

ELVIRA CLAIN-STEFANELLI, CURATOR AT SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, DIES

Elvira Clain-Stefanelli, recently retired executive director and curator of the Smithsonian Institution's National Numismatic Collection, died of heart failure on October 1, 2001, in Arlington, Virginia. She was 86 years old.

Referred to as a remarkable treasure in the world of numismatics, Clain-Stefanelli and her husband, Vladimir, were an inseparable force in the field. Their aggressive pursuit of donations from private collections increased the Smithsonian's numismatic holdings from 60,000 items in the late 1950s to nearly 1 million today.

A recipient of the ANA's coveted Farran Zerbe Memorial Award for Distinguished Service, she was profiled in the August 1996 issue of *The Numismatist*. In the article, she shared her husband's "sure recipe" for happiness in the hobby.

"Collect what you enjoy, what gives you pleasure. Regardless if you lose money or gain money, you have already gotten back half to three quarters of the money you paid for it," she said.

ANA President John Wilson says, "Although Elvira Clain-Stefanelli will be missed by all, her references and many contributions to the hobby will be with us forever."

Elvira Eliza Olinescu was an author, curator, critic and, above all, a survivor. Born in Bucharest, Romania, at the beginning of World War I, she and her family were forced to flee their village to avoid invading troops. At the end of the war, she returned home to the disputed territory between Austria and Romania. She would later earn a master's degree in history from the University of Cernauti in Romania.

In 1939 she married Vladimir Clain-Stefanelli, a postgraduate student in Rome, who specialized in ancient coins. The couple was researching coins in Germany in 1942 when Vladimir was arrested by the Gestapo because his passport had been stolen and "used by an enemy of the state." He was sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp where he remained "a guest" until the end of World War II. Although pregnant, Elvira chose to join her husband in the camp. She later was released so their child would not be born in prison; however, after experiencing the bombings in Berlin, she returned to the camp, thinking it safer. She didn't realize Buchenwald, the site of a V-2 rocket factory, was a target for Allied bombings.

After the war, Vladimir found work in Rome with the numismatic firm. The family arrived in the United States in 1951 and the couple worked in New York for several years for Hesperia Art, then later for Stack's Rare Coins. In 1956 Vladimir became curator of the Smithsonian's Division of Numismatics; a year later, Elvira became his assistant. Two years after Vladimir's death in 1982, she became the department's first executive director.

Clain-Stefanelli's considerable contributions to the diffusion of numismatic knowledge include her books *Russian Gold Coins*, *America's Copper Coinage*, *Italian Coin Engravers*

since 1800, South Carolina's Paper Money, 1770-1933, and Numismatics: An Ancient Science. She also assembled the 1,848-page reference Numismatic Bibliography.

She was the recipient of the Smithsonian's Gold Medal for Exceptional Service, the Numismatic Literary Guild's Clemy award, and the ANA's Medal of Merit. In the 1990s, she was a member of the Citizens Commemorative Coin Advisory Committee.

Clain-Stefanelli was a member of the American Numismatic Society, (British) Royal Numismatic Society, Royal Numismatic Society of the Netherlands, Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium, Numismatic Society of Italy, and the International Numismatic Commission. She held an honorary membership in the ANA.

She is survived by one son, Alexander; and two granddaughters.

The American Numismatic Association is a congressionally chartered nonprofit educational organization dedicated to encouraging people to study and collect money and related items. The ANA helps its 28,000 members and the public discover and explore the world of money through its vast array of education and outreach programs, as well as its museum, library, publications, conventions and seminars. For more information, call 719-632-2646 or go to www.money.org.