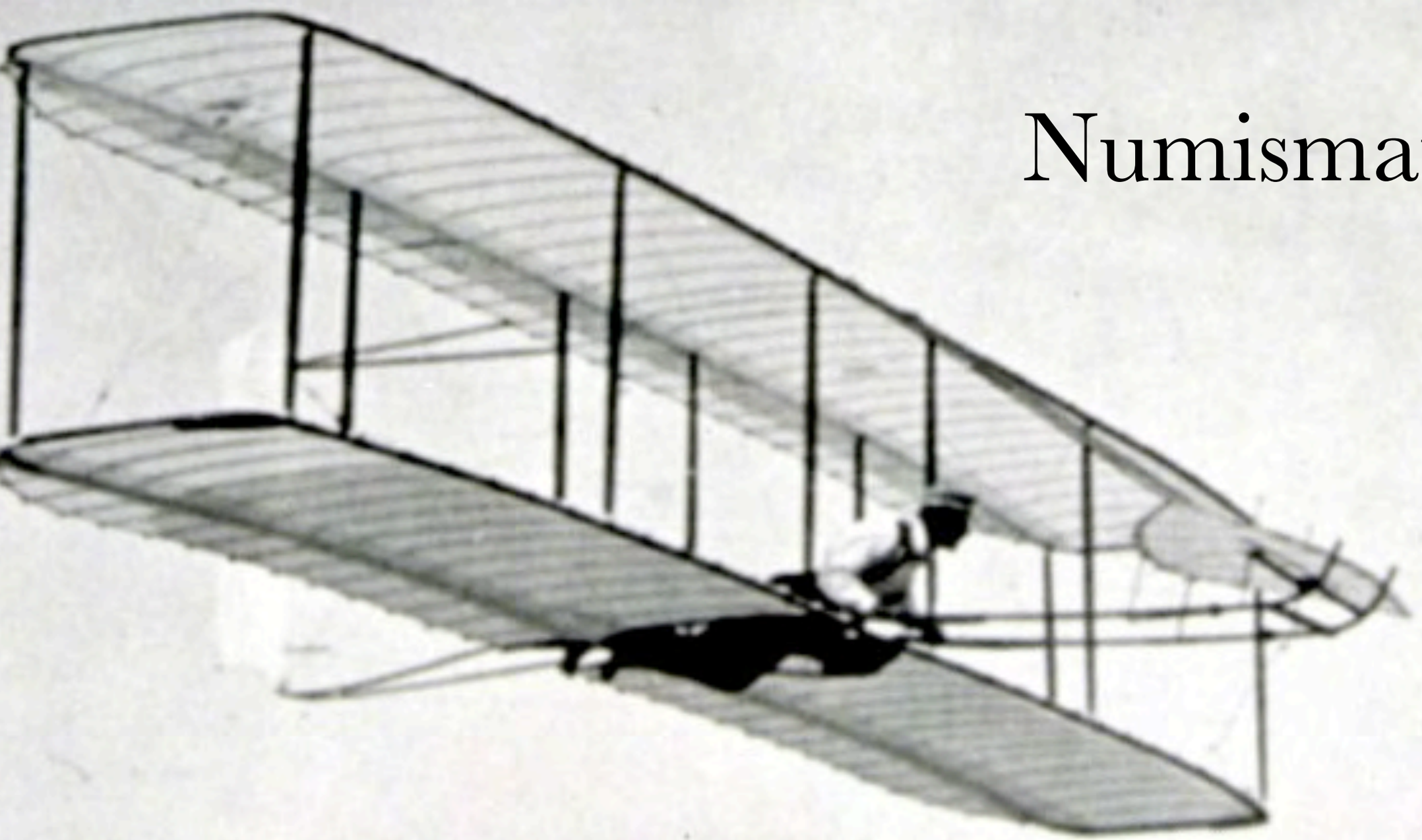

Numismatics

The Genesis of Flight

The Aeronautical History Collection of Colonel Richard Gimbel

At the United States Air Force Academy

Chapter 8: Numismatics

Edward Rochette

Introduction

Coins and medals provide a tangible link to civilization's past. They enable us, so to speak, to hold history in our hands. Although coins and medals are similar in appearance and method of manufacture, they are worlds apart in the eyes of a collector. Both may be created for the purpose of commemorating historical events, but medals are not intended to circulate as money. Coins and medals both trace their origins to the sixth century B.C.E. Medals, which give artists freedom from the constraints posed by circulating coins, are often sculptures-in-miniature. However, collectors of historical medals will seek with equal enthusiasm specimens that are prized more for their record of historical events than for their artistic merit, as evidenced in the Gimbel collection.

To learn more about this medal, see “Medal 1: Icarus.”

The items selected to best represent the numismatic section of the Gimbel collection are, for the purpose of this program, listed by subject rather than by date of issue. Thus, we first examine items from antiquity–those that relate to the dream of flight; second, we look at post-Renaissance items that commemorate lighter-than-air devices; and third, we regard specimens that honor the modern era and power-assisted mechanized flight. The vast majority of numismatic issues are commemorative and as such they mark anniversaries rather than being contemporary to the events portrayed. There are exceptions and these are the pieces that help make the Gimbel collection unique.

Man's dream of flight is best retold through modern issues; the twentieth-century art-medals of French Mint manufacture and the commissioned works of the Society of Medalists serve this purpose satisfactorily. Because the catalogue depicts but a small percentage of the numismatic issues in the Gimbel collection, the issues illustrated were selected to represent (1) the dream–the mythological legend of Daedalus and Icarus; (2) the concept–the genius of Leonardo da Vinci; and (3) the imagination–the scholarship of Jules Verne.

On June 15, 1783, the Montgolfier brothers, Joseph and Étienne, gave their first public demonstration of an ascension by hot-air balloon at Annonay, France. The 10-minute flight was the first real step in man's daring attempt to be free of the power of the earth's gravity. Other pioneers soon followed. The Gimbel collection is rich in the numismatic issues commissioned by or issued on behalf of these early aeronauts. Some pieces were issued as commemorative medals; others were token souvenirs of early events. The French Mint's issues created to commemorate the achievements of the Montgolfier brothers, the memorial pieces to honor early fatalities, and the medals ordered by the early balloonists to satisfy the desires of those wanting tangible mementos of the events witnessed are only some of the contemporary examples of medallic art to be found in the Gimbel collection.

Wilbur and Orville Wright made the first sustained and controlled takeoff in a gasoline-powered aircraft. Their historic achievement at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903, marked the true beginning of the realization of the age-old dream of flight. There are items in the Gimbel collection that depict the hectic and daring pioneering days through and including the journey into outer space, fulfilling

the prophecy made and noted in another medallic issue–that of Jules Verne.

The numismatic items comprising the Gimbel collection continue to grow in number and in scope, matching man's record of aeronautical accomplishment and man's dream of finding ever newer horizons to discover.

Flight of Icarus

Medal [Icarus, 1992]

Obverse: The beginning of the flight, Icarus in the foreground, his father below. No legends. Designer's name, SHEPPARD, SC incused near lower left edge.

Reverse: The fall of Icarus, father above, land and sea below. No legends.

Issuer: Society of Medalists (US), 124th issue. 1992.

Diameter: 63 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3908

The mythological legend of Daedalus and Icarus represents one of man's earliest dreams of flight. Daedalus saw flight as the sole means of escape from Crete. Fashioning wings from feathers and wax, Daedalus admonishes his son, Icarus, to follow him closely and not to set his own course. Impetuously, Icarus disregards his father's advice and flies too close to the sun.

In this myth, sculptor-medalist Joseph Sheppard saw the freedom represented by new invention tempered by the need to exercise caution. On this high-relief bronze art medal, prepared by Sheppard to be the 124th issue of the Society of Medalists, the artist depicts the beginning of the legendary flight on the obverse and the inevitable fall of Icarus on the other side of the medal.

Leonardo da Vinci

Medal [Leonardo da Vinci, 1983]

Obverse: Man suspended from glider designed by Leonardo da Vinci. To right,VOL LIBRE

Designer's name: JP.RETI to lower right.

Reverse: Bust of Leonardo da Vinci flanked by his designs. Legend above: "...L'HOMME DOIT RES- / TER LIBRE DE LA CEINTURE EN / HAUT, POUR POUVOIR S'EQUILIBRER, / COMME IL LE FAIT DANS UNE BARQUE / AFIN QUE LE CENTRE DE GRAVITE DE / L'ENSEMBLE QU'IL / FORME AVEC L'INSTRU- / MENT PUISSE SE DEPLACER..." / L*f* ONARD DE VINCI

Issuer: Paris Mint. From the general collection, 1983.

Diameter: 72 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3667

Had Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) restricted his thoughts solely to the study of aerodynamics, he would still have secured a prominent place in the history of man's dream of flight. Leonardo's understanding of air pressure and wind currents enabled him to envision and design instruments now in common use: the windspeed indicator and the inclinometer capable of helping an aviator enveloped in clouds tell whether his plane is flying level. His genius brought forth the concepts of the parachute,

the helicopter, and the modern aircraft propeller. His actual aircraft, however, remains to this day mere flight of fancy.

Joseph Montgolfier

Étienne Montgolfier

Medal [Montgolfier, 1783]

Obverse: Profiles to left, Montgolfier brothers superimposed one over the other.

Legend around: JOSE. ET ETIEN. MONTGOLFIER above; POUR AVOIR RENDU L'AIR NAVIGABLE below.

Designer's name: N. GATTEAUX on truncation of bust.

Reverse: Woman with two lions on ground, angel on cloud with torch under balloon in center.

Legend above: ATTONIUS ORBIS TERRARUM, below in exergue, ITINERE PER AERA FELICITER / TENTATO ANNO / MDCCLXXXIII

Issuer: Paris Mint. Dies remain extant. Restrike of 1783 issue.

Diameter: 42 mm. Silver.

XM-1 3501

Historians often cite June 15, 1783, as the date of the first ascension of a hot-air balloon. In reality, it was the first *public* demonstration and the event occurred at Annonay, France. It is certain that the Montgolfiers, who were paper manufacturers, had occasion to send trial balloons aloft before this date.

The brothers, Joseph (1740-1810) and *f*tienne (1745-1799), had been experimenting ever since they had discovered that when hot air was collected inside a paper bag, the bag became buoyant. Working with small balloons at first, they later tried steam and then hot air.

By the date of their first public display, the pair had built a paper balloon, sectionalized and held together with buttons, measuring 110 feet across, and weighing nearly 1,000 pounds when inflated. To the awe of spectators, the balloon reached an altitude of 6,000 feet and stayed aloft for about 10 minutes. With that demonstration the age of flight had indeed dawned. The successful launch led to an invitation from King Louis XVI to conduct another one on September 19 before the king and his court at Versailles. The Montgolfiers intended to send people aloft on a tethered flight, but the king ruled against human cargo. Three farm animals were substituted for human cargo and a free flight was allowed. The balloon remained aloft for 8 minutes and covered a distance of about 2 miles.

The First Manned Flights

Medal [Montgolfier, 1784]

Obverse: Two manned balloons in clouds, the Montgolfier hot-air balloon in the foreground; the Charles-Robert hydrogen balloon in the background.

Legend : AUDACIA FELIX above: AERA PERMEARUNT XXI. NOV. / L.F. DARLANDES ET F. PILATRE / I. DEC. J.A.C. CHARLES / ET M.N. ROBERT / ANNO MDCCLXIV in exergue.

Reverse: Text circumscribed within a ring of stars. Legend: PATEFACTO / PER AERA ITINERE / A JOSEPHO ET STEPHANO / MONTGOLFIER / V. JUNII MDCCLXXXIII. / REI MEMORIAM / POSTERITATI TRADT / JUSSIT / LUDOVICUS XVI. / ANNO MDCCLXXXIV.

Issuer: Paris Mint. Dies remain extant. Restrike of 1784 issue.

Diameter: 49 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3902

After successfully sending animals aloft, the Montgolfier brothers were ready for the next logical step: to send man aloft. At first the king refused to let any citizen, save convicts, participate in a flight. But having viewed the experiment at Versailles, he acquiesced and on November 21, 1783, Jean-Franois Pilâtre de Rozier and the Marquis d'Arlandes ascended from the Dauphin's Garden within the Bois de Boulogne. The pair flew high above Paris for nearly a half-hour, spending most of their time

between tending to the fire of burning straw that supplied the hot air needed to stay aloft and sponging the sparks their fire created to keep them from setting fire to the paper-lined balloon.

Ten days later, on December 1, 1783, Professor Jacques Alexandre César Charles (1746-1823) and a companion, Marie-Noel Robert, took off in the first piloted hydrogen balloon. The pair flew from Paris to Nesle, a distance of 27 miles. The flight so unnerved Charles, who was the pilot, that he never flew again.

The First Flight in England

Medal [Lunardi, 1784]

Obverse: Profile bust of Lunardi facing left. Legend around: VINCENT LUNARDI / FIRST AERIAL TRAVELLER IN ENGLAND.

Reverse: Balloon with wings protruding from the cabin. Legend above: ET SE PROTINIES AETHEREA TOLLIT INASTRA VIA; in exergue; below, SEPTEMBUS 15 / MDCCLXXXIV.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 35 mm. Silver wash.

XM-1 3519

An Italian by birth, Vincent Lunardi (1759-1806) made his aeronautical mark in England. He was secretary to the Neapolitan ambassador to London when the news of aerial flight in France reached the city; the events inspired him to design and build a balloon of his own. On September 15, 1784, at Moorfields, he made the first hydrogen balloon ascent in England. The flight drew enough attention for King George III to break from a council meeting to watch the ascent via telescope. The king is reported to have commented, "We may resume our deliberations on the subject before us at our pleasure, but we may never see poor Lunardi again."

England did see more of Lunardi. The secretary-cum-aeronaut quit his diplomatic post to pursue a career as a professional balloonist, but was later

forced to flee England after a British citizen became the victim of a balloon accident.

Jean-Pierre François Blanchard

Medal [Blanchard, 1788]

Obverse: Profile bust of Blanchard to right. Legend above: IOANNES PETRUS BLANCHARD. Designer's name: F. LOOS, below.

Reverse: A landscape of Warsaw in the distance; above the city is Blanchard's balloon. Legend above: IMPAVIDUS NON SORTEM TIMET ICARIUM / VARSOVIE / MDCCLXXXVIII.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 28 mm. Silver.

XM-1 3574

He had all the attributes to succeed as the world's first professional aeronaut. Jean-Pierre François Blanchard (1753-1809) had the imagination to envisage what others could not, the daring to try what seemed impossible, the showmanship to draw attention to his endeavors, and the touch of a charlatan to raise the funds to underwrite his efforts.

Even before the Montgolfier brothers launched their first manned balloon, Blanchard had conducted experiments with parachutes and ornithopters. His parachute designs were tested by dropping sheep from tall buildings. Within a year of the Montgolfiers' first success, Blanchard headed for England to demonstrate lighter-than-air flight. An early passenger, Dr. John Jeffries, proposed that the two make the first England-to-France flight and

offered a fee of £800. Blanchard accepted but had little intention of sharing honors. At the weighing-in before the flight Blanchard claimed that they were overweight and that the balloon could only carry one person. Dr. Jeffries noted that it was Blanchard who seemed "overweight." Close examination revealed that Blanchard was wearing lead weights under his coat. Because an estimated 250,000 people had gathered to watch their liftoff, Blanchard reluctantly shed the weights. The flight was a success and much heralded in Europe, with Louis XVI awarding Blanchard a prize of 12,000 *livres* and a lifetime pension, but extending a mere royal thank you to Jeffries. Blanchard went on to make a career of being the first to fly in several countries, including the United States.

André Jacques Garnerin

Medal [Garnerin, 1797]

Obverse: Facing bust of Garnerin. Legend around: ANDRE JACQUES GARNERIN 1769-1823.

Reverse: Shows man descending in parachute. Legend: In the field to the left, PREMIERE / DESCENT / EN PARACHUTE; to the right, PARC / MONCEAU / 22 OCTOBRE / 1797. Designer's name: VIC DAUMAS at lower right edge.

Issuer: Paris Mint. From the general collection, No. M-4212.

Diameter: 68 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3903

Despite medallic issues to the contrary, André Jacques Garnerin (1769-1823) neither invented the parachute nor was the first to make a successful jump. Credit for the concept should go to Leonardo da Vinci. Credit for the first recorded jump from an appreciable height belongs to another Frenchman, Sébastien Lenormand who, in 1783, fourteen years earlier than Garnerin, jumped from the tower of the Montpellier Observatory in southern France. He might have earned more recognition for his feat had he not promoted the parachute as a practical means of evacuating a tall building in case of fire.

In 1785, two years after the Montgolfier brothers' first ascent, J.-P. Blanchard placed a dog in a basket,

attached a parachute, and dropped it from a balloon. The dog landed safely, but it was not until 1793, eight years later, that Blanchard made the attempt himself. He survived, albeit with a broken leg.

André Jacques Garnerin made his first jump over Paris in 1797 and then gained fame for his daring by making a profession of jumping. Unfortunately, the designs of his parachutes were such that they swayed so violently that each descent left him violently airsick, a problem he failed to overcome throughout the remainder of his showman days.

Charles Green and Isaac E. Sparrow

Token [Sparrow, 1823]

Obverse: Profile bust of Sparrow facing left. Legend around: ISAAC EARLYSMAN SPARROW.

Reverse: Sparrow and Green in balloon. Legend around: IRONMONGER BISHOPSGATE LONDON.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 23 mm. Copper.

XM-1 3594

Charles Green (1785-1870) is recognized as England's greatest balloonist. In his lifetime, he made over 500 successful ascents, including a 480-mile overnight flight from London to Germany. Green pioneered the use of coal gas, which he found cheaper than hydrogen and which he obtained by tapping into London's recently installed gas lines that supplied the city's new street lamps.

In the field of numismatics, Green's greatest contribution was accommodating a paying passenger named Isaac Earlysman Sparrow. The flight inspired an interesting series of farthing-sized tradesman's tokens commemorating Sparrow's ascent on June 23, 1823, and promoting Green's business of manufacturing nails. The flight so impressed the young manufacturer that he named his company's

storage facilities Balloon House and bought and wore a "pilot's cap" for the rest of his days.

City of New York

Medal [City of New York, 1859]

Obverse: *City of New York* balloon in center. Legend: GREAT AIR SHIP to left; CITY OF NEW YORK to right.

Reverse: Text only. DIAMETER, / 130 FEET. / HEIGHT, 200 FEET. / WEIGHT WITH OUTFIT / 3 1/2 TONS. / LIFTING POWER / 22 TONS. / CAPACITY / OF / GAS ENVELOPE, / 375,000 CUBIC FEET.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 34 mm. Dull silver finish.

XM-1 3589

Thaddeus Sobieski Constantine Lowe (1832-1913) was America's latter-day J.-P. Blanchard—a showman first and aeronaut second. Dubbing himself Professor Lowe, he began his career as a traveling medicine man. During his travels he met several balloonists and became interested when he recognized ballooning's financial potential. By 1858, Lowe had learned to fly and began a subscription campaign to fund the first west-to-east, trans-Atlantic crossing by balloon. Sufficient funds were raised to construct the *City of New York*, a massive balloon 130 feet in diameter. It was the largest balloon built to date. Unfortunately, the New York Gas Company was unable to deliver hydrogen gas with sufficient pressure to fully inflate the balloon. At that point, a storm arose that materially damaged the balloon.

Hasty repairs led to an explosion on the next attempt to fill it; Lowe then abandoned the project.

To help with expenses, Lowe ordered a medal to be issued and sold. He then turned to cross-country exhibitions. One unfortunate day, soon after the outbreak of the Civil War, Lowe unintentionally landed behind Confederate lines and was held as a Union spy. Convincing the Confederates of their error, Lowe was released. He returned north to immediately offer his services to the Union army. During the war, five of Lowe's craft saw service as observation balloons. After the war, he turned his attention in another direction, from up to down. He proposed a submarine to the U.S. Navy for use during the Spanish-American War, but was rebuffed.

Jules Verne

Medal [Verne, 1972]

Obverse: Portrait, three-quarter left, Verne.

Legend: JULES VERNE 1828-1905 to left; SCIENCE-GEOGRAPHIE-FICTION to right.Designer's name: R. B. BARON at right.

Reverse: Superimposed over globe, the balloon from *Five Weeks in a Balloon*; below, submarine *Nautilus* entwined in the tentacles of a giant octopus; to left, portion of the map of Africa; to right, portion of a map of the moon's surface. Legend: LE TOUR DU MONDE EN 80 JOURS. 5 SEMAINES EN BALLON. VOYAGE DE LA TERRE A LA LUNE. 20 MILLE LIEUES SOUS LES MERS, prominent works of the author.

Issuer: Paris Mint. From the general collection, No. M-1813. 1955.

Diameter: 68 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3659

The Man of Prophecies, Jules Verne (1828-1905), has also been called the Father of Science Fiction. A lawyer by education, Verne enjoyed writing. At age thirty-five, he achieved immediate recognition with his first novel, *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, a tale of an aerial journey across the African continent. The book established the formula for his successful later works, including the most popular of all, *Around the*

World in Eighty Days. Although the genre preceded Verne by centuries, no one can deny that time has given fact to what many considered sheer fantasy during his day. Verne envisaged submarines in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*; heavier-than-air-flight in *The Clipper of the Clouds*, and even earth satellites in *The Begum's Fortune*. During his 77-year life, Verne witnessed the advent of the heavier-than-air flight he had predicted.

Siege of Paris

Medal [Siege of Paris, 1870-1871]

Obverse: Pigeon in flight. Legend around: CORRESPONDANT PENDANT LE [SIC]

ARRIVEE DES PIGEONS / SIEGE DE PARIS 1870-1871.

Reverse: Text in six straight lines: LE 22 8BRE / ARRIVEE DE / 5 PIGEONS MEDAILLES / APPORTANT / DES NOUVELLES / DE TOURS.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 29 mm. Copper.

XM-1 3493

Following the French defeat at Sedan the previous day, Louis Napoleon surrendered on September 2, 1870, along with 80,000 of his troops. Two weeks later, two German armies began a 135-day siege of Paris. Playing a defensive role during the siege, balloons were used primarily for communications with French forces outside of Paris. No fewer than 66 balloons left Paris, carrying 164 persons, 381 carrier pigeons, and mail. Most got through safely, although six were captured by the enemy and a few became caught in strong wind currents and landed far from their intended destinations. One, the *Ville d'Orleans*, came down in Norway after a fifteen-hour flight; another was not found until 3 years later near Port Natal in Africa.

Enterprising Frenchmen issued at least eighty-three different copper or lead medallions commemorating the various balloons. The pieces were offered for sale and proceeds were used to help finance the costs of constructing the balloons in various railway station factories throughout the city. In addition, as small change started to disappear, the provisional government ordered trial and proof strikes of siege coinage that depicted the balloons. The need failed to materialize and the coins were never placed into circulation.

Otto Lilienthal

Medal [Lilienthal, 1914]

Obverse: Profile bust of Lilienthal facing left. Legend: 1848 OTTO LILIENTHAL 1896 to left; NON OMNIS MORIAR to right.

Reverse: Man with experimental wings attached; blacksmith's tools in foreground; birds and mountains in background. Legend: OSTMARKENFLUG / 1914 above; WELAND / DER SCHMIED to left below; U.Z. / [ERINNERUNG] to right below; and FUR-VERDIENSTE at base.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 72 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3553

At the close of the nineteenth century, man and his flying machines had advanced to the glider stage, thanks in particular to one man, a German named Otto Lilienthal (1848-1896). He built his craft in the manner few dreamers of manned flight had patience for. Lilienthal constructed his aircraft after long and careful study of the then-known principles of aerodynamics. He held to the idea that mastering the skill of gliding was the primary step toward achieving success with manned flight.

For all his studies, however, Lilienthal was overly influenced by the flight of birds. He believed that to achieve the dream of powered flight, man would have to emulate the feathered creatures. Lilienthal built

two ornithopters, both failures, before turning his thoughts toward fixed-wing aircraft. On August 9, 1896, Otto Lilienthal logged his final flight. Taking off from the crest of a hill, his glider gained an altitude of approximately 100 feet when a sudden gust of wind caused his craft to stall and plummet to the ground. The one who had become known as the Flying Man sustained a broken back and died less than twenty-four hours later.

Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin

Medal [Graf Zeppelin, 1929]

Obverse: Bust of Graf Zeppelin toward right. Legend: ZIEL ERKANNT—KRAFT GESPANNTI above; GRAF / ZEPPELIN to left.

Reverse: Graf Zeppelin passing the Cathedral at Friedrichshafen. Legend: GEPRAGT AUS DEN RESTEN DES LUFTSCHIFFS Z.4. above; 4.U. 5..AUG. 1908 to left: DAUERFAHRT / FRIEDRICHSHAFEN - / MAINZ / 583 KLM at bottom.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 33 mm. Satin silver finish.

XM-1 3525

The man whose name remains synonymous with rigid airships became interested in ballooning as a young German military observer during the American Civil War. A visit by Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin (1838-1917) to St. Paul, Minnesota, in August 1863, coincided with a commercial tour being conducted by John H. Steiner. Steiner had served in the balloon corps and pioneered balloon reconnaissance. By late 1863, he had quit the U.S. Army in a dispute over payment. He supported himself by touring the country and taking on paying passengers. Zeppelin was one of Steiner's passengers and he was to write to his father afterward, "While I was above St. Paul, the idea of aerial navigation was

strongly impressed upon me, and there it was that my idea of zeppelins came to me."

Throughout his lifetime, von Zeppelin continued to promote his idea of an airship capable of directed flight. After failing to interest his own government in building a rigid airship, the count turned to private enterprise and founded his own company. In 1900, his first rigid airship was launched. By 1911, he had arranged for regular passenger flights between major German cities. In a short time, 32,250 passengers on 1,500 flights had flown on one of his four dirigibles—without a fatality. In 1928, his *Graf Zeppelin* inaugurated the first scheduled trans-Atlantic air service only to be replaced in 1937 by the larger, more luxurious *Hindenburg*. The latter met its end when it exploded and burned at Lakehurst, New Jersey, on May 6, 1937, bringing the brief era of commercial air service by dirigible to an end.

Alberto Santos-Dumont

Medal [Santos-Dumont, 1932]

Obverse: Facing portrait in center. Legend: name SANTOS DUMONT above. Terminal dates 1873 and 1932 left and right.

Reverse: Montage of early Santos-Dumont aircraft superimposed over Eiffel Tower and outline of Brazilian coastline. Depicted are: the balloon BRASIL, upper left; the airship *S.O. No. 6*, top center; the plane LA DEMOISELLE, captioned at right; and the airplane *14 BIS*, bottom center. In the field, above PRIX / DEUTSCH DE LA MEURTHE / 19 OCTOBRE / 1901; at lower right PRIX ARCHDEACON; at bottom BAGATELLE / 23 OCTOBRE 1906.

Designer's name: Claude Lesot

Issuer: Paris Mint. From the general collection, No. M-4809, 1973.

Diameter: 77 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3673

Claimed by Brazil as a native son, by France as an adopted one, Alberto Santos-Dumont (1873-1932) was one of the most colorful of the early aviators. Fearless to the point of being foolhardy, he had as much showmanship in his soul as innovation. The son of a rich coffee plantation owner, Santos-Dumont emigrated to Paris in 1891. Had he not become involved in aviation, history might still have remembered him as the man who conceived the idea

of the wristwatch. Santos-Dumont had a genius for mechanics. He raced motorcycles before looking up, first toward ballooning, then to dirigibles. In all, he built a total of fourteen airships; not all became successfully airborne.

On July 23, 1906, Santos-Dumont planned to attach one of his planes to the belly of a dirigible and test a revolutionary control system while both craft were airborne. Fortunately, the plane was damaged while it was being transported to a field for the test. It was later found that the aircraft was too underpowered to have flown successfully. Equipping the plane with a more powerful engine, Santos-Dumont became airborne for a distance of 722 feet in just over 21 seconds, the longest powered flight recorded in Europe at that date.

The Wright Brothers

Medal [Wright Brothers, 1908]

Obverse: Conjoined busts of brothers Wilbur, left, and Orville Wright, right. Legend: AERO CLUB OF AMERICA above; W. WRIGHT / SEP. 21,

1908 / LE MANS / FRANCE to left; O. WRIGHT / SEP. 9, 1908 / FORT / MYER, VA / U.S.A. to right.

Reverse: Wright biplane above logo for Aero Club of America dividing date 19 05.

Issuer: Unknown

Diameter: 76 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3531

Success four flights thursday morning all against twenty one mile wind started from Level with engine power alone average speed through air thirty one miles longest 57 seconds inform Press home Christmas.

Orevelle [*sic*] Wright

Word that the age of heavier-than-air flight had finally dawned reached the world outside of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, via a Western Union telegram dispatched at 5:25 P.M. on December 17, 1903. The message was addressed to Bishop M. Wright and had been sent by his son Orville, who piloted the world's first sustained, manned flight in a gasoline-powered aircraft. Legends to the contrary,

the press was informed and more than one newspaper featured the Wrights' historic achievement on the front page of the following morning's edition.

Wilbur Wright (1867-1912) and his brother, Orville Wright (1871-1948), are recognized as the first to have flown in a heavier-than-air machine. Bicycle mechanics by trade, the brothers achieved their inaugural success in *Flyer I*, a plane they designed and built. Powered by a chain-driven, aluminum-cast motorcycle engine, the first flight attained an airborne distance of 120 feet and was followed by a second of 852 feet. Encouraged, the pair quit the cycle business in 1909 to form a company to produce aircraft.

Captain Ferdinand Ferber

Medal [Ferber, 1909]

Obverse: Bust of Ferber. Legend around: CAPITAINE FERBER 1862-1909. Designer's name: MICHEL FERBER below.

Reverse: Ferber's biplane No. 6 in flight; two ground observers below. Legend: LE PREMIER VOL STABLE A MOTEUR EFFECTUE EN EUROPE / MAI 1905 CHALAIS-MEDON AEROPLANE No 6 DECLENCHE EN LIBERTE.

Issuer: Paris Mint. From the general collection, No. M-3521. 1969.

Diameter: 68 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3666

Captain Ferdinand Ferber (1862-1909) wished to be the first to fly a heavier-than- air-craft. He, too, shared the dream of the Wright brothers. A contemporary, Ferber wrote and did much of his research under the pseudonym Monsieur de Rue, a name chosen so as not to jeopardize his military career. His superiors saw the future of flight solely in the form of the balloon or dirigible. The airplane, they believed, was just a waste of his time.

In 1898, Ferber helped found the Aéro-Club of France. Four years later he built a glider similar to that designed by the Wright brothers. Ferber equipped it with a 6-horsepower engine, which was suspended from an arm extending out from a tall

tower. He spent many months conducting "routine" tests, all without success. In 1905, Ferber became the first man to pilot an airplane in Europe and is recognized as the father of French aviation. He lost his life in a crash at Boulogne four years later.

Louis Blériot

Medal [Blériot, 1909]

Obverse: Profile facing left. Legend in the field at right: LOUIS / BLERIOT / 1872 / 1936.

Reverse: Blériot's airplane seen over the English Channel on the first flight from Calais to Dover. Legend in script: J'AVAIS TRAVERSE LA MANCHE.../ DOUVRES 25 JUILLET 1909. Below is his signature.

Designer's name VIC DAUMAS to right.

Issuer: Paris Mint. From the general collection, No. 3653. 1970.

Diameter: 68 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3901

The French have their heroes of early aeronautical achievement—from Montgolfier to Ferber, but no list may exclude Louis Blériot (1872-1936). By 1909, Blériot was building his eleventh airplane, each progressively developed from an earlier lesson. By this date, Blériot had spent more than $150,000 on his experiments and was badly in need of additional funding. When he learned that a prize of $5,000 awaited the first man to fly the English Channel by plane, Blériot made that his goal, not for the glory but for the money that would allow him to continue his experiments.

Facing both competitors and an engine that had never run for more than 20 minutes without overheating, Blériot took off from near Calais on the morning of July 25, 1909, for the estimated 22-minute flight to Dover. He had to ask a bystander the approximate direction of his destination. His engine ran as he feared—hot—as he neared the English coast. Just as his overheated engine began to falter, Blériot encountered a chance rainstorm; the rain solved the problem of overheating and the Frenchman won his needed prize.

Coupe Aéronautique

Medal [Bennett, 1911]

Obverse: Likeness of trophy with dirigible, winged woman with torch. Legend: COUPE AERONAUTIQUE / J. GORDON BENNETT

above; WON BY AERO CLUB OF AMERICA/ FRANK P. LAHM 1906/EDGAR W. MIX 1909/ ALAN R. HAWLEY 1910, below.

Reverse: Text of banquet menu.

Issuer: Unknown

Dimensions: 85 mm. x 65 mm. Bronze.

XM-1 3529

In 1909, six years after the Wright brothers had first achieved liftoff at Kitty Hawk, James Gordon Bennett (1841-1918), publisher of the *New York Herald*, sponsored the inaugural Coupe Aéronautique, an international air race based on speed. (The 1906 race had been a national contest.) Twenty-eight pilots participated in an 8-day aerial extravaganza at Reims, France. They competed for thousands of dollars in prizes, a 25,000-franc grand prize, a solid silver loving cup, and fame. As a souvenir of the race awards banquet, a medal inscribed with the menu of the evening was presented to all eligible to attend. Today, a Gordon Bennett Cup competition continues as an annual balloon race.