

In Retrospect

May 11, 2025

#5 Coin Show Diaries

A lighthearted coin show diary is always a popular read in any numismatic publication. While such an article may take on the facade of ephemeral fluff, only pertinent to that particular show, numismatic diaries are valuable encapsulations of our social history and can be found to document significant occurrences for posterity, à la Samuel Pepys and John Hull. The writer of a coin show diary often reminisces about these recent past events, reliving them with others who were there, and giving a vicarious account to those who could not attend.

The first convention of the Colonial Coin Collectors Club was held in 1995. Before that, those with an interest in colonial numismatics would meet at the annual convention of the Early American Coppers Club. In the June 1994 *C4 Newsletter*, Jeff Rock wrote about this colonial-crew experience at the 1994 EAC convention held in Las Vegas with delightful jocularly. In the Spring 1998 *Newsletter*, Tom Madigan entertainingly memorialized his adventures at the C4 convention held in Boston. The crowd-pleasing coin show diary was more recently seen in the Winter 2024 *Newsletter* within Christopher McDowell's C4 President's Message about our 30th annual convention held in Baltimore.



Rob Retz's "Finest Known" 1785 Connecticut Miller 3.1-F.3 was documented by Jeff Rock to have been displayed at the 1994 EAC Convention. It was more recently sold by Stack's Bowers Galleries in their November 2024 Showcase Auction at lot 1217, The Perkins-Partrick 1785 Miller 3.1-F.3 Connecticut. Images courtesy of Stack's Bowers Galleries.

I wonder how many coppers it accounted for? Incidentally, in the light of what we think we know about values of copper coins, I note that this certificate shows that coppers were rated then at 2 shillings

8 pence per pound weight, or about 18 coppers to the shilling, the same rate later applied in 1789 (despite the collapse in copper prices and the widespread market renunciation of copper coins except those of New Jersey).

LAS VEGAS 1994 EAC DIARY

by Jeff Rock

This is a cheap, blatant rip-off of Dennis Loring's popular ANA diary that appears every year in the EAC journal *Penny-Wise*, but hey, you get what you pay for. We're a new club, with a tiny budget and we just can't afford the expense of creating something new. In any event, if you weren't able to attend the convention in Las Vegas this year this might give you a glimpse of what you missed.

THURSDAY, APRIL 21st: A late afternoon flight on Southwest Airlines to Vegas leaves on time (!)—I'm really looking forward to the in-flight meal of peanuts and a thimble full of a beverage of your choice (if we have it). I walk on the plane and spot Mr. and Mrs. Jack Beymer who are flying to Vegas from Northern California via San Diego. Now Jack always has sense enough to buy some nice coins, but I sometimes wonder about his sense of direction. Upon landing and a brief chocolate stop for Jack, the three of us are whisked to the Aladdin Hotel in the style that we're accustomed to (a cheap taxi). Finally getting to the front desk to check in, I'm assigned a room on the main floor, through the casino, down a mile-long corridor that looked like one of the mazes designed by the ancient Greeks and which is conveniently situated just across the hall from a maid station, as well as directly under a station on the floor above so that the pitter-patter of little maid's heels can be heard 24 hours a day. The perks we dealers enjoy.

After unpacking my toothbrush (clothes never manage to get unpacked at a convention like this—you just pull what's next out of your suitcase and rush to the bourse), I head off to the Hospitality Suite for a "Copper Weenie Mixer." The usual cast of colonial dealers are there, including: Mike Ringo, Tony Terranova, Tom Rinaldo, Jim Young, Mary Sauvain, Chris McCawley, Steve Tannenbaum, David Palmer and Tony Carlotto. A large number of collectors are also in attendance, and I won't even try to name them all—I'll just drop some names here and there. If I forgot anyone, I will be taking bribes to insure your name appearing in next year's diary...please call for rates. A plate of finger food and a couple of bottles of Heineken (you know you're in a bad situation when that's the best beer they have!) and things started to get fun. Jim Young had photos of the new New Jersey copper (see the article elsewhere in this newsletter) and we all drooled over it. Sure looked good to me, though there was some spirited discussion about it.

My roommates Rob Retz (the cherrypicker extraordinaire from Oregon) and Larry Gaye (also from Oregon and attending his first EAC convention) finally show up, as does Connecticut copper collector Ken Mote. Rob has his briefcase with him, which promises goodies, and Ken mentions that he has some new purchases, so we all head back to the hotel room for the oldest tradition there is—trading coins before the show even starts. I have several varieties of interest to Ken which go a long way to wipe out my debt for the purchases I made from him last month. Rob takes a few more coins, including the first new Fugio variety he was to add at this show. Of course I buy things from both of them as well which means that very little money actually changes hands, just coins being passed around in a counter-clockwise fashion. After a bit of haggling I manage to add Ken's collection of Connecticut copper errors to my inventory, which should spice up a future price list, if I ever get around to it (I PROMISE it'll be out in June!).

We look at the clock and it's past eleven. We're all hungry so we head off to the hotel restaurant to feast on the \$5.95 prime rib, baked potato and salad. A healthy late night snack. Sweet dreams guaranteed.

FRIDAY, APRIL 22nd: We're awakened by the pleasant sound of chainsaws outside our hotel room window about 5 a.m. Ah, things are already getting off to a typical EAC start. We're all registered as dealers, which means that we have to get to the bourse and set up at 8 a.m. (you'd think the powers that be would have let us sleep in a bit, especially as we were in a city that stays up so late...). We knew that we had to be there as soon as the doors opened or we would find that Mike Ringo had already circled the floor and snagged all of the better pieces [as usual].

With bloodshot eyes and lethargic steps we make it down to the bourse floor and make a halfhearted attempt to set up. What we're really doing is keeping a wary eye on the other dealers so that when they start to set up we can come down on them like a swarm of locusts and see what kind of colonials they have. It's like playing chicken—sooner or later, someone has to give in and actually start setting up, preferably before the rank and file file in. This year it turns out to be pretty slim pickings in the cases of other dealers, as we've all learned enough not to set out our best stuff right away—why put it out and let a dealer buy it at a small discount when we can sell it to you, the end user, at our full retail prices? Yes, sir, Darwin's theory has proven itself time and time again at these conventions, and we have shown exactly why colonial dealers are better than most lower forms of animal.

I talk Rob into putting two of his better coins out into my case—the finest known 1785 CT Miller 3.1-F.3 (by about 30 points!) and the finest known 1787 CT Miller 33.2-Z.17 (with generous amounts of original mint color on both sides!). Neither was for sale, but I figured it was the only way I could get people like Tony Terranova to stop at my case for more than the 2.5 seconds it took to pass by me to get to Tony Carlotto's collection of Vermont coppers at the next table (it's not quite bait-and-switch, but it's close and it almost worked).

As I started finally setting up I take out a few better Vermont pieces to show Tony Carlotto. He buys everything I show him which makes him happy, but leaves me wondering if I have enough nice Vermonts for my next list. Still, I guess they've found a good home. I take another look at his collection, which contains 35 of the 40 known varieties, all in outstanding condition, and generally with duplicates of even the rarest numbers. Yep, they've found a good home.

The doors open to the general public, and people flood into the room, waving handfuls of hundred dollar bills, yelling "I must have a colonial coin." O.K., I can dream can't I? Still, the action did pick up considerably and most of us dealers were busy talking to old friends and showing or admiring some neat coins. The funny thing is that even though we're competitors, the little cadre of colonial dealers are all pretty much friendly. We know what the other people have in their inventory and will often refer a customer somewhere else if we know they can find what they're looking for. I imagine that this is what dealing was like in the late nineteenth century [though without the noise of the casino a few feet away...].

Young John Kraljevich, the C4 secretary and bon vivant, makes an appearance and informs me that I will be going to hear his talk on French Colonial coinage at the Educational Forum tonight (I missed an earlier version at the ANA convention because it conflicted with an auction). He still owes me a letter or two, so I let him wonder if I'll actually show up, but as he, Bob Vlack, and I are about the only people in the world that seem to care about these pieces I'll be there. John and I discuss the mysterious William Lutwyche who seems to appear at EAC and C4 meetings even though he's been dead nearly two centuries. And you thought vitamins wouldn't work.

Don Groves, who was published in the last C4 newsletter for his spirited defense of the expensive, low grade (but extremely rare) 1787 CT Miller 8-a.1, stops by and asks if I have any low grade colonials. I thought he was trying to cherrypick another R-8 variety instead of buying it at auction, but it turns out that he actually wants a few inexpensive pieces to give away to collectors who express an interest in colonial coins. What a generous way to get new people hooked on the hobby—good luck, Don (oh, and if Michael Hodder calls you and says he might be interested in colonials, don't fall for it and send him a free coin...)

We break for another prime rib meal (fat content: 80%), waddle back to our tables and do what we do best, talk colonials. Tom Rinaldo finds the only cherry of the show, a nice 1785 CT Miller 7.1-D that is purchased unattributed. Mike Ringo walks past my case and from 20 feet away spots a cast NJ copper—an extremely deceptive coin that got past 3 dealers, an auction cataloguer and a pair of collectors before being spotted by The Amazing Ringo. Look for a write-up and photos soon.

The bourse slowly winds down and we head off to the lounge area for a few drinks and some quiet. The beer is Heineken again (it rhymes, trust me), but the quiet is shattered by the bass-heavy sounds of Melissa somebody or other who wiggles out on stage and sings, plays piano, trumpet, electric fiddle, tuba and probably the washboard for all I know. EAC'er John Warshawsky falls in love, but Melissa's heart was obviously stolen by Mitch Mitchell. We fled the bar and made it to the Educational Forum in a minor state of intoxication (something like Rhode Island).

Again, the colonialists flexed their muscles, as three out of the four presentations were on early American coins. Mary Sauvain gave an introduction on how to collect colonials, which was well received. John Kraljevich's talk was quite polished and informative, and who knows, it may actually double the number of people interested in this area of collecting (although I must admit the numerous references to the nut who collected sous marques by date and mintmark and die variety hit just a little too close to home). The next talk up was non colonial, so we'll just ignore it completely (actually it was an open question forum consisting of dealers Tom Reynolds, Chris McCawley and Jack Beymer, who fielded any sort of question you could think of. Quite interesting.) John Griffiee rounded out the slate with his talk on New Jersey coppers, which underscored his fascination with this series and surely converted a number of new collectors.

After the Forum we headed off for dinner. Fooled you, this time it was the \$7.95 Steak and Lobster combination. Now aren't you sorry you didn't go to the convention? It was already getting late, so Larry and I headed back to the room to see if we could get more than two hours of sleep. Rob decided he wants to walk around Las Vegas for a few hours and will wake us all when he comes in at 3 a.m. Somehow, we manage to get at least three hours of sleep, a new indoor record for an EAC convention.

SATURDAY, APRIL 23rd: Feeling invigorated after our lengthy rest, we all leap up and rush down to the bourse. Only then do we notice that we haven't showered or dressed, so I guess we really didn't sleep long enough after all (Note to collectors: this is the best time to buy coins from a dealer). As Larry and I actually start down to the bourse, Rob says he'll join us in a few minutes. We see him four hours later.

I finally notice the exhibits, which are hidden right at the entrance to the bourse, an idiotic place to put something that you want everyone to see. John Griffiee had two exhibits, the general colonial one and the specialized New Jersey copper one. Jim Goudge has a few cases of Connecticut coppers by Breen numbers, an intriguing display that graphically illustrated just how Walter had broken the series down into a logical and consistent format (I also saw about 20 old friends that used to be in my Connecticut collection but which are now buried forever in the L.A. smog). Some other people had exhibits up, including a woefully incomplete set of half cents and large cents by date and variety, from 1793 to 1857. I mean, there must have been at least 10 empty holes where a few of the unique NC

large cents went, and not one of the '93 cents had full mint red. Geez, the junk some people will exhibit...

I acquire a unique coin, a Massachusetts cent that Mike Packard has counterstamped for this year's EAC. As most of you know, Mike collects Mass copper, and I think this really pained him—each stroke of the hammer further and further defaced a fascinating piece of history. Each time another letter was brutally pounded into that innocent Mass copper you could almost see a tear forming in Mike's eye. This was not for the faint of heart, and Mike, next year I have a Mass half cent already saved up—a 1788 1-A (should be fun).

Tom Rinaldo and Mary Sauvain lead an "Intro to Colonials" talk which is well attended and draws people who need no intro to the series at all, like the aforementioned Don Groves who shared a number of his collecting experiences and observations with us. This was a very open forum, and a lot of good information was given out in a small period of time. Hopefully, this type of program will continue at future EAC conventions.

Another prime rib break with Rob, Larry and Ken. We tell a few jokes about Tom Rinaldo paying more for his fruit salad than we are for this huge slab of beef, but since he's not there, the jokes are funnier than ever. We try to charge the meal to his room, but the waitress doesn't trust us.

An unannounced C4 meeting is scheduled by word of mouth. We think we tell everyone, but realize at the meeting itself that some obvious people are missing (and honest, John K., I thought you knew...). Still, it was a good meeting, with a lot of questions and answers about the club and where we're going. We find out that at next year's EAC we'll be given a part of the room for the Half Cent Happening for our own use (the Colonial Comparison Corner, or C3 for short?), which should be interesting. We should have enough space for 8 coins—any ideas?

The bourse closes, and we head out for another drink before the auction. None of us are planning to stay too late into the sale, just until the 1796 large cents have been sold, as we want to see what the roll set of NC's will bring. The colonials whiz by in record time, and I find myself the proud owner of the Ryder 26 Vermont, an extreme rarity in the series. I stuck my hand up at \$600 and started to pull it down at the next bid, so imagine my surprise at winning the coin at \$900! And to think that Dennis actually slowed down his pace from previous years... Still, it seems like quite a steal in comparison with a low grade Sheldon 16, a low Rarity-7 variety of large cent that might actually hit High R-6 (the same rarity as the Ryder 26) which brought \$17,000—just think what'll happen if we ever reach parity. We leave the auction after it starts getting into those late-date coppers from the 1790's and 1800's (we like to think of them as the Morgan dollars of the copper world).

We decide that we want to find a new place to eat, so we head out of the casino—the first time we’ve seen fresh air since our arrival, and walk around the strip a bit. Ken Mote adds to his reference library during our walk, which takes a little bit of effort and ingenuity. We walk through three or four other casinos, don’t find a thing we like, and head back to our own hotel, with ravenous appetites. This time it’s Steak and Lobster and cheesecake for dessert. I came into this show with a body fat content of 10.4% and I’ll leave about 50%. You only live once [and with blocked arteries it won’t be for long!].

We talk until the wee hours of the morning, finding ourselves again short of a normal nights sleep. Big surprise there.

SUNDAY, APRIL 24th: The last day of the show is always the saddest as you realize you won’t see some of these people for a whole year. You’re also so sleep deprived that you start walking into the walls. I walk around the floor, missing most of the walls, and find a few items that I hadn’t seen before. I pick up some books from Charlie Davis and Fred Lake which add the necessary weight and bulk to my luggage to virtually insure that something will get crushed.

I look over at Tony Carlotto’s case and notice his pair of Ryder 26’s. We now have small, medium and large planchet sizes within two feet of each other—probably the largest number of pieces that have been this close since they dropped from the press! Our three also represent a healthy portion of the surviving population, a fact that almost makes me forget that his two are nicer [and more expensive].

A few last minute sales and settling of accounts, and suddenly it’s time to start packing up. I’m still waiting for David Palmer to come by, as I’ve been holding a number of pieces for him since the start of the show. Oh, there he is, walking to my table. Sets his book down at my table then walks over to Tom’s table. Starts walking back to me, but Tom calls him back. Twenty minutes later he starts walking to me, but Tom calls him back again. This happens two more times and gets ridiculously similar to a bad Warner Brothers cartoon (imagine my face getting red, turning into a teapot and steam coming out of my ears). Finally David makes it over and I finish my last transaction of the show, and he picks up over a half dozen new coins. I start packing up, hoping that there’ll be an announcement that the show has been extended one more day.

I head off for my last prime rib meal of the trip (one more for the road). By the time I’m done I have about an hour and a half to kill before I need to head to the airport. I spy an empty seat at a blackjack table and find myself in a crowd of EAC’ers. I elbow in next to Mark Borkhardt and find myself actually gambling—the first time I had time to do it during the entire show (well, actually I did put a quarter in a slot as I walked by once). The table was quite fun, as we all knew or had seen each other at the show, and there was a lot of joking going on. We were also winning, and at one point I found myself up about \$300

(heck, this could be better than the show). Mark B., who had been losing a few hands left the table and I found that his bad cards ended up coming to me. Thanks, Mark. He came back to claim his lousy hands and things improved, and by the time the table closed I found myself ahead by exactly \$1—not not all that bad considering some of the stupid bets I made!

I pick up my bags, head to the airport and fly home (the Beymers decided it would be quicker to skip the tour of the scenic San Diego airport this time around and took a direct flight), thinking about how good it would feel to actually sleep. And maybe eat another prime rib dinner.