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Heisser Collection of Government Symbols

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Civil War Books — The Only Books Worth Reading

by Dewey Stinson, Jr. (Retired, Newport News, Virginia) <awphjfh@att.net>

I've always liked to read history, anything from ancient to **Civil War** to **World War II**, which I participated in. In fact, reading anything else is a waste of time, as far as I'm concerned. I decided to limit my collection of

books to those about the **Civil War**, mainly because of my connection to it. I had two great-great grandfathers who fought in the War. I spent many summers in Buckingham County (Virginia) with my relatives, and often heard family stories. When you have a direct connection to the events, it makes it so much more interesting to read about.

My brother in Richmond introduced me to a book dealer. I have purchased books mostly through two book dealers for over twenty-five years, although occasionally I purchase one at a book store. My collection now numbers over 1,000 books. I also subscribed to a monthly publication about Confederate veterans for years until the veterans died off and it ceased publication. I eventually had to build a special climate-controlled room for my library.

I do continue to collect books, but only those I specifically want. I receive lists of important books from a college professor who teaches **Civil War History**. He recommends the books; I tell the dealer which ones I want. Books are continually being written about the **Civil War**, as new information comes to light. People continue to be fascinated by a war between brothers.

I think my collection is significant, having over 1,000 books. It takes up a significant amount of space! Many are rare, out-of-print texts. I have a complete set of the *Confederate Veterans* magazines and indexes until it ceased publication. I also have two encyclopedias of biographies of **Civil War** generals. The collection is indexed on cards, each book is covered with a protective covering, and I never lend a book to anyone. I also have some artifacts from the War.

I'm giving the whole collection to my youngest son, who's interested in it. He'll have to add a room on to his home. He has two daughters. I don't know if they will be interested in reading about the War. Maybe the collection will end up in a library. I have also been asked to donate it to the **Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech**, but I want my son to have it. 🇺🇸

Heisser Collection of Government Symbols

by Dr. David Heisser (Associate Professor and Government Documents Librarian, Daniel Library, The Citadel, Charleston, SC) <heisserd@citadel.edu>

I first got interested in symbols of government in 1952, when I was nine and a half years old, and my parents took my sister and me from Charleston on a trip to Washington, D.C. There I was greatly impressed by the great eagles and other symbols in and on the buildings and monuments. I wanted to learn more about these emblems so I started reading everything I could find about government symbols in our Public Library. Then in 1954 I traded a pack of baseball cards with a kid in the schoolyard for a copy of a 1946 *National Geographic Magazine* that had color pictures of all the then-48 states. I still have the magazine. (Today of course the baseball cards would probably be worth a lot more, but anyway....) I started writing to the secretaries of state of the states and territories asking for information and even impressions of their seals, and everybody wrote back, and a hobby was born.

My interest expanded to governmental symbols since the Middle Ages and worldwide — seals, coats of arms, flags and other emblems — and the collection now includes thousands of books and other publications, impressions and casts of seals, color prints and other materials. I have focused especially on countries that share the Western tradition of heraldry, which is the study and art of symbols centered on a shield, although there are

lots of materials on other styles of symbols from non-Western lands. I've tried to collect materials on the history of the national symbols of a country, as well as the emblems of cities, towns, provinces and other political subdivisions.

Recently I added to the book collection a civic armorial for Estonia, that is, a book containing pictures of the coats of arms and flags of all the cities and towns of that country. Materials have been acquired by gift and purchase. The Estonian book came through a bookseller in Munich, Germany, who specializes in books from Russia and Eastern Europe. Friends who travel offer to help. One of my friends was recently on vacation in Hungary, and brought me a beautiful color-illustrated history of the city coat of arms of Budapest.

Over the years, my hobby became an avocation, and I have written a number of nicely illustrated, scholarly publications on government symbols. Examples are a history of South Carolina's state seal for the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, and a color-illustrated history of the ceremonial Mace of the South Carolina House of Repre-

sentatives for the House. I emphasize that this is an avocational interest. I am involved in research and writing on subjects in library science and history, and have graduate degrees in both those disciplines.

The symbols collection — which is still growing — will be donated to the **Libraries of Brown University**, in Providence, Rhode Island. **Brown University** has named this the "**Heisser Collection**." In 2004 I was invited to Providence to give a talk about the collection at **Brown**. I showed a **PowerPoint** selection of brightly colored images, and folks seemed to have a good time. They won't get it until I can no longer enjoy the collection. The reason I chose **Brown** as its ultimate home is the fact



that they already have the famous **Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection**, the world's largest private collection of books, pictures and other materials about military costume, including military symbols and decorations, through the ages. It seemed to me that my collection would augment and supplement what **Brown** already has, and would benefit future researchers who will travel to Providence seeking this kind of information. 🇺🇸