From the Archives: Christian Endeavor: Badges, Conventions, and Youth Ministry

The recent donation of Christian Endeavor material to the B.L. Fisher Library Special Collections and Archives of Asbury Theological Seminary came with a large number of envelopes and boxes filled with ribbons, pins, medals, and all kinds of assorted badges from across the U.S. and even the world.¹ As we began the process of sorting these items and trying to think through the preservation and importance of these materials, we began to get interested in these odd pieces of ephemera. After Dr. Francis Clark founded the Young People’s Societies of Christian Endeavor in 1881, they rapidly began to grow and expand by holding meetings at the local, state, and national level. At first the groups were rather small, but outside interest in this new youth movement led to many visitors coming to their meetings. At their fourth conference in Old Orchard, Maine in 1885, they decided to try something different,

Announcement was made by the chair that badges had been prepared for the delegates, who were requested to provide themselves with the same that they might be distinguished from others in attendance, not delegates. The badges consisted of a piece of white satin ribbon, with the legend “Christian Endeavor, Delegate,” printed thereon in red letters. Similar badges were provided for visitors.²

So, the first Christian Endeavor badge was created to distinguish voting members from visitors during a convention.
The Oldest International Convention Badge in the Collection is a Ribbon from the 8th Convention Held in Philadelphia in 1889.

Soon, however, the leadership of the Christian Endeavor began to realize the potential for forging a strong group identity through the use of badges. First, they had to develop a common symbol, which they found in an “E” being surrounded by a “C”. This logo was developed by Rev. Howard B. Grose in 1887, and has been defined as, “The C. embraces the E. The Endeavor is all within the Christ…” So the emblem became a theological statement as well, that all of our work should occur within the mission of Christ. Soon the combined C.E. of Christian Endeavor was added to the many badges being produced. By 1890 at the ninth International Convention, the number of visitors became rather unwieldy
and the convention report notes, “Admission was gained on presentation of the convention badge.” So these badges now came to serve an additional function of entrance passes to important events at the convention.

As youth are prone to do, it became popular to collect and wear the various badges to show solidarity with the group and the purposes represented by Christian Endeavor. Members desired to be recognized as part of the organization. One manual suggested receiving new members by saying,

It is the custom of our society to give each new member a Christian Endeavor pin, in the hope that it will serve as an earnest (token?) of our brotherly affection, and as a constant reminder of the covenant you have just repeated with us. We ask that you show your Christian Endeavor colors faithfully, and we pray that this little emblem may come to mean as much in your lives as it means in ours.
Some badges were quite elaborate, such as this badge from the 18th International Christian Endeavor Convention held in Detroit, Michigan in 1899.

The Christian Endeavor logo fans out to display popular tourist sites in the city.

As a result, items with the CE emblem proliferated, including tie clips, sweater clasps, rings, bracelets, and all kinds of items. Another manual encouraged the collection of these items,

Celluloid buttons are cheap and they can be used as rewards for Junior work well done. When a Junior has earned so many buttons, he may exchange them for a Christian Endeavor pin. Every Junior should be encouraged to wear the Christian
Endeavor monogram in some form or other, on a button or a pin. Make this a point of some of the contests the society carries out.

So, contests were designed for spiritual growth, which included using pins and badges for incentives for things like scripture memorization.

Finally, these contests expanded to create friendly contests between local societies to encourage the growth of new societies and new members. At the ninth International Convention in St. Louis, some enterprising Christian Endeavorer brought a banner constructed by sewing hundreds of ribbons together from different societies. The convention report from the following year notes,

At St. Louis, last year, a badge banner, made up, as it was, of badges from hundreds of societies, was displayed amidst much enthusiasm. Acting upon the suggestions made by a delegate, it was decided to place that banner for one year in the custody of the State, Territory, or Province that should show the greatest proportionate increase in its number of local societies during the year just closing.

These badge banners were given out as awards to the societies that had grown the most until about 1898, when the society started using banners sent by foreign nations to serve this purpose.
Badge from the 28th International Christian Endeavor Convention in New York City.
Notice the metal date is 1917 for the originally planned convention, which was postponed due to World War I, so the added ribbon contains the dates for the 1921 convention after the war.

Throughout its long history, the badges of Christian Endeavor have been a constant, but even then, these badges have changed form and function over the years. From 1885-1891 the earliest forms of badges seem to be simple ribbons that could be pinned to a person’s clothing. These were inexpensive and useful. From 1892-1921 we see the development of very elaborate badges, many modeled after military medals with elaborate metal pin bars, ribbons and suspended metal elements. This period of time coincides with the Spanish-American War and World War I, both wars in which Christian Endeavor groups were involved. The imperialistic aims of the United States encouraged strong patriotism, and the parallels with the Christian Endeavor army moving across the globe on a mission for Christ is clear.
to see. From 1923-1937, during the period of the Great Depression, the badges become cheaper versions of the military-type of medals, often using paper, plastic, or celluloid instead of metal. At this time individual nametags begin to appear, demonstrating a growing desire for less group identity and more individualism. From 1939-1993 the individual nametag becomes the dominant form of badge, moving from more elaborate metal nametags to modern paper nametags in plastic sleeves.

Badges often contained images and slogans representative of the host state, such as the corn and slogan, “The Harvest Time is Here” for the 29th International Convention held in Des Moines, Iowa in 1923.
In today’s world the symbolic value of material culture items, such as Christian Endeavor badges is often overlooked. Group identity, rallying around a common mission, fostering spiritual growth and friendly competition for the good of the group are all important reasons for taking a little bit of time to reflect on this often overlooked ephemera within archives and special collections. It helps provide a window into the past to see how Christian ministry to youth developed and flourished in previous generations.

Local State Convention Badge from Nicholasville, Kentucky for 1909

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary’s mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or
in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.

End Notes

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4 Minutes of the Ninth Annual International Christian Endeavor Convention, Boston, MA: The United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1890:5.


8 Drawing taken from “Two Decades of Christian Endeavor,” by Amos R. Wells. The American Monthly Review of Reviews, 23(2): 185-190, February 1901. This image is in the public domain and came from page 190 of the article.