



The Curious Collector

by Len Augsburger, LSCC #1271

Liberty Seated Collectors Dedicate Christian Gobrecht Headstone

Sponsored by the Liberty Seated Collectors Club (LSCC), a new headstone was placed at the Christian Gobrecht grave at Lawnview Cemetery in Rockledge, PA, on November 13. In attendance were LSCC members, U.S. Mint personnel, and descendants of the Gobrecht family. Benjamin Franklin, in the person of Pat McBride, was present, while the American Numismatic Society was represented by Resolute Americana Curator Jesse Kraft.

Speakers included Liberty Seated Collectors (LSCC) president Len Augsburger, past LSCC vice-president Bill Bugert, American Numismatic Association president Tom Uram, U.S. Mint Chief Engraver Joe Menna, and the Honorable Ventris C. Gibson, U.S. Mint Director. Uram graciously produced a challenge coin for the event, which was distributed to attendees (See Cover Photos).

Originally interred at Philadelphia's Monument Cemetery in north central Philadelphia, the remains of Gobrecht and his family were moved in 1956, when the Monument Cemetery property was transferred by the city of Philadelphia to Temple University.

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Bill Bugert, writing in the July 2008 Gobrecht Journal (<https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/book/177>), detailed his investigation into the location of the Gobrecht plot. The documentary trail, beginning with Monument Cemetery, eventually led Bugert to Lawnview Memorial Park in Rockledge, PA.

There, Bugert discovered that the original Gobrecht family headstone had been discarded during the 1956 move of remains from Philadelphia to Rockledge, PA. A marker reading simply "GOBRECHT" now marked the family plot, hardly a fitting tribute to the third Engraver of the U.S. Mint. In 2023, LSCC Vice-President Dennis Fortier spearheaded the effort to commission a new headstone, which has now been placed at Lawnview Park.

Len Augsburger's prepared remarks at the ceremony were as follows:

"It is said that a person dies twice. First, when they pass away, and again, when anyone who knew them passes likewise to their reward. At that point, people move from memory and into history, and it is only through history that we know Gobrecht. However, history tells us much about him. We know the things written about him, and we know the objects he created.

Christian Gobrecht was born in Hanover, Pennsylvania in 1785, the sixth son of the Rev. John Christopher Gobrecht, an emigrant from Germany. Gobrecht grew up bilingual, and his papers reflect fluency in both English and German. His early sketchbooks, preserved in Philadelphia, attest to his ability as an artist and mechanic, a rare combination and especially so in a small town. Gobrecht moved early in his adulthood to Baltimore, and shortly thereafter to Philadelphia, where he spent the remainder of his life.

Gobrecht and his father were patriots. Gobrecht's father recruited for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and is said to have hidden from British troops on several occasions. Gobrecht in turned served with the Pennsylvania volunteers during the War of 1812.

In 1791, after the Revolution, President Washington passed through Hanover, a small town of less than a thousand people. Although we cannot say for sure, it seems likely that Gobrecht's father, or even Gobrecht himself, would have met Washington on that occasion. We do know that Gobrecht later produced three different copperplate engravings of the first President.

Gobrecht and his father were men of faith. Gobrecht senior led the Emmanuel Reformed Church in Hanover, PA for many years. From the letters of Gobrecht's children remaining in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, it is clear the family was deeply committed to the Christian faith.

Gobrecht was self-taught. The young country did not have access to the network of art schools and exhibitions that existed in Europe. Gobrecht apprenticed to a clockmaker who died young, and then moved to Baltimore where he made a living doing copperplate engraving and working in a type foundry. He shortly moved to Philadelphia, the center of the banknote engraving

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industry, where professional opportunities were more promising than in Baltimore.

Prior to his employment at the Mint in 1836, Gobrecht worked as an engraver for various publishing concerns in addition to work as banknote engraver. He accepted private commissions for portrait medals and created dies for embossed book bindings. He also worked as a mechanic, inventing a medal-ruling machine and a reed organ, the drawings for which survive in the American Antiquarian Society.

Gobrecht joined the Mint in 1836 and served as the de facto Chief Engraver from that time, although he was not recognized as such until the death of William Kneass in 1840. Although associated with the Mint for only eight years, Gobrecht completely reworked the designs of the entire U.S. coinage series during his short tenure. Among these were the Liberty Seated design for the silver coinage, a series that remain especially popular with today's collectors.

Today, it is hard for us to relate to an economy where "hard money," silver and gold, acted as the universal standard for trade and transactions. That is not the world in which we live. The Mint thus had a different symbolic role than it does today. It was truly the source of the nation's money. Apart from the circulation of foreign coins and private banknote issues, there was no Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Gobrecht's time, leaving the Mint as the sole coiner of the realm. This context amplifies Gobrecht's place in history, especially given that the capability to produce coinage was a distinct mark of American sovereignty.

Gobrecht might have accomplished much more at the Mint, but he passed away young, in the summer of 1844, at the age of 58. The Mint Director Robert M. Patterson shared with the Mint staff a note from the family. "It is the particular wish of the family of the deceased that the officers and all who are connected with the Mint attend the funeral." The note demonstrates a kinship between Gobrecht and those he worked with, a sentiment no doubt shared among the Mint staff gathered here today.

The U.S. Mint boasts a rich history, today preserved in the National Numismatic Collection and by the many numismatists who pursue the history and objects of our national coinage.

It is appropriate that we are gathered here to honor an American who played a prominent role in our early coinage."

Bill Bugert, past vice president of the LSCC, next spoke with prepared remarks:

"My name is Bill Bugert and I have collected and researched Christian Gobrecht's Liberty Seated half dollars since my Grandmother gave me my first in 1967. I still have it as a family heirloom.

In opening, I am going to say the 4 words that audiences like to hear: "My talk is short."

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I am humbled and honored to be here today in close proximity to his remains and to participate in the re-dedication of Christian Gobrecht's gravesite. This is especially special to me as I spent a lot of time searching for his gravesites. I live in Gettysburg, near where he was born in Hanover, PA in 1785. As I like numismatic research, I decided to research where he was interred. I reported my detailed findings in a Liberty Seated Collectors Club publication, *The Gobrecht Journal*, in 2008. Len asked me to say a few words today so here is a summary of my findings.

A few years after he designed and had minted his Liberty Seated design on half dimes, dimes, quarters, half dollars, dollars, and later double dimes, Christian died in 1844. He was initially interred with an ornated headstone [produce photo] in Philadelphia's Monument Cemetery. After years of neglect, the 26,000 dead interred there were moved here, to Lawnview Cemetery in 1955. The old cemetery lot was sold to Temple University, just adjacent to it.

In the Fall of 2007, my wife and I took a trip here hoping to find his gravesite. The cemetery office was closed. After a few hours of fruitless searching in the old section, we eyed the mass expanse of the cemetery. Laid out in neat rows were brass name plates. Judy and I spent a frustrating hour using our hands to scrap back grass that has overgrown the markers without success. Pushing her limits, I vowed to return later when the office was open. Good thing too, we were looking in the wrong section.

In the Spring of 2008, I wrote the cemetery office for details of Christian Gobrecht's grave. They were quick to respond so I headed there alone this time when the office was open. Producing my letter, "Eric" said his grave would be easy to find. Grabbing a shovel, we drove to the location where essentially no brass plaques were visible. He said, "here it is" and I am thinking we cannot see anything. With spade in the ground, first try, he located Christian Gobrecht's grave. Absolutely amazed, I was grateful as we scrapped back the grass and dirt to reveal a plaque that simply said "GOBRECHT." [produce photo] I asked him what happened to the original Monument Cemetery headstone and he said it was destroyed. That brings us to here today for the appropriate dedication of the 3rd gravestone memorial of the Christian Gobrecht family.

I wish to thank Dennis Fortier and Len Augsburger for making this event possible."

Tom Uram, ANA President, spoke next and noted he was humbled to represent the 28,000 members of the American Numismatic Association. Uram spoke about the value of history within in numismatics, and recognized the Liberty Seated Collectors Club for its preservation of Gobrecht's legacy. He noted that one did not have to be a numismatist to appreciate today's ceremony, that anyone with a recognition of history would understand the importance of the event.

Tom mentioned his living history program, which is shared with area schools, and recognized Benjamin Franklin (aka Patrick McBride), who was present at the ceremony.

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Uram noted the contrast in the minting technology of the early 19th century and that of today. Gobrecht would have worked directly on steel in some cases, whereas today's engraver's can be completely computer-based if they wish.

Tom concluded by recognizing the Mint officials in attendance, in addition to the work of the Citizens Coin Advisory Committee, on which he previously served.

Joe Menna, U.S. Mint Chief Engraver, spoke next. Joe thanked the numismatic community for their support of this event and for supporting the work of the U.S. Mint in general. Menna began by pointing out a key difference between European and American artists of Gobrecht's period. While Europeans enjoyed established schools, museum exhibition opportunities, and mentor relationships; American artists often worked in a vacuum, separated from the substantial artistic infrastructure enjoyed across the pond. Menna called out Gobrecht as an example of one these self-taught artists who produced work comparable to their European counterparts, even with little formal training.

Menna noted that he lived in Bordentown City (NJ), and mentioned a plaque in that town honoring Joseph Wright, who was effectively the first Chief Engraver of the Mint (he died shortly before the appointment could be made by Washington). For Menna, the plaque serves as a constant reminder of his counterparts in the early Mint. Menna continued:

"Today as we gather to honor Christian Gobrecht, the third Chief Engraver of the United States Mint, I am deeply humbled to stand here as his eleventh successor. This moment is about reflecting on the path he forged, one of artistry, innovation, and dedication that has influenced generations of engravers and continues to shape the work we do today. Christian Gobrecht was an innovator and a true craftsman; his contributions helped elevate American coinage to new levels, establishing a standard that engravers have aspired to uphold ever since. He brought his spirit of precision and creativity to the Mint, and his work endures as a testament to his skill and to his profound vision. As I serve in this role today, I am constantly reminded of the legacy he left for us.

Though our tools and methods have changed, the heart of our work remains the same, to create symbols that reflect our nation's values and history, honoring the American people, serving the American people through our craft. It is an immense privilege to follow in the footsteps of such a distinguished predecessor. I am profoundly grateful for the foundation that Christian Gobrecht laid.

May we continue to honor his legacy, striving to bring the same dedication to excellence to our work that he exemplified. His spirit lives on in every coin that we create and his impact on our artwork will never be forgotten. Thank you."

Mint Director Ventris C. Gibson concluded the remarks. Gibson talked about the value of recognizing history, and how it reflects on our nation. Gibson recognized the Mint employees for

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their dedication and mentioned that the Rittenhouse award, named after the first Mint Director and recognizing outstanding Mint employees, was recently conferred. Gibson made mention of the ANA and LSCC and thanked them for the role is organizing this ceremony.

Following Director’s Gibson’s remarks, Dennis Fortier recognized the Gobrecht family members in attendance and led the gravestone unveiling, which was ceremonially performed by Len Augsburger, Joe Menna, Tom Uram and Director Gibson (left to right as shown below).



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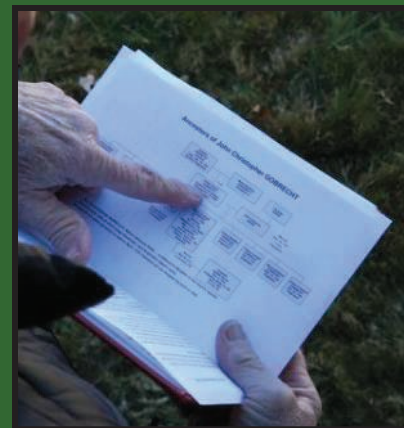
Note: Image on previous page at far bottom is the new headstone for Christian Gobrecht and family.



Philadelphia Mint Superintendent Robert Kurzyna, Mint Director Ventris Gibson and Chief Engraver Joe Menna



Gobrecht Family Descendants
&
Ancestry Chart of Family Tree
with Len Augsburger and
Bill Bugert (both from LSCC)



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Family Descendants with Mint Superintendent Kurzyna, and Joe Casazza & Dennis Fortier (both from LSCC)



Ken Otto, Regional Team Leader at far left in left center image and at far right is Jesse Kraft, Resolute Americana Assistant Curator of American Numismatics, American Numismatic Society



Guest Signature Book & Brochure Card for Ceremony



Local media (ABC 6) photographs the new headstone

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Speaking at the Ceremony
in left to right order:

Len Augsburger, LSCC President

Bill Bugert, Researcher of Gobrecht's
Gravesite, who conceived the idea of
a new grave marker

(John Frost with guest)

Ventris Gibson, U.S. Mint Director

Joe Menna, Chief Engraver,
U.S. Mint

Dennis Fortier, LSCC Vice President
and who managed the
Grave Marker Project



Tom Uram (ANA President) in blue suit jacket who arranged the donation of Special Ceremony Medals, and Judy Bugert

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Some of the nicer
Group photos taken:

Below: Ben Franklin
as portrayed by
Pat McBride
and
Tom Uram, ANA
President who also
spoke during the
Ceremony



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