

**WILLIAM SUMNER
APPLETON.
MEMOIR OF WILLIAM
SUMNER APPLETON**

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William Sumner Appleton. Memoir of William Sumner Appleton by William Theophilus Rogers Marvin & Charles C. Smith

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WILLIAM THEOPHILUS ROGERS MARVIN & CHARLES C. SMITH

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~~1850, 49~~

William Sumner Appleton.

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WILLIAM SUMNER APPLETON.

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WILLIAM SUMNER APPLETON.

WILLIAM SUMNER APPLETON, a life member of the New-England Historic Genealogical Society, was born January 11, 1840, in Boston, Mass.; he died there April 28, 1903, after an illness of several months. He was the elder son of the late Hon. Nathan Appleton by his second wife, Harriot Coffin Sumner, both of Boston. His father, who died in July, 1861, will long be remembered as a prominent merchant, whose large enterprise, distinguished ability, and sterling character honored the city of his residence, which he served with eminent success as its representative in the State Legislature, and for three terms in Congress. The late Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, in a Memorial Tribute, published in the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society (Vol. v: p. 250), eulogized him as a man of unsullied integrity, a wise and prudent counsellor, and a citizen who had enjoyed through life the esteem, respect, and confidence of the community in which he lived.

William Sumner was a descendant* of Samuel Appleton, Sr., of Little Waldingfield, England, later one of the early settlers of Ipswich, Mass., and a Deputy to the General Court in 1637, and of Judith Everard, his wife. The second son of the emigrant, Samuel Jr., also born in Little Waldingfield, came to New England with his father; was Major and Commander-in-Chief of the Massachusetts troops† in the great Swamp-fight, a Deputy 1668, and onward, and an Assistant in 1681, and later; his son Isaac was a Lieutenant in the Port Royal Expedition in 1707, and Major of the Essex County regiment; and his son, Isaac Jr., was a Lieutenant in the Provincial Militia in 1771. On his mother's side he was descended from William Sumner, one of the early settlers of Dorchester, Mass., and a Deputy in the General Court in 1666, and later.

* The line of descent was Samuel,¹ of Little Waldingfield and Ipswich, died in Rowley, Mass., and Judith Everard; Samuel,² of Ipswich, and Mary Oliver; Isaac,³ of Ipswich, and Priscilla Baker; Isaac,⁴ of Ipswich, and Elizabeth Sawyer; Isaac,⁵ of New Ipswich, N. H., and Mary Adams; Nathan,⁶ and Harriot Coffin Sumner; William Sumner.⁷

† See "General Register, Society of Colonial Wars," 1899-1902, pp. 550, 551.

He married, August 12, 1871, in Berne, Switzerland, Edith Stuart, daughter of William Stuart Appleton, and of Georgiana L. F. Armistead, whose father was an officer in the U. S. Army. Mrs. Edith S. Appleton was born in Baltimore, Md., and died January 20, 1892; a son and four daughters survive them.

When that admirable teacher the late Epes Sargent Dixwell relinquished the charge of the Boston Public Latin School, which he conducted with such distinguished success for many years, he opened a private school in Boston, to prepare boys for college, and young Appleton was one of his first pupils. The training he there received was careful and thorough, and he entered Harvard in 1856, taking at once a high rank, and graduating in the upper half of his class in 1860; later he entered the Law School, and received the degree of LL.B. in 1865, but never engaged in professional work. How accurate was his scholarship, especially in the languages, was constantly evident in his later years; his translation of a German article on the voyages of the Northmen, his remarks on the character and writings of the late Emile Belot, his letter on Count Rochambeau,—communications to the Massachusetts Historical Society,—all showing how closely he kept in touch with Continental literature, especially when bearing on American history, are sufficient proof of our statement; while the grace and ease with which he rendered the epigraphs on the coins and medals he loved so much to study, and his ready response when asked for an explanation of some puzzling Latin inscription, testified to the exactness of his classical training. I think it may truly be said that few equalled him, and none excelled him, in his skillful and often epigrammatic versions of the condensed legends, or the fragmentary bits of verse from some one of the old Roman poets, which such pieces often bear, but whose meaning, frequently half concealed, rather hints at than reveals the significance of the devices they display and veils in pleasing mystery the thought of their designer. I recall no American numismatist, save perhaps the late Professor Anthon, who so happily read these legends, and interpreted medallic symbols. And it was the historic side of these numismatic charades,—if I may so style them,—and not the fanciful garb they wear, which aroused his interest.

As illustrative of this trait of Mr. Appleton's character, I may mention his attitude towards two very different classes of medieval pieces, which yet have certain points of resemblance. The curious alchemistic and astrological medals, with their triangles and pentagons, their mystical planetary emblems, and their solemnly absurd invocations of spirits, angelic or otherwise, amused him, but failed entirely to attract his study. He regarded them as merely showing a singular phase of what passed for learning in the period when they were struck, but utterly worthless from the historian's point of view. On the other hand, pieces like the remarkable series of thalers,—quite as mystical in their devices to an ordinary observer,—which

were coined by Augustus, Duke of Brunswick, during the Thirty Years' War (most, if not all, in the eventful year of 1643), had for him a peculiar charm. This group of seven pieces is known as that of the "Bell Thalers," from the fact that all of them bear a bell; on some, it has no clapper; on some, the clapper detached, lies near it, while on others the bell is complete, and on one, vigorously swinging. Their mottoes too are equally unintelligible; usually they have but a word or two—"SIC NISI," "UTI SIC NISI," "TANDEM," "SED," and a few letters, generally believed to be the initials of some Latin sentence, on the interpretation of which authorities are even now not entirely agreed. Coins like these, which have a distinct though not always an easily understood allusion to contemporary history, possessed for him a special fascination. They courted and received his careful and often protracted study; labor in this direction was a delight, and he persisted in his effort to decipher their mysteries until the riddle was solved to his satisfaction.

Quaint devices and baffling legends, like those to which I have alluded, gave zest to Mr. Appleton's taste for historical research, but they were by no means necessary to incite it. He prepared for the Massachusetts Historical Society a valuable paper (see Proceedings, Second Series, Vol. v: p. 343, *et seq.*) on the eminent French medallist, Augustin Dupré, whose medals,—among them that commemorating the victory of the Bon Homme Richard under John Paul Jones over the Serapis, those of Gen. Morgan and Gen. Greene over the British, the fine bust of Franklin with Turgot's famous epigram, "*Eripuit caelo fulmen*" etc. (suggested by a verse in the Astronomicon of Manilius), and above all his charming head of Liberty, by far the most beautiful of the Peace medals which followed the close of the Revolution,—are well known to American collectors. All these medals graced his cabinet. His trenchant paper on the remarkable attribution of the token of an English Musical Society (a local issue known as the "Avalonia piece" and of a comparatively recent period) to an American colony and to a date a century and more before its issue; his exhaustive list of the Issues of the United States Mint; his very complete Catalogues of Washington, Franklin, and other medals; his descriptions of the boastful tokens of Admiral Vernon and the capture of Porto Bello, and others which need not be mentioned here, show how thoroughly he had mastered the connection between History and Numismatics.

His study was by no means confined to American pieces, or the European issues which relate to our Colonial history. A single incident will show how wide and how minute as well, was his knowledge of ancient coins. It chanced that he one day called at the office of the writer to look over some recent numbers of the Continental coin journals which came to the editorial table of the Journal of Numismatics. In one of these was the account of a "find," mostly of Roman coins, among which was one never before noticed, which

was specially interesting as bearing the name of a Cæsar previously unknown to historians. Having some slight familiarity with Roman Imperial coins, this discovery was on lines which to me were so novel that it had at once attracted my notice, and I called Mr. Appleton's attention to the item. "Oh, yes," said he, before glancing at the account in the magazine, "I presume it belongs to such a group." And this was precisely the case. It is needless to say, that knowing as I did, and perhaps no one knew it better, his wonderful mastery of the science, I was yet astonished at his instantaneous placing of this coin from the very brief description I had given him.

While the writer was preparing for publication the manuscript on "Contemporary Medals Illustrative of American Colonial History," left unfinished by the late Mr. C. Wyllys Betts, Mr. Appleton's thorough acquaintance with this interesting class of pieces was of great assistance; and it was most willingly and courteously given; while his familiarity with the historic events which led to their mintage was equalled only by his readiness to bring examples from his magnificent cabinet, whenever they might serve to elucidate some doubtful point.

His disquisition on "A Uniform Coinage," which was the title of his "Commencement part," and the fact that he was one of the founders of the Boston Numismatic Society in the year that he graduated, that he served it as its Secretary until his death, together with his constant and regular attendance at its meetings for over forty years, except when abroad, and his letters to its membership while on the Continent, show how deep and genuine was his interest in this department of his three favorite studies — Numismatics, Heraldry and Genealogy. Indeed before he entered college he had begun the collection of the cabinet which, to the very close of his life, was an unfailing source of pleasure, and which it is earnestly to be hoped may be preserved intact as a monument to his memory. He was unceasing in his efforts to complete his series of coins and medals having reference to events in American history, and there are those who will recall his delight when he informed a few sympathetic friends of his success in obtaining originals of the rare Oswego medal, and the still rarer "Diplomatic" Medal, for which he had long been watching, and which he exhibited and described at a meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society in the winter of 1894, and to his associates in the Numismatic Society.

Perhaps I have lingered too long over Mr. Appleton's devotion to coin study, which from our joint connection with the Journal of Numismatics, and his constant interest in its success for thirty years and more, I had frequent occasion to recognize, to the very close of his life. And yet I am inclined to believe that that devotion may have been the key to his interest in the kindred topic of heraldry, out of which grew in turn his love of genealogical research. It has well been said that "heraldry is one of the innumerable auxiliary