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NEWS AND VIEWS

This month we are happy to welcome Gary E. Mikelson as a new contributor with his well-illustrated "Notes on French Medals." Gary is an instructor in Modern Foreign Languages at the University of South Dakota and a serious collector of fur trade weapons.

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Members are urged to remember that an annual membership in the Museum of the Fur Trade makes a most suitable gift for the friend, relative or business acquaintance who is interested in the fur trade or frontier history. In addition you are helping support the only national organization devoted entirely to the history of the North American Fur Trade.

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The structural work and exterior finish of our new exhibit wing have been completed and we hope that interior work and the new exhibits can be ready by June 1 for the summer season. The building committee earnestly solicits your contribution to finish this addition. Make your checks or money orders payable to the Museum Association of the American Frontier, Chadron, Nebraska. A contribution certificate for tax purposes will be furnished upon request.

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One of the most significant gifts received recently for our collections is a fine old Indian tanned and painted buffalo robe, presented by Harmon C. Leonard DVM, of Connecticut. Dr. Leonard has an outstanding collection of both Colonial and Western Americana and is a long-time member of the museum. The robe will be used in our forthcoming exhibit on the buffalo robe in the fur trade of the trans-Mississippi West in the nineteenth century.

Notes on French Medals

by Gary E. Mickelson

The history of medals presented to North American Indians in order to gain influence and friendship among them is probably one of the most complicated chapters in aboriginal history. Most nations which had claims in North America practiced the presentation of medals to the red man. It is a matter of record that British and United States authorities distributed great numbers of these pieces. Moreover, both of these powers evolved a special group of medals for this very purpose. Various French medals were described by a number of earlier historians but several recent writers, including Prucha, have discussed in more detail the use and distribution of medals in the West by Spain after 1762.

As a result, the role of France in this "medallic diplomacy" may not be as widely recognized as it should be. Certainly, at one time, French medals were very important in American frontier history and the use of medals made in France continued to a limited extent after the end of French rule in North America.

The reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715) brought a considerable French interest in North America as is evidenced by the explorations of men such as Louis Joliet; Rene Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle; and Pere M. Jacques Marquette. Figure 1 shows a Louis XIV chief medal which bears the date of 1693. As can be seen in the photograph the obverse carries a likeness of "the Sun King" with elegantly flowing wig. Below the bust appears H-ROUSSEL-F, evidently the mark of the designer. The legend reads "LUDOVICUS MAGNUS REX CHRISTIANISSIMUS" which can be translated from the Latin as LOUIS, THE MOST CHRISTIAN KING. The reverse carries the Latin inscription "FELICITAS DOMUS AUGUSTAE" (FELICITY TO THE AUGUST FAMILY) in tribute to the royal family. In addition, the reverse bears the busts of the Dauphin (monarch's son) and his three sons, Louis, Duke of Burgundy; Philip, Duke of Anjou; and Charles, Duke of Berry. Burgundy (or Bourgogne in French), Anjou, and Berry (or Berri) are located respectively in the southeast, the west, and the central parts of France. The designer's mark which appears on the obverse also appears at the bottom of the reverse.

The pictured specimen is 3 1-16 inches in diameter. The Louis XIV medallion was struck in several smaller sizes. However, Jos. Leroux in *Le Medailler du Canada* illustrates the largest size (3 1-16") in the "Medailles des Chefs Sauvages" (Indian Chief Medals) portion of his work. ¹ Moreover, documents found in the Library of Parliament, Ottawa, Canada illustrate that by the third decade of the 1700's the established custom was to present chief medals in two sizes only. ²

Although the author's research did not reveal conclusively whether or not the Louis XIV "Honos et Virtus" (Honor and Virtue) medal (See Figures 2 & 3) was distributed to North American Indians during the reign of Louis XIV, it is known the "Honor and Virtue" medal was used as a chief medal during the reign of the succeeding Louis. Figure 3 illustrates a most unusual Louis XIV "Honos et Virtus" medallion. This particular piece was struck with the obverse completely blank. While this could have been intended for a subsequent inscription it probably represents an error in the mint strike since it would not be customary to leave off the king's portrait. ³

The illustrated medal is of bronze and has no means for suspension. This particular piece was collected some years ago in southeastern Iowa. An interesting cartouche appears on the rim of this piece. The marking appears to be that of a hand with an extended index



Figure 4 — The Linwood Site Medal. Left: Obverse; Right: Reverse. Photo courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

(HONOR AND VIRTUE) appears on the reverse of the Millard Fillmore Indian medal of 1850. In the case of the American medal, the legend reads "LABOR VIRTUE HONOR" (see Figure 6). One wonders if the designers of the two United States medals were in some way influenced by a design used by France some century and a half earlier.

Fur traders were more than accommodating when it came to the Indian's desire for medallions. This may explain the two following medals which were definitely issued after France's role in North America had ended.

The first (Figure 4) medal was recovered from the Linwood site, a Pawnee village in Butler County, Nebraska. The Linwood site is believed to have been occupied between 1851 and 1857. Although the medallion is much corroded, Mr. Gayle F. Carlson of the Nebraska State Historical Society has researched the piece and believes that the medal depicts the Duke of Berry and was struck between 1820 and 1830. Mr. Carlson, who discovered the medal, states that this piece appears to be made of pewter and that when recovered there was no evidence of a necklace from which the piece could have been suspended. ⁴

Another "trader's medal" of pewter was purchased by the author some time ago with several Indian items of Sioux origin. Figure 5 illustrates this medal. This piece is evidently a coronation medal of Charles X, crowned king of France on the twenty-ninth of May in 1825, according to the medal's reverse inscription. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this item is not the medal itself, but rather the necklace from which it is suspended. Although the necklace appears to have been shortened slightly, it is strung on the original rawhide. Three basic types of trade beads are found on the necklace. The principle type is the Cornaline d'Aleppo bead with translucent amber (with an orange tint) exterior and opaque, off-white interior. Irregular in shape and dimension, these beads have an average diameter of just over $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. The familiar hollow brass bead found on so many Indian items of the northern plains has been interspersed between every third bead. Just above the point at which the necklace is joined to the medal by means of a brass ring are found two most unusual longitudinal beads. These have an opaque, cream colored center around which has been spun a thread of amber colored glass. These latter beads are slightly over $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in length.

This article does not claim to be a definitive discussion of French Indian medals. Rather, the intention of the author is to describe several French chief medals which have come to his attention in the hope that other specimens may be brought to light.

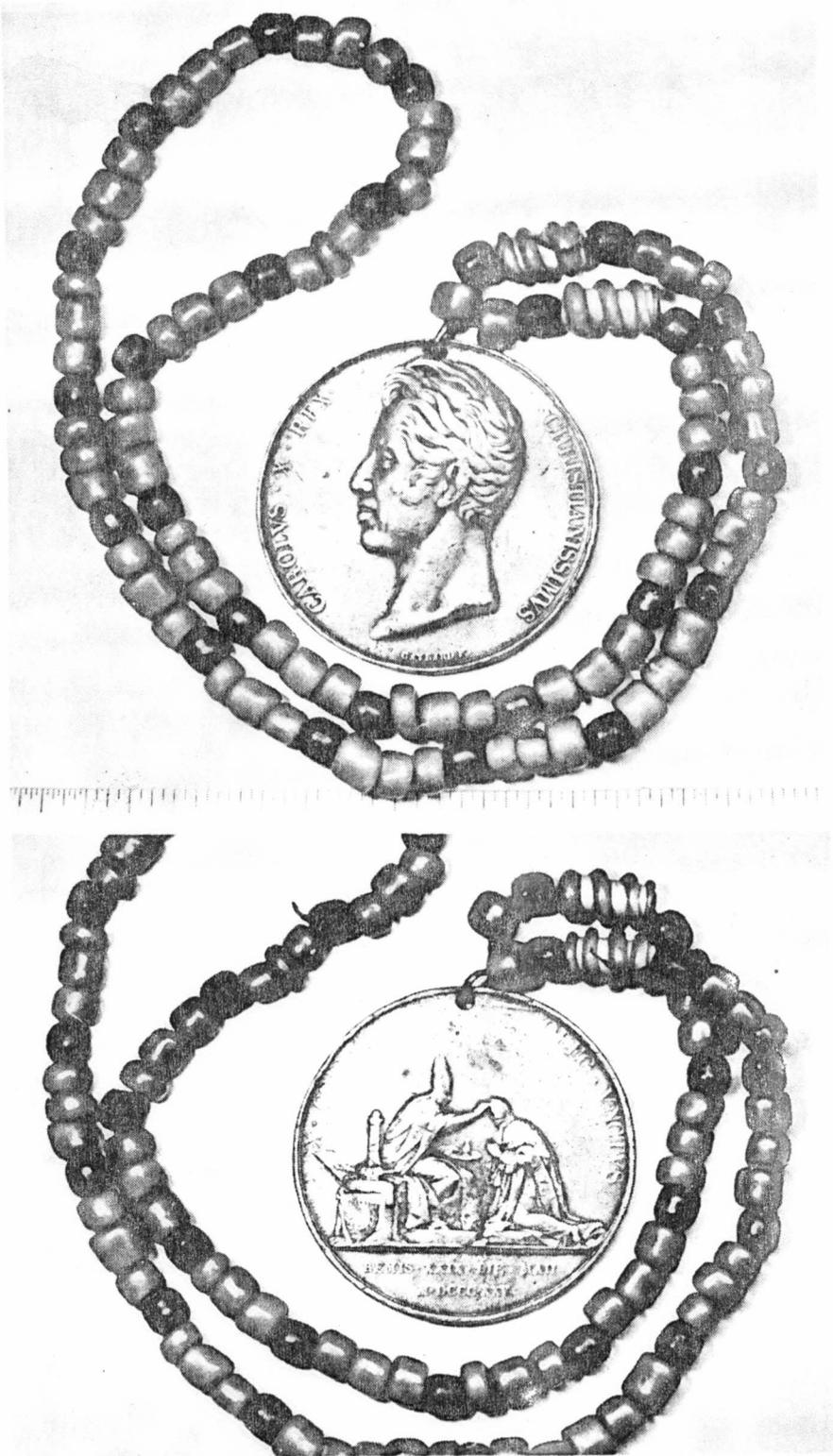


Figure 5— Coronation medal of Charles X.
Top: Obverse; bottom: reverse.