

Notes and Documents

INDIAN MEDALS AND CERTIFICATES¹

Grace Lee Nute

IN A DAY when medals for meritorious conduct are again conspicuous on American bosoms, it may be interesting to review the history of the first known medals to be presented on American soil.

On November 10, 1670, the intendant of New France, Jean Talon, wrote to the French minister of state, Colbert, that if royal medals would not thereby be rendered too common, a dozen of them should be sent to him with which to reward useful discoveries, either of new countries or of mines, in America. Medals were very much in favor with Colbert's royal master, Louis XIV, and they were soon given to Indians as well as to explorers—Indians who deserved special recognition, that is to say. Those sent in the seventeenth century usually carried the sovereign's portrait on one side and recognition of some important event on the other. They were usually of silver, and to them were attached flame-colored silk ribbons, four fingers in breadth. Those sent for a period after 1686 commemorated the birth of the Dauphin's children between 1686 and 1693.

The French medals were of two sizes, mentioned usually as "large" and "small" medals. Francis Parkman, quoting a Jesuit missionary in his *Montcalm and Wolfe*, describes one worn by Abnaki Indians just before the conquest of Canada. It had the "King's portrait on one side, and on the other Mars and Bellona joining hands, with the device 'Virtus et Honor.'" It was probably one of Louis XV's many bronze medals commemorating events in France. The

¹ More detailed material on the early history of medals presented to Indians by French and English sovereigns is to be found in Horace E. Hayden's article on "Various Silver and Copper Medals Presented to the American Indians . . . from 1600 to 1800," in Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, *Proceedings and Collections*, 2:217-238 (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1886); and in Grace Lee Nute, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, 147 (New York, 1943). Bauman L. Belden's *Indian Peace Medals Issued in the United States* (New York, 1927) is a good brochure on presidential medals.

clasped hands became a favorite device later, when American medals were made for presentation to deserving Indian chiefs. They are usually referred to as "Peace and Friendship" medals.

English medals for Indian purposes became common in the reign of George III, though some had been struck as early as the reign of Charles II, when the Pamunky medal appeared honoring Indian "kings" and "queens" in Virginia. They were silver shields, oblong in shape, between four and six inches in diameter.

By 1710 Queen Anne was sending the Five Nations of the Iroquois "as a pledge of her protection, and as a memoriall to them of their fidelity, a medall for each Nation with her Royall Effigie on one side, & the last gain'd battle on Ye other, which as such she desires may be kept in your respective Castles for ever." She also sent "her Picture in silver . . . to be given to the Chief Warriors to be worn about their necks."

George I gave genuine Indian rather than royal medals. His bust appeared on the obverse and an Indian hunting deer on the reverse. They were of copper, brass, or bronze. George II as early as 1753 had silver medals in quantity sent to the Five Nations. They had his portrait on one side and the royal arms on the other, with a silver loop and ring for suspension purposes; and they were placed in shagreen cases with a yard of the best broad scarlet watered ribbon. They were of three sizes.

In 1757 the Friendly Association for Regaining and Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Means, with headquarters in Philadelphia, struck a medal showing George III on the obverse and, on the reverse, an Indian seated at a Council Fire with a European, who points with the calumet, or peace pipe, toward the sun near the zenith. Tin, bronze, and silver forms of this medal have been found. It is supposed that William Penn is the European represented on the medal.

Another medal of George III's reign, struck in 1764, shows the monarch on one side and on the other a white man and an Indian seated under a tree on the sea shore, surrounded by the legend, "Happy While United." Of the same period is one recorded as issued by Governor Haldimand of the Province of Quebec "To Chawanon,

Grand Chief of the Folles Avoines." These were the Menominee Indians of the Wisconsin country. No actual medal of this form is known to have been found, only the order by Haldimand that it be struck as he prescribes. The date is 1778.

The Spaniards also struck medals: a silver medal of the reign of Carlos III, probably of the date 1781, was discovered about 1864 at Prairie du Chien. It bears the bust of the king on the obverse, and the words "Por Merito" with a wreath of cacti on the reverse. From Jonathan Carver's manuscript diary of 1766-67 it is known that Spanish traders were then at Prairie du Chien trying to oust British traders, who were crossing the upper Mississippi and penetrating the Sioux country of the Spaniards.

An early Minnesota trader, Thomas G. Anderson, refers in his reminiscences to King George medals among the Indians of the upper Mississippi. These had the royal arms on the reverse, with lion supporters, and were doubtless of the same kind as some still in Indian hands in Minnesota. The writer has a recent photograph of a Chippewa Indian wearing three medals, at least two of which answer Anderson's description.

When George Washington became president, he inaugurated a series of medals that were struck for Indian use throughout the next century, from 1789 to 1889. The first is of silver and is inscribed, "G. Washington President 1789." It is large—106 by 137 millimeters—and is crudely hand engraved. It shows a full length figure of an Indian in feather headdress and draped blanket, letting his tomahawk fall from his right hand as he receives in his left the peace pipe presented by America in the garb of Minerva. On the reverse are the arms of the United States.

The famous Red Jacket medal was hand engraved in 1792 and shows George Washington, full length, extending his hand to an Indian smoking a peace pipe and wearing an oval medal on his breast. Red Jacket was a renowned Seneca orator who prized his medal highly. It later became the property of the brilliant Indian General, Donehogawa, who served notably, as General Ely S. Parker, on the staff of General Grant in the Civil War.

Many other so-called Red Jacket medals appeared, each unique

because it was hand-engraved and presented to an important Indian. There are nine distinct types, all from the years between 1789 and 1795. They are of silver, oval, and in three sizes—large, medium, and small. The importance of the chief determined the size of medal he received.

In 1795 a medal was engraved especially to commemorate the treaty of Greenville of that year. With 1796 the so-called "Season" medals were prepared. They were struck in England in sets of three, both in silver and copper, and were made from the design of Colonel John Trumbull, then studying art under Benjamin West in England. They arrived in the United States after Washington ceased to be president and were distributed for the most part by President Adams, for whom no regular Indian peace medals were struck during his administration. Those commemorating him were of later coinage. The Season medals represent the raising of cattle, the sowing and raising of wheat, and housekeeping, with spinning, weaving, and child-raising included. One of these medals—of the second design described—was given to an Indian by Lewis and Clark on May 10, 1806, while on their expedition up the Missouri to the Pacific and back.

In 1801 Thomas Jefferson became president and a new series of medals was inaugurated. They were struck in three sizes and in both silver and copper. The obverse shows a half-length bust of Jefferson facing left, with the legend, "Th. Jefferson President of the U.S. A.D. 1801." The reverse shows clasped hands in the center, with crossed tomahawk and peace pipe above, and "Peace and Friendship" in three lines. In the large size, 105 millimeters as a rule, the medal was made in two shells, struck from dies, and united by a collar, and a ring for suspension was inserted at the top. Later a solid medal of this design was struck in silver. In both the shell and the solid form, the Indian wrist differs from similar representations on other Peace and Friendship medals, for the latter usually depict bare flesh. The Jefferson medals show a metal wrist band, of a kind frequently worn by Indian chiefs.

A particularly fine silver specimen of this medal, in two shells and of large size, was recently presented to the Minnesota Historical

Society by an anonymous donor. It has an interesting history. In 1885 Newton H. Winchell writes of it in his report of a survey of Indian mounds at Red Wing: "At Red Wing was formerly a mound, situated on Main Street, which, when removed, was found to contain a human skeleton, and with it a medal having date 1801. On one side is the date, with the head of Jefferson and his name. On the other is a representation of clasped hands, hatchet and pipe crossed, and 'Peace and Friendship.' It is quite a large medal, and is owned by Mrs. Frank Sterritt, St. Paul. . . . On being questioned by Col. Colvill, another old Indian said he was present and saw the burial of him that wore the medal." The reference is to Colonel William Colvill, an officer of the First Minnesota in the Civil War, who lived for many years at Red Wing and was deeply interested in its geological and archaeological history. He suggested that the medal probably was presented to Chief Red Wing by Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike in 1806 on his trip from the headwaters of the Mississippi.

Gifts of medals are not, however, recorded on Pike's expedition of 1805-06. Tantankamani, who was known also as Red Wing, or Walking Buffalo, was one of seven chiefs in the council on Pike's Island, near modern Fort Snelling, where Pike procured from them for the United States the land on which the fort was built later. Pike says of Red Wing and his group of Sioux: "The second subdivision resides near the head of Lake Pepin. . . . Their chief's name is Tantangamani—a very celebrated war-chief." In the "Abstract of the Nations of Indians" which forms part of Pike's report, under the heading "Remarks," he states that Red Wing "received a commission and a flag" on this trip. The word commission suggests the certificates that frequently accompanied the gift of a medal to a chief. One of these documents, presented in 1816 to one of Red Wing's own band, Tamaha, is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. It reads:

William Clark Governor of the Territory of Missouri, Commander in Chief of the Militia thereof and Superintendent of Indian Affairs To all who shall see these Presents In consideration of the fidelity, zeal and attachment testified by Tar-mah-hah (one eye) of the Red Wing's

band of Sioux to the Government of the United States, and by virtue of the power and authority in me vested I do hereby confirm Tar-mah-hah as a Chief in the said band of Sioux aforesaid, having bestowed on him the small sized medal, willing all and singular, the Indians Inhabitants thereof to obey him as a Chief and all Officers and others in the service of the United States to treat him accordingly.

Given under my hand at St. Louis this Sixth of May in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight & Sixteen and of the United States the fortieth

By his Excellency's Command
WM CLARK

It is possible that Pike presented Red Wing with a medal along with his commission, just as Clark treated Tamaha. It is more likely that the occasion of the gift was some other conference, such as the Peace and Friendship treaties of 1815 and 1816 at St. Louis. Red Wing signed both these treaties. The large size indicates a recipient and an event of consequence.

Another member of the Red Wing band was presented with a medal, though again there is no official record of its presentation. This was the second chief, Mahpeya Maza, or Iron Cloud, who was given a small-size Madison medal of 1809. The medal, like Red Wing's, was found in a grave at Red Wing. It is now owned by Mr. George Flaskerd of Minneapolis. Iron Cloud signed treaties in 1816, 1830, 1839, and 1851.

The Jefferson medal is the finest and the earliest of the presidential medals in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society, which appreciates deeply the honor of having been made its recipient. Other medals, gorgets, and similar pieces are known to be in private hands in the state or nearby. It is to be hoped that their owners will be stimulated by the present donor's generosity to part with their own cherished objects in the interest of the public.



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