# Buffalo Bill Center of the West Authenticates Trove of Historic Early 1800s Medals

*Buffalo Bill Center of the West authenticates rare early 1800s Indian peace medals, including one of only three taken on the Lewis & Clark Expedition.*



NA.205.120 Jefferson Indian Peace Medal; Buffalo Bill Center of the West

CODY, WY, UNITED STATES, September 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Following a thorough course of testing and analysis carried out earlier this year, the Buffalo Bill Center of the West has definitively authenticated a trove of rare and historically significant medals tied to key periods and events in the history of the American West spanning more than 100 years.

Some items in the collections have been hailed by experts as profoundly consequential, and are on view now at the Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming.

Four are Indian peace medals presented to Tribal members during treaty negotiations and other interactions with U.S. representatives. One is exceptionally rare, with only three of its kind carried by Lewis & Clark on their 1804–1806 Corps of Discovery Expedition.

"All of the medals have long resided in the Plains Indian Museum's collections, and some had been previously displayed at the Center. But exact details about the medals' origins and authenticity were not fully known until this summer," said Rebecca West, CEO and Executive Director of the Center of the West.

"We did not previously know the full extent of their significance in the cultural history of the American West, but we're always working to learn more about our collections," she said. "Consequently, we have now gained substantially greater understanding of their exceptional nature." Among the medals evaluated and authenticated are:

- A large Thomas Jefferson Indian peace medal—known as a "shell medal" made by joining together two outer shells as front and back—which is one of only three such medals taken on

the Corps of Discovery Expedition.

- A small Jefferson Indian peace medal, also a shell medal, which is one of only 16 of its kind taken on the expedition.
- Two other Indian peace medals, one awarded during the administration of Millard Fillmore (1850 – 53) and one from the Franklin Pierce administration (1853 – 57). Each is one of fewer than two dozen of its kind known to exist.
- Two fur trader medals, modeled after genuine Indian peace medals, that were gifted to Natives by fur-trading companies. Each is one of only eight known of its type to exist.
- Additional medals of various kinds dating to as early as 1804 and as late as 1913.



Buffalo Bill Center of the West located in Cody, Wyoming

Preliminary analysis of relevant documentation indicates a high likelihood that both Jefferson Indian peace medals were presented to Native recipients during the Corps of Discovery Expedition, and the Center is conducting ongoing research to determine additional details about these and other medals.

> Exact details about the medals' origins and authenticity were not fully known until this summer."
>
> *Rebecca West, CEO, Buffalo Bill Center of the West*

Among the 33 medals from the Center's Plains Indian Museum collection examined and tested this summer, also included were other authentic medals similar to (but not the same as) Indian peace medals; genuine collector medals produced by the U.S. Mint; and so-called "fantasy" medals—forged peace medals struck by private individuals in an attempt to deceive recipients. Other medals were also determined to be counterfeits, including forged versions of George Washington oval peace medals, which have historically been highly subject to counterfeiting.

The rare and important genuine medals that were authenticated are "extremely important and add significantly to our history, and change the numismatic world," said Dr. Lawrence J. Lee, an independent numismatic specialist hired by the Center to evaluate the collection. Lee has curated museum collections and consulted with multiple institutions regarding their numismatic holdings, and is among the world's foremost specialists on Indian peace medals and related artifacts.

"Each of these genuine Indian peace medals has a unique and hugely significant historical backstory," Lee said. "They have such important provenances that each can stand alone as a

momentous artifact from our nation's past."

Based on historical documents, notes, and other authentication gathered and maintained with the medals, Lee said, "It might be possible to eventually trace two of the medals to their original recipients, which is quite rare."

In addition to Lee's physical inspection of the medals and supporting documentation, Center of the West Chief Conservator Beverly Perkins conducted an X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis of them.



Buffalo Bill Center of the West Logo

"XRF is a widely used, non-destructive technique that determines the elemental composition of materials," Perkins said. "It allows for a metallurgical comparison of the specific alloys used in the medals to known benchmarks, much the way historical paintings, tapestries or ceramics are often authenticated," she said.

Plains Indian Museum Curator Hunter Old Elk said: "The Center has been and will continue to conduct extensive research on the history and specific provenance of these medals. As appropriate, we will consult with affiliated Tribes, as we do with all items in the Plains Indian Museum."

John Pack, Executive Director of consignments for Stack's Bowers Galleries, a leading U.S. numismatic auction house, said he was glad to see the Center's medals get their moment in the spotlight.

"Indian peace medals and the related medals of the fur trade are important historical objects that were part of the complex and fascinating interactions of European and Indigenous cultures across North America," Pack said. "All too often, these objects lurk in the shadows of collections, and as a researcher in this field, I am delighted that the medals of the Plains Indian Museum are being celebrated and better publicized."

PR Department
Buffalo Bill Center of the West
+ +1 307-578-4137
email us here

Visit us on social media:
LinkedIn
Instagram
Facebook
YouTube
TikTok
X

---

This press release can be viewed online at: https://www.einpresswire.com/article/939468048

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.
© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.