

The President's Letter By Chris Pilliod

This is my 53rd President's letter. A few weeks ago you may have received an email from me soliciting some fresh material for the Ledger. I received a few emails asking me to bring my golf clubs to the FUN Show. But one response in particular I received did indeed catch my attention and I would like to share it with you as I do feel the Club "can make a difference" in this regard. The email was from member Heath MacAlpine, and is self-explanatory. It was received as follows on 15 October 2015:

Dear Chris,

Thanks to you and all the other folks who work to keep the Fly-In Club going. I've been a member for a number of years and have always enjoyed the Ledger; it's clearly a work of love by people who care deeply for their subject.

I don't know if this is an article, or an idea, or a cause, but here's something that the group might want to consider. I attended the ANA show in Philadelphia in 2012 and, in addition to pursuing my numismatic interests, indulged in another hobby, visiting old cemeteries. I made a particular point of looking for some numismatic personalities, including Longacre. I found him at Woodlands Cemetery in Philadelphia. Photos of his monument are attached.

You'll notice that the monument seems to have had something embedded in it in the past that's now missing. I haven't done any research but I suspect it might have been a bronze medallion, perhaps a portrait of Longacre. In many old cemeteries like Woodland bronze art like this have been looted for scrapping, despite their very nominal metallic value.

Do you think that the club, with the help of the cemetery, would be interested in crafting a replacement? Perhaps one of the current or former engravers of the mint would be willing to donate their talents to design it, the club could arrange for the striking (perhaps with additional copies available for sale to defray the costs), and maybe time it for the next ANA summer show in Philadelphia in 2018; it would make a grand ceremony. Something to think about.

All my best,

Heath MacAlpine

All of this got me to thinking... as President I would like to direct the club to take it upon ourselves to refurbish the tomb. Longacre was indeed a giant in the annals of US numismatics. Longacre was an American portraitist and engraver, and from 1844 until his death on New Year's Day 1869 he was the fourth Chief Engraver of the United States Mint. Longacre is best known for designing the Indian Head cent, easily recognized by collectors as one of the most popular US numismatic issues in history. Had the Flying Eagle Cent enjoyed greater longevity, I am sure it too would be amongst the most desired issues in US history as well.

He was born James Barton Longacre in Delaware County, Pennsylvania in 1794. His parents were Sarah and Peter Longacre and his mother died when James was at a young age. After his father remarried, James could not tolerate his life at home any longer and left at the age of 12 to find work in nearby Philadelphia, accepting a position as an apprentice with a book printer. His artistic talent developed and he was released to apprentice



in an engraving firm. He struck out on his own in 1819, making a name providing illustrations for popular biographical books. He portrayed the leading men of his day; support from some of them, such as South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun, led to his appointment as chief engraver of the U.S. Mint after the death of Christian Gobrecht in 1844.



Longacre's Grave Marker



Close-up of Longacre Grave Marker

But the first major work that Longacre designed and engraved was the Liberty Head gold dollar with the first issues being minted in 1849. This design lasted until 1854 when it would be replaced by the small Indian Princess design, which was also designed by Longacre. This coin would also have a short lifetime and would last from 1854 until 1856 when it would again be replaced by the large Indian Princess design, also designed by Longacre thus, he would be the only designer and engraver of the single dollar gold coins.

Longacre also designed the two-cent piece, both the silver and nickel three-cent pieces, the Shield nickel, and several other coins of the mid-19th century. He enters the annals of United States numismatics with a very high level of respect for his accomplishments.

A more detailed plan for the refurbishment is as follows. Perhaps with the contacts I have made in working with the United States Mint in developing an alternative metal for coining, one of them could introduce a current engraver. This would get the ball rolling, and then proceed as follows as per below:

1. I believe the original commemorative plaque is too large to strike, or at least prohibitively expensive to make dies and strike. Production of dies for striking coins and medals only makes sense if thousands or millions of pieces are needed.

2. As such, I would hope to enlist the services of a Mint artist/engraver to design an appropriate portraiture at a nominal fee. If it is done in relief, like a coin, it could then be used to produce intaglio molds in wax.

3. The wax models could then be used to produce molds in a refractory suitable for lost wax or investment casting.

4. Some line of communication would be needed with the cemetery for approval.

5. The monies for the initiative would come from the members in the form of a donation or fundraiser. Any additional monies raised would go the Club treasury. In addition, the goal would be to produce additional copies for sale to club members and other interested parties.

Noticed I left out the donations until last. This is not a task that happens overnight, and I would expect a two-year time-frame on the project.

And lastly, the Fly-In Club meeting will be held on Friday, January 8th, 2016 at the Tampa Convention Center in Tampa, Florida. The time will be 1:30 p.m. in a room to be determined. We will discuss this project. I hope to see you there!