

## BEYOND THE BOOK, BEYOND THE INTERNET, CONTACT AN EXPERT-ONE COLLECTORS EXPERIENCE

A couple of years ago I wrote an article for the SVCC newsletter that spoke to the vast amount of numismatic information that was now available to collectors via the internet. Obviously, this has not always been the case unless you are a Young Numismatist. During the early years of my collecting I relied on books (The Red Book) and later subscriptions to Coin World and the ANA's Numismatist for information about coins and collecting. To learn something about grading I purchased the book Photograde and in later years other grading books. Within the last 20 years I started buying series specific books such as "The Complete Guide to Buffalo Nickels" by David Lange to learn about my favorite coin to collect the Buffalo Nickel.

Having read David Lange's book cover to cover and several other books and any articles I could find on the Buffalo Nickel I thought I was pretty knowledgeable about the coin. I completed a circulated set about 10 years ago after purchasing the 1937-D 3 leg in Fine condition. At that time I had several mint state (MS) Buffalo's in slabs from both NGC and PCGS so I decided to begin to work to complete a MS collection of Buffalos. For the last 10 years I have looked at 100's perhaps 1000's of slabbed Buffalo's. I quickly gravitated to purchasing Buffalo's with attractive toning and great eye appeal. I soon discovered that there was a significant difference in strike, luster and eye appeal amongst Buffalo's even within the same numeric grade such as MS-65. Even though I had read as much information as I could find about Buffalo Nickels in books, periodicals and on the internet and had read several books on grading MS Buffalo's I was still perplexed by some of the difference I saw in my search for that next nickel to add to my collection.

An event occurred in 2008 that triggered my wanting to learn more about the beautifully toned nickels that I was adding to my collection. I had sent one of my beautifully toned PCGS slabbed Buffalo nickels (1918-D MS-63) into PCGS for a grade review. I thought the nickel should have been in a MS-64 holder. Several weeks after I sent the nickel in PCGS contacted me and said the coin was artificially toned and they would not release the coin back to me in a PCGS holder. After some back and forth discussion they agreed to reimburse me for the amount I paid for the coin even though it was about 30% over Grey Sheet. This triggered in me a desire to better understand the toning of Buffalo nickels and taught me the lesson that if I liked a coin in a slab, leave it alone, don't mess with it.

In February of this year, knowing that the ANA show was coming to Sacramento, I decided to take some steps to better understand the ins and outs of MS Buffalo nickel grading and also to better understand the differences between real and artificial toning on Buffalo's. I had met and spoken to "Mr. Buffalo Nickel" David Lange at several large coin shows and was aware he was going to be our guest speaker at the SVCC Banquet during the ANA show. I emailed David and asked him if he could put me in contact with some Buffalo nickel experts that might help me better understand the ins and outs of Buffalo nickel grading and toning. I had hoped David himself could provide

me with his expertise but did not think that was possible due to his position with NGC. That turned out to be the case. However he did email me back with a couple of names and I contacted the first person on the list. That person lived in the Midwest and was not planning to come to Sacramento for the ANA show. He did agree to take a look at my collection if I shipped it back to him and provide me feedback on each of my coins with an emphasis on overall grade, strike and toning. I also decided to have a local dealer who is knowledgeable on MS Buffalos and toned coins review my collection and also provide me with coin specific comments.

## NOW FOR THE RESULTS.

Both dealers confirmed my suspicions about a couple of my coins and recommended I look to replace them. One had a carbon spot that was somewhat hidden on the obverse of the coin and was somewhat distracting. When I purchased the coin which had very nice overall eye appeal and was well struck I overlooked the carbon spot. Had I put a low powered loop on the coin I would have spotted it. Lesson learned. I had even tried to get the spot removed by NCS, NGC's conservation service, but they said if they tried to remove it the attractive toning and eye appeal of the coin would suffer. Both dealers also agreed that a couple of my coins appeared to be artificially toned and they recommended I replace them. Regarding many of the other toned nickels I have in my set the experts had differing opinions. One dealer thought that a nickel probably had been artificially toned while the other expert thought the toning on that nickel was real.

Regarding the assigned grades, they thought several of the coins were probably under graded and that several of the coins were probably over graded.

## WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

For one, I have learned that the answers to some of your question may not be found in books or articles or on the internet but may have to be found by talking to numismatic experts. Another thing I learned is that even amongst "experts" there may be no "one right answer". Grading is not an exact science. To determining if toning is real or artificial is not an exact science. Both involve human interpretation which can vary even amongst experts.

While this article discusses questions I have involving my collection of Buffalo nickels, the message is that for anyone in numismatics, do not be afraid to approach fellow club members, dealers at shows and national experts in an attempt to answer your questions. You can make friends and gain more enjoyment with your hobby by doing so.

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