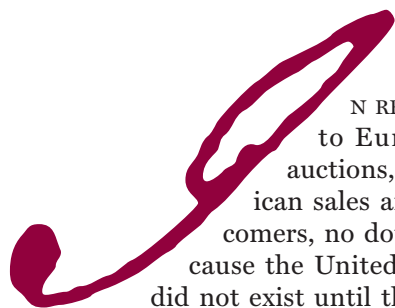


# American Sales & Auctioneers, Pt. 1

*By the mid 1800s, a handful of auction houses were making their mark in the field of numismatics.*



**I**N RELATION to European auctions, American sales are late-comers, no doubt because the United States did not exist until the 18th century. Since Holland and England had conducted coin auctions for centuries, it follows that our Founding Fathers brought the tradition with them. Consequently, American rare coin auctions probably started about the same time as our nation's establishment, and continue today in a most robust fashion.

## Early Activity

There is anecdotal evidence of several numismatic auctions in the 1700s and early 1800s. Notable sales featured the collections of Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere of Philadelphia on March 19, 1785; Matthew Clarkson (October 29, 1800); and Samuel Curin, Esquire of Salem (April 10, 1802). According to author and numismatist John Kraljevich, The Richmond, Virginia, *Enquirer* noted that Thomas Randolph, executor of Thomas Jefferson's estate, was scheduled to sell the late President's collection of medals at Monticello on January 15, 1827.

Records indicate a "Public Coin Sale" conducted by George Nichols of Salem, Massachusetts, on June 12, 1828, featuring material from the Benjamin Watkins collection. On November 10, 1840, Aaron Levy of New York conducted a sale of "medals." Royal Gurley reportedly held a coin auction on March 22, 1841, and, under the Gurley & Hill moniker, one on April 20, 1844, and

another on December 12, 1845.

M.B. Butler held the James Scrymgeour (sic) Sale on June 11, 1851, and the John Doggett Sale on October 14, 1852. Also, F.J. Bearn of New York sold a group of medals on May 17, 1842; two months later, N.A. Thompson & Company of Boston sold the Harrinton Museum's coin collection. D.B. Worden sold the Horatio Hill collection on April 22, 1846.

On March 22, 1848, Dumont & Hossack of New York sold a collection of 1,389 medals assembled by James Thompson. On May 24, Leonard & Cunningham of Boston offered 1,026 medals and 1,333 coins belonging to Daniel Groux. The Roman and Greek coins of Baltimore merchant Robert Gilmor were sold on March 8, 1849, by Gibson & Company of Baltimore. The coins of Gabriel Furman were sold by Cooley & Keese of New York on May 15 of that year.

New York City companies were busy in the mid 1800s: Leavitt & Delisser & Company sold coins at auction on May 17, 1856; the firm of H.H. Leeds & Company auctioned medals on

March 10, 1858; and Herts & Moss offered coins in a sale on April 27, 1858. (Coincidentally, the first coin auction catalog with photographic plates was produced in London by Christie, Manson & Woods in 1860.)

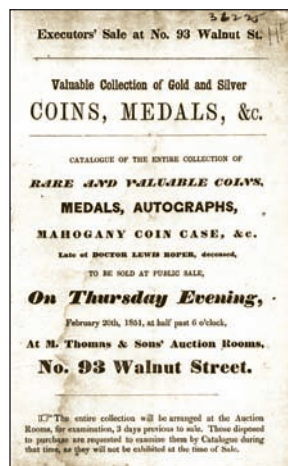
Quite a number of early U.S. coin dealers began their own auction companies. As their businesses grew into large-scale operations, many major, 20th-century dealers created full-service auction divisions so that they might offer their coin-collecting clientele another sales option.

## 19th-Century Auctions

In 1841 the firm of Bangs, Richard & Platt appears to have cataloged and sold the first fully documented U.S. coin auction of the 19th century. Other public coin sales were conducted between 1841 and 1846. Following a brief lull, rare coin auctions occurred regularly after 1855.

Since that first auction on 1841, perhaps 5,000 to 10,000 "serious" coin auctions have been conducted in the United States, with lesser sales bringing the total to as many as 50,000.

By my count, 60 or 70 major rare coin auctioneers have operated since 1851, at least a dozen ☺



◀ The 1851 sale of Lewis Roper's collection drew bidders from far and wide, including numismatist Joseph J. Mickley (pictured), who purchased a majority of the American coins.

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▲ Boston was a center of numismatic activity in the 19th century.

of which still are in business. Each banked on the skills of its in-house “expert numismatist” and served the coin collecting community with various degrees of skill.

In this and subsequent installments, I offer a chronological list of these major American auction companies, with the dates of their first and last coin auctions are noted in parentheses. For each company, I have included the name or names of their numismatic experts, if applicable. Since catalogers and numismatists often changed employers, their names might appear under more than one company and period.

• **M. Thomas; Moses Thomas & Sons (c. 1837-c. 1912).** This well-known, general auction house, located at 93 Walnut Street in Philadelphia, allegedly conducted a coin auction around 1837. In 1846, the firm held numismatic sales on June 6 and 22. Thomas sold the collection of Dr. Lewis Roper—dentist, photographer and numismatist—on February 20, 1851, possibly the first American coin auction with a surviving catalog. The publication consisted of 24 pages listing 698 rare and valuable coins, medals and autographs, and a mahogany coin case. This sale realized

\$1,172.47. (Author Joel J. Orosz wrote an in-depth article about Roper in the January 2001 issue of *The Numismatist*. He noted that legendary collector Joseph J. Mickley attended the sale and purchased a good deal of Roper’s American coins.)

Thomas sold the coin collection of Edward D. Ingraham on March 20 and May 22, 1855, and that of A.C. Kline on June 12. Henry Pennington’s collection crossed the block on February 8 and 10, 1859. These same auctioneers, probably the sons, sold the law library of Nathan Potts in 1862; land in Norwood Park, Illinois, in 1873; the library of Samuel Agnew in 1881; and a copy of Gilbert Stuart’s famous portrait of General George Washington to the Mellon collection in 1912, where it remains today. Various Thomases cataloged and conducted at least 23 coin auctions.

• **Lyman & Company.** A New York City auction house, Lyman & Company offered coins and medals in a sale held on October 28, 1852, and the collection of Jonathan M. Wainwright on November 22 and December 6, 1854. Under the name of Lyman & Rawdon, the firm sold “a cabinet of monies” on December 23, 1852.



◀ Numismatist and former New York City Mayor Philip Hone put his collection up for bid in 1852.

• **Leonard & Company.** This firm sold Daniel E. Groux’ collection of medals on April 22, 1851, in Boston, and 36 lots of coins on September 16, 1856. As Leonard & Pierce, it sold “a collection of 123 silver and copper coins” on August 26, 1852, and conducted an auction of silver and copper coins on April 8, 1856, both in Boston.

• **E.H. Ludlow & Company.** This well-known New York City auction

house sold just about everything, but its advertisements suggest the company specialized in land. Ludlow did, however, sell the coin collection of Philip Hone (1780-1851)—numismatist, diarist and one-term mayor of New York City (1826-27). Ludlow’s public auction on April 28, 1852, highlighted 292 lots of coins and coin books in a 26-page catalog. The coins brought \$837.88, and the books realized \$166.50. The company likely held other coin auctions, perhaps earlier.

• **Bangs, Richard & Platt; Bangs, Brother & Company; and Bangs & Merwin (c. 1840-89).** Coins were just a small part of this New York City auction house’s business. Most, if not all, of the coin collections were cataloged by the consignors, as Bangs appears to have employed no numismatists on staff. Bangs sold 760 lots in a coin auction on March 3, 1841; another sale was held on December 24, 1846. The firm issued a broadside dated February 15, 1853, offering 204 lots of coins, but I could find no evidence of the actual sale.

A public coin auction was conducted on February 15, 1855, with another on June 6 featuring the collection of Peter Flandin (which he likely cataloged). A November 5 sale contained 50 lots of coins owned by Henry A. Brady. An auction of 2,504 coins occurred on February 15, 1856, possibly the balance of Daniel Groux’s collection, while an April 17 sale featured coins of Louis Borg. An auction of Greek and Roman coins was held on October 17, 1857. Subsequent sales featured material from the collections of Charles B. Norton (May 13, 1858), Frank Norton (October 26, 1858) and Henry Bogert (February 28, 1859).

Bangs held at least 25 coin auctions and definitely was among the first public, rare coin auction companies in the United States. Next month, I’ll look at more early sales and auction companies, beginning with Edward Cogan, considered by many to be the father of the U.S. rare coin business.

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