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## Two George Washington Medals: Missing Links in the Chain of Friendship Between the United States and the Wabanaki Confederacy

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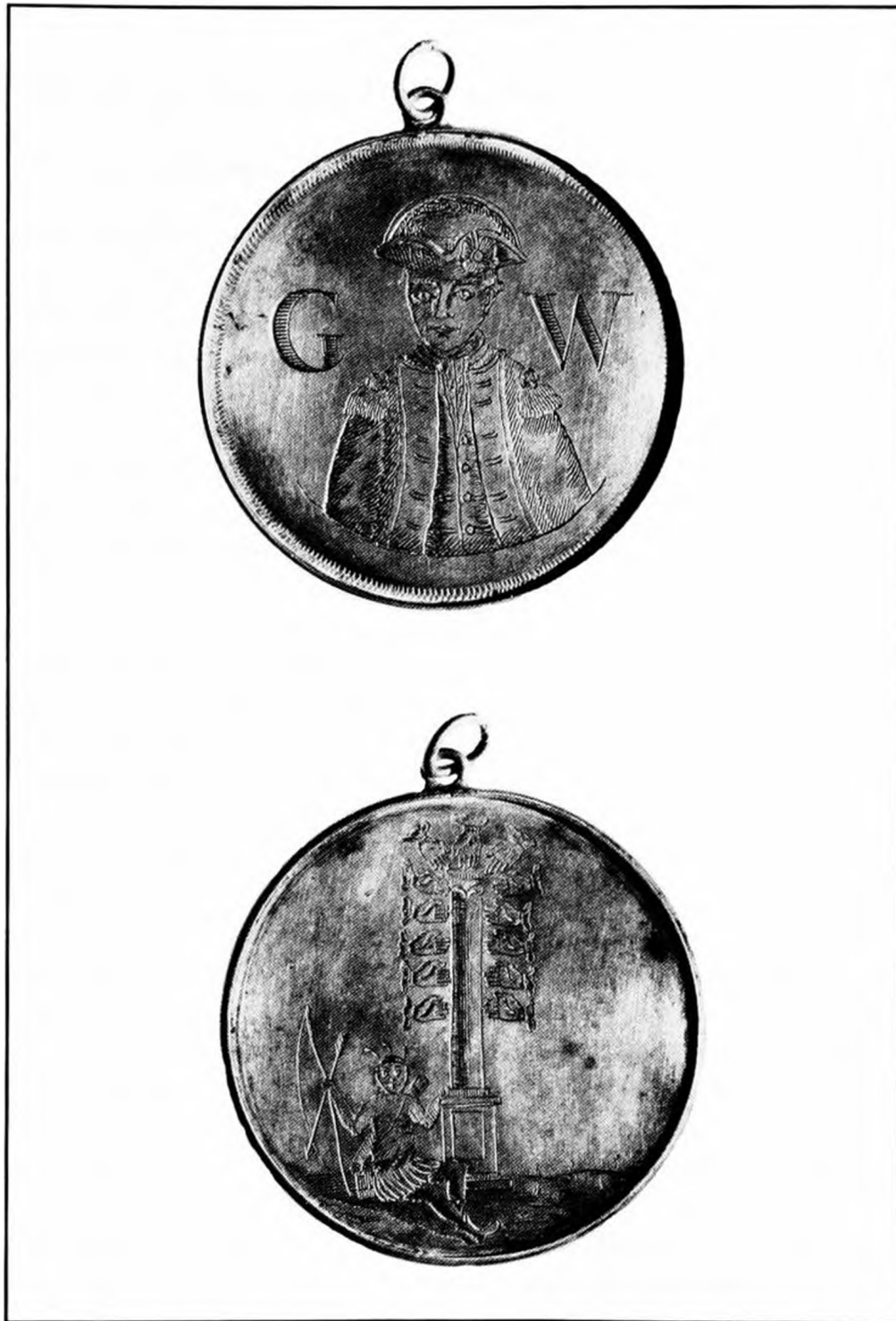
*TWO GEORGE WASHINGTON MEDALS:  
MISSING LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF FRIENDSHIP  
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE  
WABANAKI CONFEDERACY\**

In 1972, a tribal dispute developed between two Indian bands belonging to the Micmac Nation. The controversy centred around the ownership of a rare 'peace medal,' which features George Washington and his initials on one side, and an Indian sitting at the base of a classical column, crowned by thirteen hands, on the other. (Fig. 1).

A matching silver medallion, engraved with the same images, is harbored in the collection of the British Museum's Department of Coins and Medals. (Fig. 2) In 1982, this medal appeared in Jonathan King's book *Thunderbird and Lightning*. The existence of both extraordinary medals remains largely unknown, and has never been chronicled in professional journals of the United States or Canada. In 1984, while researching Micmac Indian history in Maine, I became aware of the two medals and their curious distribution. Several questions begged for an answer. How did the British Museum acquire its piece? Why were Micmac Indians fighting over their medal? How did they obtain it and when did it come into their possession? What was the purpose of these medals, and finally, who made them?

According to Mark Jones of the Department of Coins and Medals, the British Museum acquired its medallion in 1825 from the collection belonging to King George III.<sup>1</sup> How the British sovereign obtained this piece is not (yet) known. A Canadian expert suggested that the medallion was given to the King as a 'peace offering' after the American Revolution, "probably by General (Geo.) Washington himself."<sup>2</sup> This hypothesis seems odd. It appears unlikely that George III would have appreciated such a souvenir from a "rebel"

\*Reprinted by permission from *The Medal* (British Art Medal Trust, British Museum, London), Winter 1985.



Mystery surrounds the origin and disposition of the Washington metal depicted here. Most likely, it was presented by Congress to the Micmac Nation between 1776 and 1777 as a symbol of friendship. Today, it rests in the British Museum; a second, identical metal remains in the family of Micmac Band member Georgina Barlow in New Brunswick.

general who had stripped the British Empire of its prize possessions in America.

The Micmac Indians are not quite certain of the origins of their silver medal either, and its blurry history led to the inter-tribal controversy over ownership. The Band at Eel Ground reserve claimed that it was their Chief's badge of office, which had been passed from each headman to his successor. In 1972, the Eel Ground Micmac Chief ceremoniously turned the medal over to the Public Archives of Canada, which was to keep it in trust for that Band.

When the Micmac Band of Indian Island heard of this transference its Chief Peter Barlow stepped forward in protest. He claimed that the medallion belonged to one of the members of his Band, Mrs. Georgina Barlow, who had inherited it from her mother Rose Francis. Her father, being at one time Chief of the Eel Ground Band, "with the permission of his wife," wore the silver medal on special occasions. In 1979, after a long legal battle, the Federal court ruled that Georgina was the rightful owner of the medal, and it was returned into her family's hands. There it remains today.<sup>3</sup>

Chief Barlow believed that the medal was "given" to an Indian Chieftain or Warrior who was faithful to the young American Republic, and that "it came into the possession of one person who belonged to the Micmac race as a result of inter-tribal wars between the Indians some time after the turn of the 19th century."<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to Chief Barlow's beliefs, Micmacs were not involved in inter-tribal wars during the early 1800s. The various historical records show another scenario, which explains how the British King and the Micmac Nation obtained their medals. The geo-political situation in Northeast America during the 1770s and the symbols engraved on the medals present clues to solve the riddle.

From the 16th century onward, European artists portrayed America in the allegorical form of an Indian warrior or princess, dressed in native garb, usually with feather headdress, bow and arrow, and often with tobacco pipe or tomahawk. For

example, the Company of Massachusetts Bay had an Indian in its seal, which was cut in England prior to 1629 when it was sent to the colony in New England.<sup>6</sup> In the political cartoons of the 1700s, the American colonies were often represented in the figure of an Indian.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the figure on the medal symbolizes America. The pillar crowned with thirteen hands is a stylized Tree of Liberty. The column stands for the Roman Republic, the political example for the revolutionary united colonies, which are represented by the thirteen hands pointing toward the column.

Hostilities between the patriots and the British forces in America did not begin in earnest until 1775, when Congress chose George Washington as the Commander-in-chief of the Continental army “for the defence of American Liberty.” Fearing problems with the surrounding Indian nations, Congress wrote letters to the principal tribes, using familiar metaphors of Indian diplomacy: “Brothers! We live upon the same ground with you. The same Island is our common birthplace. We desire to sit under the same tree of peace with you.”<sup>8</sup> In September 1775, the thirteenth “hand” joined the united colonies when Georgia sent its delegates to Congress in Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> In July 1776, Congress declared the independence of the United States and abjured King George III. Royal symbols were destroyed and the number thirteen became almost sacred.<sup>10</sup> In June 1777, Congress resolved that “the Flag of the United States be thirteen stripes [and] that the Union be thirteen stars.” Five years later, the bald eagle was chosen as the American emblem.<sup>11</sup>

On the basis of this configuration, it seems likely that the medal was designed between July 1776 and June 1777, and probably not later than 1782. This chronological frame fits with the historical records. In July 1776, a delegation of Micmacs and Maliseets came to Watertown in Massachusetts “to see and talk with the Council & General Washington, from both whom they received letters.” These eastern members of the Wabanaki Confederacy declared: “We shall have nothing to do with Old England” and offered to support the Americans.

Ambroise St. Aubin, the Maliseet chief, then presented as their token of allegiance "a Silver Gorget and Heart with the King's Arms and Busts of the King and Queen engraved on them." When they signed the Treaty, the President of the Massachusetts Council proclaimed: "The United States now form a long and Strong Chain; and it is made longer and stronger by our Brethren of the St. John's & Mickmac Tribes joining with us; and may Almighty God never suffer this Chain to be broken." He promised the Indians "that they should have a new Gorget and Heart with a Bust of General Washington and proper devices to represent the United Colonies."<sup>12</sup>

Six months after this visit by the Indians, Congress appointed a former Indian trader, John Allan of Nova Scotia, as the new Agent for the Wabanaki tribes inhabiting the territories east of the Penobscot River. Allan held the rank of Colonel in the Continental Army. After a visit to Congress, he stayed for several months in Boston and in February 1777 requested the following goods from the Massachusetts Council in Watertown: "Silver medals — Powder — Ball — Flint — Tobacco — Axes." He concluded his letter with: "Should any of the above articles be in store I should be glad to get some."<sup>13</sup> Several months later, Colonel Allan established his headquarters at Machias in eastern Maine, where a number of American troops and Wabanaki warriors were stationed under his command. In the spring of 1778, his lieutenant Frederic de Lesdernier and two Indian war-captains sailed from Machias to Boston. On June 11, the Massachusetts Congress in Watertown resolved "that the Board of War be directed to procure and deliver to Lieutenant Frederic de Lesdernier, for the use of the two Maricheet Indians accompanying him, six handsome laced Indian Hats not exceeding the value of Six pounds each, two Silver medals, not exceeding the same value each ... and charge the same to the account of this State."<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Allan prepared for an offensive and sailed to St. Andrew's Point at Passamaquoddy Bay, in "Order to collect all the Indians together & raise them for War." That same day, July 1, 1778, Lesdernier returned from Boston "with agreeable News" that gave

Colonel Allan “a great advantage in Treating with the Indians.” He called a Council, “as they call it,” gave the Indians the news, and “Delivered them Strings of Wampum as Customary.” In his report, Allan wrote: “I then addressed the War Captains, presenting Each a medal (having procured several for the purpose) as a Token of Friendship & for a Distinguished Badge for their former conduct, which they received & were saluted by all.” These were given “on behalf of the Commander in chief to Defend their rights & Liberty, from the attempts & Insults of a Cruel & Bloodthirsty Enemy.”<sup>15</sup> On the basis of Colonel Allan’s muster roll, the recipients of these two silver medals were the Maliseet Captains Nicholas Hawawes and Noel Wallice.<sup>16</sup>

Disturbed about these activities, the British despatched a warship to Fort Howe in the harbor of St. John River. Meanwhile, a supportive missionary incited the Roman Catholic Maliseets and Micmacs to break with the Americans. On September 24, 1778, “at a Grand Meeting of the Indians at Menaguashe in the Harbour of the River St. John, near Fort Howe,” a group of Micmac and maliseet chiefs signed a Treaty of Friendship, and handed over “the presents which they had received from the rebel general Washington.”<sup>17</sup> Ten days later, Allan wrote a missive to the Maliseets on the St. John River, commanding them to leave the British “without Delay” and forwarded this letter “with a String of Wampum & Maddle Annexed in the usual form.”<sup>18</sup> Unable to counter the missionary’s injunctions and British peace-offerings, Allan lost control over a large number of Indian troops. Among those Maliseets who defected was the War-Captain Hawawes, taking with him seven Indian families to the St. John River.<sup>19</sup> Until the Treaty of Paris (1783), which concluded the war, the Maliseets and Micmacs continued to flounder and developed a wait-and-see policy.

Assuming that the silver medals Colonel Allan presented to the Indians were engraved with “proper devices,” I surmise that the two medallions here discussed are the same as those requested from the Massachusetts Council in February 1777. It

appears likely that King George III acquired one of these medals as a trophy from Colonel Michael Francklin, his Superintendent for the Indian Affairs in Nova Scotia (which included the St. John River). Given the close inter-relationship between Maliseets and Micmacs, which includes inter-tribal marriages, the other silver medal presumably has been passed down from generation to generation until the piece was inherited by Georgina Barlow at Indian Island.

This leaves us with the final question of authorship. Because Colonel Allan requested silver medals from Massachusetts Council, it is probable that the pieces were made in Boston, where about forty silversmiths were active during that period.<sup>20</sup> Although no conclusive evidence has been tracked down, the circumstances, design, and style of the engravings point in the direction of Paul Revere, a famous silversmith and revolutionary agitator. He was a prominent member of the "Sons of Liberty" in Boston, a secret organization, which staged the Tea Party of 1773.<sup>21</sup> In the years immediately preceding the request for silver medals, Revere designed and engraved a variety of devices picturing Indians, such as the emblem he made for the Royal American Magazine in 1774 and the figure on the Massachusetts Bay Colony promissory note in 1775.<sup>22</sup> In that same year, he made the official seal of Massachusetts, also showing an Indian, which the State used until 1780.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to these engravings depicting Indians, Revere designed bills of payment showing a revolutionary soldier, the bust of whom is virtually identical to the "George Washington" on the silver peace-medals.<sup>24</sup> During the period 1775 until 1777, the silversmith was active designing medals and coins such as the "Liberty and Virtue" coin, made in 1776.<sup>25</sup> Throughout his career, Revere was renowned for his caustic cartoons and played an important role as a graphic propagandist for the American cause. During the Revolution he served as a colonel in the Massachusetts militia, stationed mostly at Fort William in Boston harbor.<sup>26</sup> This, of course, left him less time for smithing and engraving, but he did not stop working as an artisan during those years. Revere "had a rather spasmodic



keeping of daybooks," illustrated by the fact that his famous Liberty Bowl was not recorded.<sup>27</sup> This may explain the lack of documentation proving undisputed authorship of the silver medals. Records do exist, which demonstrate that in the years following the Revolution, Revere made silver medals commemorating special events.<sup>28</sup>

On the basis of the documentation and argumentation presented above, it seems apparent that the medals now held by the British Museum in London and the Micmacs at Indian Island (New Brunswick, Canada) were engraved by Revere and presented by Colonel Allan to his Indian Captains of the allied troops, consisting of warriors belonging to the Wabanaki Confederacy. As such, these silver medals represent some important missing links in the historical "chain of friendship" between the United States of America and the tribes belonging to this ancient Indian league.

Harald E. L. Prins

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mark Jones, Letter to Harald Prins, London, March 6, 1985.

<sup>2</sup>*Micmac News*, vol. 12, August 15, 1983.

<sup>3</sup>*Indian News*, vol. 15, March 1972. *Agenutemagen*, vol. 1, August 3, 1972. Georgina Barlow, personal communications, 1984-1985.

<sup>4</sup>*Indian News*, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup>*Agenutemagen*, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup>Swan, B.F., "Prints of the American Indian 1670-1775," in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 46 (Boston, 1973), pp. 273-274.

<sup>7</sup>Jones, M. W., *The Cartoon History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1975). Dolmetsch, J.D., *Rebellion and Reconciliation, Satirical Prints on the Revolution in Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, 1976).

<sup>8</sup>Cited in Burnett, E.C., *The Continental Congress* (New York, 1941), p. 97.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 103, 320.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>11</sup>*The Columbia Encyclopedia* (New York [2nd edition], 1950), p. 683.

## GEORGE WASHINGTON MEDALS

<sup>12</sup>Baxter, J. P., (ed.), *Documentary History of the State of Maine*, vol. 24 (Portland 1916), pp. 166, 168, 169. The Wabanaki Confederacy of Algonquian tribes in the Northeast North America was formed in the 17th century. This league fell apart in the 19th century, but was resurrected in 1977 as a result of Pan-Indian activism in North America. Micmacs, Maliseets, Passamaquoddies, and Penobscots form part of this traditional league, which also included the Abenakis from St. Francis, Becancourt, and Missisquoi (Swanton).

<sup>13</sup>Kidder, F., *Military Operations in Eastern Maine and Nova Scotia during the Revolution* (Albany, 1867), p.182.

<sup>14</sup>*Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay*, vol. 20 (Boston, 1918), p. 438.

<sup>15</sup>Kidder, op. cit., pp. 247-248.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

<sup>17</sup>*Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Saint John, 1885), pp. 313-318; Murdoch, B., *The History of Nova Scotia*, vol. 2 (Halifax, 1865), pp. 595-596.

<sup>18</sup>Baxter, op. cit., vol. 16, pp. 95-98.

<sup>19</sup>*Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society*, op. cit., pp. 322-323.

<sup>20</sup>Flynt, H. N., and Fales, M. G., *The Heritage Foundation Collection of Silver, with Biographical Sketches of New England Silversmiths, 1625-1825* (Old Deerfield, 1968), pp. 143-364.

<sup>21</sup>Fales, M.G., *Early American Silver for the Cautious Collector* (New York), p. 175; Kimball, J., "The One Hundredth Anniversary of the Destruction of Tea in Boston Harbor," *Essex Institute for Historical Collections*, vol. 12 (Salem 1874), pp. 195-239; *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 43 (Boston 1966), p. 374.

<sup>22</sup>Swan, op. cit. p. 271. Brigham, C. S., *Paul Revere's Engravings* (Worcester, 1954), p. 79.

<sup>23</sup>Gettemy, C. F., *The True Story of Paul Revere, his Midnight Ride, his Arrest and Court Martial, his Useful Services* (Boston, 1905), pp. 138-139.

<sup>24</sup>Brigham, op. cit., pp. 147-156.

<sup>25</sup>Storer, M., "Numismatics of Massachusetts," in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, vol. 7c (Boston 1923), p. 183.

<sup>26</sup>Gettemy, op. cit., *Massachusetts Archives*, vols. 148, 151.

<sup>27</sup>Buhler, K. C., *American Silver 1655-1825 in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston* (Greenwich, 1972), p. 384.

<sup>28</sup>Storer, op. cit., p. 29; Gettemy, op. cit.; Brigham, op. cit., pl. 161; *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, op. cit., p. 375.