



Conder Tokens: Interview with Joel Spingarn (Feb 2004)

Conder Tokens: Joel, I'm especially pleased to have this opportunity to "speak" with you as my own interest in collecting conders

stems from when I got your set price sale list several years ago. I suspect that sale may have been the starting point for more than a few other collectors as well. Obviously you had been collecting for some time prior to your sale. Can you tell me something about how you started in conders? [Note: Shown on the right is the the Fixed Price List issued by Joel in 2001 which now serves as an excellent reference for collectors.]



Joel Spingarn: My addiction to "collecting" started many years prior to my collecting conders. My initial collecting experience goes back to 1938 when I started a stamp collection. World War II interrupted that as I entered Service. Three years later, as a civilian there was little time or funds to spend collecting, having married, raising children and building a business. However the collecting bug eventually returned one day while I was spending a few days at a hotel where there happened to be a coin show in progress.

Being exposed to a numismatic bourse did a number on me and I couldn't resist making a purchase of a low grade chain cent. Having been bitten by the bug, I began attending local shows where I met a large cent collector. His enthusiasm for the big cents was contagious. Before long, I joined Early American Coppers, and collected the entire Sheldon series of early dates except for two that were beyond my means. I had come to the end of the line with the early dates and could not make up my mind as to what to collect now, if anything.

One day, at an EAC meeting, I met Robbie Brown. The usual question from many collectors was "What are you going to collect now, Joel ?" Robbie was no exception. Having a huge collection of Conders with a number of duplicates, it was natural that Robbie suggested collecting Conders. I asked him to send me the dupes and that I would take a look. Of course, one thing led to another, and before long, my irrational exuberance, exploded and I was on the hunt. The combination of beauty, superb condition, affordability and availability of conders could not be resisted.

Conder Tokens: I certainly agree with you regarding the many factors that make conders irresistible. And from what I've seen and heard your "exuberance" led to a very nice collection as well as to the Conder Token Collector's Club. Can you tell me about the origins of the CTTC?

Joel Spingarn: I believe that I was actively collecting Conders about a year when I heard of a chap that had much knowledge of conders and had a fabulous collection. I do not recall how I managed to locate Wayne Anderson but I do recall that persons acquainted with him were reluctant to put me in touch, which only made me more anxious to meet him. Finally, I managed to contact Wayne and he was very generous with information, advising me to obtain auction

catalogues of significant collections and other pertinent literature, some of which, he was able to supply. We had almost daily conversations about tokens and huge phone bills. I believe that any sort of collecting is much more pleasurable when collectors are able to get together to show and discuss their hobby.

This was something that was seriously lacking in the realm of conder token collecting at that time. Being a member of EAC where I was ,very much, in touch with large cent collectors, I was acutely aware of the difference between the two collecting groups. Having this in mind, I broached the subject to Wayne ,who was also an EAC member, and we agreed that having a venue for conder collectors would be very desirable and also a lot of fun. Now, how do we get started?

Neither Wayne nor myself were acquainted with many collectors. Logically, it could be the token dealers that could put us in touch with collectors. The problem was that the dealers were hesitant to part with their mailing list for fear of our infringing on the privacy of their customers. Wayne was quite friendly with Alan Davisson who offered to add a blurb on his outgoing mailings which eventually paid off. I contacted Bill McKivor who really was the only dealer who was enthusiastic enough to offer his mailing list for us to use for an intro to the CTCC and that really added the impetus we needed. Once we started, of course, every one joined, and I believe the club has furthered the conder series considerably.

Conder Tokens: During the year or so I've been a member of the CTCC I've found other members I've been in touch with very helpful, and have found the journal very interesting reading. I expect the club will continue the good work they have been, and are currently, doing. Now, I'm wondering if you could share your thoughts on any particular tokens or token series that you may have been particularly taken with during the time you have been involved with conders. Any favorite tokens? Any finds that were almost too good to be true?

Joel Spingarn: I suppose that my favorite token is the last one that I collected! Seriously though, it would be difficult to pin down any one particular token but those that come with exceptional surfaces or an interesting story might be favorites. A couple of examples are: the Middlesex DH41 (I had two of these, one of these with incredibly superlative surfaces that I still retain);



and another favorite I still retain is a beautiful specimen of Kinrosshire DH1, a perfect specimen which illustrates an interesting story.



Another token that I WISH I still retained is the only gold token that was ever offered to me, an Angusshire DH2. which, I believe, is the rarest of the type. I assume that it is probable that most gold conders were sold and melted as a precious metal when the price of gold skyrocketed. If anyone of your readers have any information about the existence of gold conders, I would love to hear about them. I did request any info from the British Museum but did not receive a reply.



Conder Tokens: Those are certainly some extremely nice items - as images you provided show. And your response about the last token collected being your favorite is so true. Since your sale I suspect your collecting interests have changed somewhat. What new directions are you looking in?

Joel Spingarn: At age 82, I didn't expect to start a new collection but, sure enough, the bug bit again. It must be that inveterate collectors have a gene in their DNA that initiates this malady. I have always been interested in the numismatic aspects surrounding the Civil War and have been collecting both fractional and large size U.S. currency. Also a very interesting series but if I had

to choose a favorite, the Conders would be my first choice. The advantage of being able to afford mint state specimens has great appeal.

Conder Tokens: I've no doubt that your Civil War holdings will grow to include many nice items. As a "beginner" in this field, have you any particular advice or suggestions you feel might be useful for beginning conder collectors?

Joel Spingarn: Plenty of excellent advice for new collectors was given in your previous interviews so I do not need to repeat them, however I might add this thought. The hunter who has the quarry in his sights, and hesitates to pull the trigger may have to continue the hunt for a very long time before finding the quarry again. The same advice applies when that superb token comes along, don't hesitate, you may never see another, pull the trigger.

One more bit of advice that I would like to add has been said many times but it bears repeating. "The three things to remember when collecting is "condition, condition, and condition." Never clean a token and reject any for sale that have been cleaned. They just never look right. Except for a few rarities, conders in nice condition are affordable.

And one more bit of wisdom. Never hold a grudge when a fellow collector out-bids you for a much wanted piece. Losing a friend is much more of a loss than losing a token.

Conder Tokens: Excellent suggestions. I'm still thinking about some of the pieces I missed from your sale as I mulled things over! Thankfully I did eventually buy one or two items that I'm still very happy with. Thanks for the opportunity to get those and thanks for taking the time for this interview.