



"HOW I STARTED"

How numismatists "got started"
By Samuel Ernst YN

This month we are going to learn how Jim McKee of Lincoln, NE got started in the hobby. Mr. McKee is going to be another of the speakers at the Central States Educational Seminar here in Omaha this fall. Here's his story.

Sam:

My first experiences in coin collecting came from two events. My uncle had accumulated a small grocery bag of Indian cents which came my way. Although they were only worth a few cents each at the time, they fascinated me and I bought one of the early "boards" which actually was more of a board than folder being about 12 by 18" tall. I had all but about eight of the coins to fill the slots and you can imagine exactly which eight. I did actually later fill in all of them and along the way became interested in the short-lived flying eagle cents and was able to then get into patterns so now I have an undated large flying eagle, an 1854, 1855 and 1856 as well as the regular circulation series. My father also collected coins though I didn't learn till years later that he had completed several Lincoln cent collections...all from circulation finds.

About 1950 I was well into Boy Scouts and set out to get the merit badge. The counselor was a man, who at the time I thought quite old but who was probably 50, named Newell Joyner. Mr. Joyner also had a part time shop in a downtown Lincoln bookstore and was in the Lincoln Coin Club which was just getting started. Most of the merit badge requirements then settled around foreign coins which interestingly never really caught my imagination. I did, however, catch the bug and in a couple of years my parents began driving me to the club meetings then in the downtown YMCA. At the time I was a junior member with a number of something like 9 which was then converted to regular membership and became something like #60 so the club was well on its way.

About 1957 I was elected Treasurer and several years later Secretary. I am still the Secretary so I have either been doing something right or no one else wanted the job. When the LCC invited state-wide collectors to come to their annual Christmas Party at the Cotner Terrace Restaurant in Lincoln and the Nebraska Numismatic Association was born, I fell in as an unofficial assistant Secretary-Treasurer to Elmer Nelson who was one of the first three LCC members. That led to becoming editor of the NewsLetter and ultimately being elected President.

In 1964 the man I worked for, Cliff Hillegass...later my father-in-law, was extremely interested in stamps. We had the opportunity to purchase the Hawaiian Stamp & Coin Co. which we brought, safes and all, to Lincoln and opened what became Centennial Stamp & Coin Co. at 1320 Q, then The Coinery at East Park Plaza in conjunction with our bookstore, Lee Booksellers. The Coinery has moved around and is now at 1265 South Cotner Blvd. in the Piedmont Shopping Center.

My interests have floated from type coins to Nebraska broken banknotes to patterns with sub-interests along the way. I have also written numismatic articles and books, perhaps 50 or 60, for "Paper Money" and practically every other numismatic publication along the way.

Perhaps my most interesting "find" was just after reading about the 1942/41 Mercury Dime in the "Numismatist," buying a roll or coins and actually finding one in the first roll!

That's it in a nutshell (or paper coin wrapper). If you want details, let me know,

Jim McKee

Mr. McKee is the owner of Lee Booksellers (Lincoln's last independent bookstore), J&L Lee Co. (publisher of regional books), and The Coinery (coin and stamp dealership.) He also is the author of nearly 1,000 articles and books on Lincoln and Nebraska history and numismatics including: *The Wildcat Banknotes, Scrip and Currencies of Nebraska*. 1970; *Lincoln: A Photographic History*. 1976. In conjunction with Lincoln, NE Bicentennial Commission. Salt Creek Press; *The Lincoln Trivia Game*. 1980; *Lincoln: The Prairie Capital*. In conjunction with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Historical Society. Windsor Publications (Woodland Hills, CA), 1984; *Havelock: A Photo History and Walking Tour*. In conjunction with the Havelock Centennial Committee. J & L Lee Co. (Lincoln, NE), 1993; *Remember When*. A collection of articles on Lincoln history. J & L Lee Co. (Lincoln, NE), 1997; *Visions of Lincoln*. With National Geographic photographer Joel Sartore. Thinkworks. 2007; Weekly history column appears in the Lincoln *Journal-Star* Sunday newspaper, 1960s and 1993 to present. Mr. McKee also is a local history adjunct professor (Lincoln History, copyright law, publishing) Southeast Community College, Lincoln, NE, since 1970 and he also presents about 50 talks a year to church, civic, professional and historical groups including a number through the Nebraska Humanities Council. You can contact Mr. McKee at: (402) 488-4416, jim@leebooksellers.com

I think we're pretty lucky to have Mr. McKee coming to our seminar.