

## My Journey Collecting Admiral Vernon Medals

by John Adams



After a dozen years of very active collecting, I sold my U.S. large cents through Bowers and Merena in 1982. Ted Craig, an engineer by day and a voracious medal collector in his spare time, had just died. John Ford knew Craig's widow, Miriam, and he knew me, so he put the two of us together. John then compiled a ten-page inventory of Ted's collection and put on his best sales job. Best or not, it was good enough to launch me into the world of "Betts" medals, so called because C. Wyllys Betts wrote the definitive book on the subject.

Of the 623 medals described by Betts, no less than 167 of them are Admiral Vernon medals. Indeed, the Vernon chapter is the largest single section of the book. So compelling has the subject proved over the years that no less than fifteen serious authors have been drawn to it, this list including such numismatic luminaries as William Sumner Appleton, Malcolm Storer, Alejandro Rosa, J. T. Medina, the Earl of Sandwich and Jorge Ferrari. Alert readers will note the mix of both English and Latin authors: Admiral Vernon medals have the unusual distinction of attracting intense interest in both hemispheres.

I fell victim to the same siren song as did the "luminaries," with the bug biting me perhaps the hardest of all. After my purchase from Ted Craig's widow, I moved swiftly to purchase the entire collections of Leonard Finn, Dr. Paul Patterson and an anonymous Canadian. To anyone vigorously pursuing the Vernon medals, the lodestar is the collection of the British Museum, put together by Edward Hawkins, Admiral Lord Milford Haven, and sundry contributors over several centuries. Today, the BM's vast collection numbers 241 distinct Admiral Vernon varieties. I blush to say that my collection totals 248 varieties, a number that may never be surpassed.

Speaking of "both hemispheres," it was in the process of writing *Medallic Portraits* that I came across a gentleman from Argentina, Fernando Chao. In speaking of Fernando, let me emphasize the word "gentleman," being a person not only with good table manners but also sensitive at all times to the wants and feelings of those around him. Having Fernando as a house guest for two weeks, I can say from experience that he was a gentleman from the moment he got up in the morning until bidding us a warm "good night" before trundling off to bed.

Beneath this veneer of politesse there dwelt a warm human being with a keen mind. With the exception of the sport of soccer, which Fernando detested despite being from Argentina, he could talk intelligently on a wide range of subjects. In his company, the conversation never lagged, nor was it ever dull in the least.

My strong relationship with Fernando exemplifies how Admiral Vernon medals have been collected ardently in both hemispheres from at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century on. The medals served as the tie that bound us in friendship. Fernando had long since sold his collection, but I was able to track it down and purchase it from a dealer in Spain. This put a glorious seal on our relationship: I did not have Fernando by my side, but I did have in my possession the medals which had meant so much to him. Fernando passed away this January, a victim of COVID-19, and it made me think: Collecting is a mundane activity whereas true friendships are sublime. Fernando's passing had no effect on my collection, other than to make it seem trivial when weighed against the worth of a great man.

Two years ago, I had little thought of parting with my beloved Vernon medals. I was willing to dispense with duplicates and, as I was contemplating this possibility, along came Dan Sedwick to give me a hand. His providential arrival was rewarded with a series of consignments which he handled with great skill and energy. Now it is time for him to ferry my main collection across the River Styx.

Note: New XRF technology allows us give exact percentages of metallic content, as opposed to the old method of measuring specific gravity, which cannot discriminate the amount of each metal in the mix. Each of the listings to follow states percentages of metals from XRF testing (only those above 1%, no trace elements). Since these readings are taken from the center of one side of each medal, and most likely other locations would give slightly different results, these numbers should not be taken as absolutes so much as a general idea of the alloys. The great majority are copper-zinc, but there are some surprises. We hope this information will facilitate future analysis of specific methods and location of manufacture.

Following Parts I (Auction 30) and II (Auction 31), now it is our honor to present Part III of the John Adams Collection of Admiral Vernon Medals here in the next 75 lots, many of them plated in John's book with Fernando Chao, *Medallic Portraits of Admiral Vernon* (2010) and many also with important pedigrees. Enjoy!