issuing modest lists of numismatic literature for sale, and his first auction was held in 1976.

Since then, Kolbe has distin-