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ANA Baltimore Convention Medal One of Few Known To Commemorate Edgar Allan Poe

Not many people understand the connection between Edgar Allan Poe and the City of Baltimore, home to the 2008 World's Fair of Money®. But anyone purchasing a 117th Anniversary ANA Convention medal will own a striking collectible and gain a greater understanding of Poe's connection to the city where he lived, wrote, died and was buried.

Artist Jamie Franki conducted countless hours of research on Poe, searching for images preserved in portraits, daguerreotypes and drawings – as well as numismatic items that may have celebrated the author and his genius. But for all of his efforts, he found just one low-relief, traditional side-view medal of Poe – used as a literary award by the New York Public Library in the late 19th century.

“This is quite possibly the second medal ever struck with Poe's image,” Franki said. “This should give the medal an unusual appeal and make it quite collectible – especially for anyone who is a fan of Poe or American literature.”

Franki's design features a three-quarter view of Poe in high relief. The portrait on the obverse is inspired by an oil painting by Baltimore artist Oscar Halling and “informed by every image I could find,” said Franki. The word, “Nevermore,” immortalized in *The Raven*, circles the edge above Poe's head and a small incused silhouette of a raven is perched on his signature, which was taken from an archival scan.

The reverse tells the tale of the annual “Poe Toast,” where for each of the past 59 years on Poe's birthday, a black-clad figure visits the gravesite and raises a cognac toast. The toaster then leaves a half-bottle of cognac and three roses on the grave.

“Poe is an absolutely fascinating person to draw,” said Franki, a coin collector who teaches art at the University of North Carolina – Charlotte. “He was poor, sickly, a substance abuser and an odd character. His face is asymmetrical; his mouth is at a different angle than his eyes, and he has a misshapen, sunken nature to his features. I wanted his expression to reflect his wit and intelligence as well as the somewhat tortured life that he lived. I looked at so many paintings, drawings and daguerreotypes that I'm confident I produced a pretty fair likeness of the man.”

Franki acknowledged that artists often pick safer themes for medals, such as landmarks and architectural features. “But as I researched Baltimore, Poe became my first choice. I felt that an important consideration in designing a medal is the educational aspect. People already know about Francis Scott Key and Fort McHenry, but not necessarily about Poe. This medal can expand people's perception of Baltimore.”

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Poe also has a numismatic connection. His original grave in Westminster Hall and Burying Ground is marked by a simple headstone with an engraved raven. But in 1875, a Baltimore school teacher started a "Pennies for Poe" campaign to raise money for a more appropriate monument, resulting in the large marble monument where, to this day, visitors traditionally leave a penny.

Franki said he hopes that the medal will cause people to explore more about the relationship Poe had with Baltimore and inspire them to read his literature and learn more about him.

"As a numismatist and collector of commemoratives, I am thrilled at the selection of Edgar Allan Poe as the subject of the ANA Baltimore medal," said Executive Director Larry Shepherd. "This medal is unique and certainly Poe, like many literary figures, was under-commemorated in numismatics. This is a fitting tribute to our host city."

Franki, who has designed a number of medals for a variety of organizations, worked as a Master Designer in the U.S. Mint Artistic Infusion Program from 2004-2006. His designs were chosen for two coins in the Westward Journey Nickel Series: the 2005 American Bison nickel reverse, and the 2006 Jefferson 1800 nickel obverse. In addition he designed the new coaching award for the United States Olympic Committee, which was unveiled in February.

Only 125 ANA convention bronze medals will be struck along with 150 two-medal sets (bronze and silver) and 125 convention medal badges. Badges sell for \$22.00; bronze medals for \$50 and two-medal sets for \$65. Pre-orders are being accepted for June delivery by calling 1-800-467-5725 or visiting www.money.org.

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