

# Preparing a Winning Exhibit

By John Eshbach

## Part II

### Illustration

The following exhibit was assembled by the students enrolled in the *Learn To Build an Award Winning Exhibit*, at the American Numismatic Association Summer Seminar at Colorado Springs. The exhibit was entered in competition at the ANA Money Show in Chicago, in 1999. The exhibit received the 1st place award in the tokens category. It is displayed here as a review of the guidelines explained or reviewed above.



The exhibit told the story of the Civil War tokens issued by a Samuel H. Zahm of Lancaster, Pennsylvania during the early part of the conflict.

**Title:** The title of the exhibit was "Samuel H. Zahm's Civil War Tokens." One-inch plastic letters were attached to a red poster board backing with an adjustable hinge and positioned at the top of the exhibit case at a forty-five degree angle for easy reading. The plastic letters (large and small capitals) were spray painted a 'sand' color to complement the other colors of the exhibit. The **title** can also be computer generated but the colors may not be as vivid as with actual dimensional letters and numbers.

The **scope** of the exhibit is defined in the first paragraph of the left storyboard and reads:

## Civil War Tokens - A Solution To A Problem

What do you do if you are a store owner and have no coins for making change? In 1860, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was populated mainly by frugal, industrious farmers of German ancestry. The "putting back," hoarding, of coins, books, Indian artifacts, and other items was widespread in this stable economy. This hoarding increased drastically as the Civil War continued, leading to a coin shortage and problems making change. These problems were noted starting in July of 1862 in the Lancaster Inquirer, the local newspaper. The problem became so acute that one man, who had bought several pounds of butter and had his dollar note refused for payment because the merchant lacked change, became upset, emptied the butter out on the pavement, and said that "he wouldn't take any butter today." Similar scenes were repeated daily, resulting in "thrifty housewives (who) went home with long faces, light baskets and heavy hearts."

Samuel H. Zahm, an enterprising Civil War grocer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, tried to solve the problem by issuing tokens that could be used as change. They also advertised his new sideline enterprise as a coin dealer.

This exhibit shows Zahm's tokens and tells about the man and his "money."

**Basic Numismatic Information:** The storyboard on the right side of the exhibit outlined the numismatic information pertinent to the subject. The obverse and reverse designs were detailed including the diesinker, diagnostics and die erosion during striking. Diameters, weights and individual specific gravities were provided for each token. Rarity and probable mintages were also mentioned along with the first newspaper advertisement announcing Zahm's new venture as a coin dealer.

An example of the **numismatic information** on the right-hand storyboard reads;

(The 4th paragraph). This token has a diameter of 19.5 mm (approximately the size of the US small cent) and a plain edge. It comes in three different metals and is listed by Fuld as number 525A 1a-1f (1a = copper, 1b = brass, 1e = white metal, and 1f = silver). Although Fuld lists silver specimens, he also notes, "All W-M pieces seen of this issue have a light silvering and no authentic silver specimens have been observed - all were plated W-M pieces." The current review of this token verifies his remarks.

**Special Numismatic Information:** The storyboard on the left of the exhibit related the life of Samuel H. Zahm. His family, schooling, business ventures, politics, community service, travels and military status were outlined. The economic circumstances that necessitated the issuing of the token were also outlined.

Examples of **special numismatic information** are illustrated in the newspaper remarks.

**Creativity and Originality:** The physical layout of the exhibit was neither necessarily original nor creative but some of the material in the text was new and interestingly written. One aspect of the exhibit not observed by the viewer was a piece of sheet metal centered in the exhibit case under the background material and small magnets in the bases of the pedestals to keep them in their proper place should the exhibit case be bumped.

**Attractiveness:** The dominant color of the exhibit is red: the most used color in the advertising world. The second choice was green. The two storyboards were of coated 60 pound stock 8'1/2" x 13-1/2". The tokens were mounted on 1" pedestals spray painted a sand color to match the color of the paper used for the storyboards. As noted above, the letters used in the title were of the same color. Three enlarged pictures of the tokens were also part of the exhibit, one obverse and two reverses. A picture of S. H. Zahm was the centerpiece centered below the title. Two of his advertising cards were placed above each storyboard to balance the exhibit and add a bit of trivia to the exhibit. Captions under each token listed the Fuld number and type of metal alloy. A small bibliography card was centered at the bottom of the case

listing references or other information that could be helpful to anyone wanting to learn more about the tokens in the exhibit.

**Balance:** A one case exhibit for four tokens is a reasonable compromise. A few pictures were included in the exhibit and the selection of a large typeface provided an easy read of the **text**.

**Completeness:** The exhibit is complete as outlined in the **text** and **scope** of the exhibit. There are three different types of the Zahm token and each is exhibited including one additional token showing the obverse design. The subject of a silver specimen was also addressed in the text as mentioned above.

**Degree of Difficulty:** The Zahm token is listed as an R-4 (200 to 500 pieces) or R-5 (75 to 200 pieces) depending on the type. Most are in reasonably good condition ranging from extra fine to mint state. Much of the material in the text was new information on both Zahm and the token. For example: the activities and travels of Zahm, the local economic conditions during the Civil War, the striking progression of the tokens, and corresponding die erosion illustrated extensive research in preparing the **text** of the exhibit.

**Condition:** No statement in the exhibit relates to the condition of the exhibited tokens. It was just a visual observation of the numismatic material displayed.

**Rarity:** Indication of the rarity of the Zahm token was given in the **text** suggesting an issue of 70 to perhaps 500 depending on the type of token, either the brass, copper or white metal piece.

The scores given the Zahm exhibit at the Chicago ANA convention were 93/95/95, a relatively high score for an exhibit on a Civil War token. The score is attributed to the detailed information contained in the **text** relating to the token, its issuer, and the presentation of the information.

## **Chronology For Developing A Numismatic Exhibit**

The following is a guide or check list for developing an educational exhibit for competition at any numismatic activity that sponsors or solicits competitive exhibits. It may be necessary to become a member of the organization to enjoy the privilege of exhibiting, as is the case for competitive exhibiting at the American Numismatic Association conventions. The requirements are simple; complete the membership application, have it signed by an ANA member and send it with the proper registration fee to the ANA, 818 N. Cascade Ave., Colorado Springs, CO.

### **Preliminary steps:**

- Get the exhibit rules (copy of current rules attached)..
- Choose a category within which to exhibit.
- Apply to the exhibit chairperson for exhibit space.

### **Building the exhibit:**

- Select a theme.
- Research the numismatic and biographic materials.
- Write exhibit text.
- Edit text, check/correct spelling.
- Lay out exhibit according to the space allotment as defined in the exhibit rules.
- Proof read text, check spelling, make final layout.
- Make map of exhibit layout and list of contents.
- Pack exhibit. Double check all exhibit items as they are packed. Don't leave anything behind.

- Check all exhibit items for proper placement and alignment. \*
- Check the glass of the exhibit cases for finger marks and dust and clean if necessary. The exhibit chair generally has the necessary supplies to clean the case.
- Enjoy the convention.
- The American Numismatic Association has several seminars devoted to exhibiting, judging or review of the exhibits and judging procedures. Participation in the practice judging activity is beneficial to better understanding the art of exhibiting and judging.
- The exhibit judging procedure requires three judges to evaluate the competitive exhibits. The rating sheets are generally returned to the exhibitor and may contain remarks both complimentary and constructive. Review the evaluation sheets and seek guidance in bettering the exhibit or explaining scores by contacting the chief judge or any of the other judges or exhibitors. Most exhibitors and judges are willing to discuss or critique exhibits.

\*The following is a short list of common mistakes made by exhibitors in placing exhibits that seem to be repeated time and again. 1) The numismatic material is not related to the caption (meaning the numismatic material or the caption is in the wrong position). 2) The coin or token is placed up side down or the wrong side shown. 3) The most heartbreaking and humiliating mistake is realizing that a few pieces of the exhibit are still at home.

- Where to find it: Exhibit building requires not only knowledge relating to the numismatic information, both basic and special, but also color coordination, proper use of language, spelling and the proper selection and arrangement of the exhibit materials. In most cases, the local book, hobby, art or arts & crafts shop is the source for many of these kinds of supplies.

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