

# The Life and Tokens of Frank L. Gay

by Rob Pennell

## His Tokens

Frank L. Gay's Civil War Tokens are known by CWT collectors to be one of the more available tokens in the Rhode Island series. This is shown to have always been the case in an August 1898 issue of *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal*. An article about CWT titled "Metal Tokens" states: "In common with the merchants of other cities, the dealers of Providence issued these tokens in larger or smaller numbers. The one most commonly seen now was made for Frank L. Gay".



Gay CWTs were made with a single obverse die and four reverse dies. The most common, an R2 in copper or R3 in brass, is with the 1264 reverse die. The other varieties are all rare and are seldom seen, and made with multiple off-metals, probably for collectors. The obverse die is also muled with the reverse die of Fall River, MA issuer Edward P. Francis who operated a hotel, a restaurant and a billiards hall.

## Frank L. Gay the Bookseller and Reviewer

Born in Massachusetts in 1832, Frank Lemuel Gay was a bookseller in Providence R. I. before, throughout and after the Civil War. Webster's Dictionaries, schoolbooks, diaries, bibles, antique books, as well as the latest titles could be bought at his establishment. Book reviews published by Gay, can also be found in periodicals during the Civil War era.

**GOLD PENS! GOLD PENS! GOLD PENS!** at the lowest prices, at  
**FRANK L. GAY'S, 140 Westminster street.**

Other items that could be purchased in his shop included photography albums, backgammon boards, puzzles, and Gold Pens!

**Frank L. Gay the Stationer**

**FRANK L. GAY,**  
**BOOKSELLER, STATIONER,**  
 AND  
**BLANK BOOK MANUFACTURER.**

School and College Text-Books, Theological, Historical, Medical, and Miscellaneous Books,  
 AND  
**ALL KINDS OF SCHOOL STATIONERY,**  
 CONSTANTLY ON HAND AND FOR SALE AT LOW PRICES.

SECOND HAND BOOKS BOUGHT, SOLD AND EXCHANGED.

A LIBERAL DISCOUNT MADE TO TEACHERS.

**FRANK L. GAY, 140 Westminster Street, Providence, R. I.**

In the above advertisement Gay targeted teachers and students to buy stationary including blank books that he manufactured.

**Frank L. Gay the Librarian**

In the book "A Directory of Printing Publishing, Bookselling and Allied Trades in Rhode Island to 1865" Mr. Gay is not only listed as being a bookseller, but also having a circulating library.

**WESTMINSTER CIRCULATING LIBRARY**—New Books—Love's Labor Won, by Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.  
 The Morgesons, by Elizabeth Stoddard.  
 Oriental Haroms and Scenery.  
 John Doe and Richard Roe, by E. S. Gould.  
 North America, by Anthony Trollope.  
 Life of Gen. Lyon, by Ashbel Woodward, M. D.  
 Ravenshoe, by Henry Kingslev.  
 For sale or to let by **FRANK L. GAY,**  
 140 Westminster st.  
 je21

In 1862, various advertisements in newspapers show a Westminster Circulating Library being run by Frank L. Gay at 140 Westminster St. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Victor Hugo, and Charles Dickens are just a few of the authors listed as being available to "let". Circulating libraries were a large part of nineteenth century America. These libraries allowed citizens access to a variety of books for a fraction of the cost of purchasing them outright. After the civil war these types of libraries decreased in population due to a decline in book prices. This made owning books feasible for the middle class, who were circulating libraries' biggest customers. Maybe this played

a factor in owning a bookselling business for Gay, as he was bought out in March of 1866 by proprietor C. M. Tower. Gay would even file for bankruptcy around Jan.-Feb. 1868, but it doesn't seem this kept him out of business for long though. Information from Dave Bower's book *The Civil War Tokens of Rhode Island*, shows in that same year of 1868, Gay was in a partnership with Thomas H. Spencer at 259 Westminster St. By 1878 it seems he was no longer a shop owner, but under the employment of another bookseller and stationer, Tillingham and Mason.

### Frank L. Gay the Horticulturist

Newspaper articles from the 1870's well into the 20th century can be found showing Frank L. Gay as an active member of the Rhode Island Horticultural Society. He won numerous awards (which included cash gratuities) during this span for floral displays, growing flowers and vegetables. During over 40 years with the society Gay also played an administrative role. He judged exhibitions, served on awards committees and at times, acted as its secretary. Throughout this time, periodicals show his wife and son were also active in the Society, winning awards on various occasions. Apparently, Civil War token issuers in Rhode Island seem to have enjoyed horticulture.

**The Horticultural Society.**  
 The Rhode Island Horticultural Society met at their hall, on Washington street, last evening, the subject of discussion being the Gladolus.  
 In the absence of the President and Secretary, Mr. Charles F. Phillips and Mr. G. H. Hague were appointed to fill the offices pro tem.  
 Remarks on the subject of discussion were made by Palmer Dorrance, Frank Gay, C. V. Kennon and C. F. Phillips.

**Frank L. Gay**  
 The funeral of Frank L. Gay, one of the oldest members of the Rhode Island Horticultural Society, who died Tuesday night was held this morning from the funeral home of the W. H. Graham Corporation, 571 Broad street. The services were conducted by the Rev. H. W. Hewitt. Burial was at Pocasset Cemetery.

Charles F. Phillips (City Fruit Store token issuer) is mentioned alongside Gay in various articles concerning the R.I. Horticultural Society.

On May 4, 1920, Gay passed away and was buried at Pocasset cemetery in Cranston R.I.

#### SOURCES:

- The Providence Evening Press
- Manufacturers and Farmers Journal
- The Evening Telegraph
- Providence Morning Herald
- A Directory of Printing Publishing, Bookselling & Allied Trades in Rhode Island to 1865 by H. Glenn Brown and Maude O. Brown
- The Civil War Tokens of Rhode Island by Q. David Bowers
- George Fuld and Melvin Fuld, U. S. Civil War Store Cards Fourth Edition ed. John Ostendorf. The Civil War Token Society, 2024.