

## The Centennial Commemorative Medals

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On February 12, 1873, Congress authorized the striking of National Commemorative Medals by the United States Mint. The first four issues authorized under that Act celebrated the impending Centennial of the United States of America.

The first National Commemorative issue authorized, struck, and sold were the medals in two designs and sizes for the U.S. Centennial Exposition to be held in Philadelphia. They were authorized by Congress on June 16, 1874, struck later that same year, and first offered for sale on March 24, 1875.

The second commemorative issue celebrated the Centennial of the Battle of Lexington, which took place on April 19, 1775. The first order of 2 gold, 25 silver, and 200 bronze medals was rushed into production on April 15, 1875, in order to be available for the Centennial celebration in Lexington, Massachusetts, on April 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 1875.

The third issue commemorated the Centennial of the Mecklenburg Declaration of May 20, 1775. The first reverse die produced by the Mint drastically misspelled the name of the county as “Mechlenburgh,” which delayed production until May 5, 1875. The medals were introduced to the public on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of May, 1875, at the Mecklenburg Declaration Centennial Celebration in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The fourth and last set of Centennial medals issued under the Act of 1873 was the Nevada Exposition medal, commissioned to be sold as a Centennial Exhibition souvenir at the California and Nevada State Building. Production started on June 20, 1876, and ended on November 11, 1876. According to a certificate signed by A. Loudon Snowden, U.S. Mint Coiner, that accompanied the first 147 medals, “the Nevada Exposition medals... are made of pure silver, crushed from Nevada ores, at the Nevada quartz mill in the Centennial Exposition grounds, and subsequently refined at the United States Mint.

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## 10. U. S. Centennial Large Commemorative Medal (Variety 1)



(1.4 x)



(1.4 x)

**Obverse:** Lady Liberty wears a long gown with a long shawl or veil billowing behind; resting on her right knee; sword in her right hand pointed to the ground; left hand pointing upwards; above her head a glory (halo of 13 stars from which radiate a number of lines representing beams of light); in exergue "1776"; surrounded by a circle of small beads, outside of which is inscribed: "THESE UNITED COLONIES ARE AND OF RIGHT OUGHT TO BE FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES."; all surrounded by a circular solid line just inside the rim.

**Reverse:** A standing female figure of Columbia, representing the United States, in a long off-the-left-shoulder full gown, wearing the liberty cap, with a sheathed sword at her left side, and supporting the shield of the United States leaning against her left leg, holds a beribboned crown in each outstretched arm. With her left hand, she crowns a kneeling female figure representing Art, depicted with her right hand resting on a sculptured bust, holding a modelling stick in her left hand, and next to her lies a palette, brushes, and a maulstick. With her right hand, she crowns a kneeling female figure representing Manufacturing, depicted with a hammer in her right hand, supporting a large cog-wheel, and next to her a large anvil. In exergue: "1876". All surrounded by a rope or beaded ring; outside the ring: "IN COMMEMORATION OF THE HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE."; below: "ACT OF CONGRESS JUNE 1874."; all surrounded by a circular solid line just inside the rim.

The official trade card of the Centennial Board of Revenue explained the symbolism of the official Centennial medal designs as follows: "The design of the obverse on all of the medals represents the Genius of American Independence rising from a recumbent position, grasping with her right hand the sword which is to enforce her demands, and raising her left in appealing pride to the galaxy of thirteen stars, which, indicating the original colonies and States, are blazing in the firmament. Beneath is the date 1776. The reverse displays the Genius of Liberty, with the now ornamental sword buckled to her girdle, the shield of the Stars and Stripes leaning at rest, while with either hand she extends a welcome and a chaplet to the arts and sciences assembled with evidences of their skill and craft to do honor to the date 1876, which is inscribed upon the platform. The history of our great nation is depicted in these two designs, and as a work of art, a memento of the Centennial, or as a means of contributing to its celebration, these Memorial Medals should be objects of universal appreciation."

## The Centennial Commemorative Medals

The official broadside that marketed the medals (q.v.) indicates that the Centennial Board planned to sell seven Mint medals: the large medal in gilt, bronze, and white metal; the small medal in silver, gilt, and bronze; and an Independence gilt medal. Later versions of the same broadside do not mention the Independence medal, so it is probably safe to say that it was never issued.

**Cross-refs:** F-1; H-9; J CM-11, L-82

**Diameter:** 57.6 mm.      **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.	Weight	Note
Gold	10go	150.6 gm	This medal is unique. It was presented to the President of the U.S. Centennial Board of Finance, at the public ceremony held on the Exhibition grounds on July 4, 1876. It was last sold at auction in the John Ford Sale, Part V, Lot 193, on October 12, 2004, where it realized \$54,625.00.
Silver	10si	81.2 & 77.9 gm	These medals were struck in .990 fine silver. One specimen, weighing 81.2g, was presented to Dr. Henry Linderman, the Superintendent of the Mint. Ten lighter specimens, also in .990 fine silver, but weighing only 77.9g, were struck. In 1881, two of them remained in the Mint and were melted down.
Gilt	10gi	103.2 gm	Gilded copper. 2,123 were struck.
Bronze	10bz	103.2 gm	Mint records indicate that all of the copper medals were intended to be gilded. However, Holland lists this medal in copper, but not in gilt. While it is possible that one or more copper planchets got out of the Mint without being gilded, it is more likely that Holland was less than strict in distinguishing between copper and bronze. 7,010 specimens were struck.
White Metal	10wm	74.2 gm	Modern availability would indicate that many more than the Mint's documented 583 white-metal specimens were struck, perhaps by private contractors. It is estimated that about 9,000 specimens were struck, making this one of the most common Centennial medals.
Terra Cotta	10tc		See below.



Publication fees paid  
to the  
American Numismatic Society.

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## 20. U. S. Centennial Large Commemorative Medal (Variety 2)



(1.4 x)



(1.4 x)

**Obverse:** Similar to #1, with several significant differences. There are fewer rays in the glory over Liberty's head. The hair behind and below Liberty's left arm is less detailed. The surface on which Liberty kneels has discernible six-petaled flowers in it. The hem of Liberty's gown is noticeably less well defined. (See the Variety 1 and Variety 2 comparison chart below.)

**Reverse:** Similar to #1, with several minor but important differences. The most obvious is that the artist's palette at Columbia's left foot does not have the four daubs of paint visible in #1. There is no star at the hilt of Columbia's sword. The topmost of the three paintbrushes is longer, with its left end breaking the outer edge of Lady Liberty's shield. Columbia stands on a flowered carpet, vice the plain surface of Variety #1. (See the Variety 1 and Variety 2 comparison chart below.)



Variety 2  
Vermeil



# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

**Cross-refs:** Swoger 3Ibv<sup>2</sup> (the vermeil example)

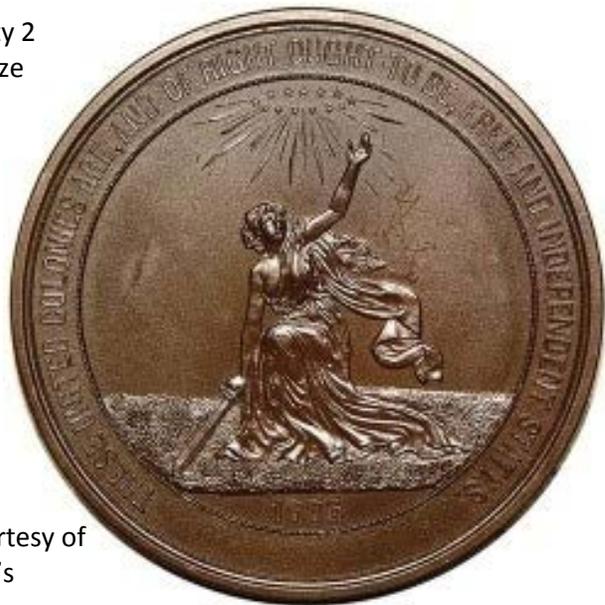
**Diameter:** 57.6 mm.

**Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.	Wt	Note
Vermeil	20vm	110.3gm	This medal was struck in silver and then gilded. Only one is known to exist. It appears to have been struck from original Mint dies, but its weight of 110.3 grams vice 77.9 grams for the silver Variety 1 versions indicates that it may have been struck outside the Mint.
Bronze	20bz		Joe Levine, of Presidential Coin and Antique has handled three of the bronze Variety 2 pieces, one of which was subsequently consigned to Stack's. This specimen is shown below.
White Metal	20wm	62.3gm	Bill Swoger states in his recent book on National Commemorative Medals that 583 of these Variety 2 medals were struck in white metal. He bases this hypothesis on the fact that Mint records indicate that the Centennial Board of Finance ordered a late batch of medals after the original dies had been destroyed at the end of the Centennial Exhibition. He suggests that, in order to fill this order, the Mint had to cut a second set of dies, which accounts for the many differences between the two varieties. If he is correct, Variety 2 seems much scarcer than one would expect of a run of 583 medals. Though Mint records state that 583 medals were delivered, it is possible that fewer were actually distributed, and the rest were lost.



Variety 2  
Bronze



Images courtesy of  
Stack's

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## LARGE OFFICIAL MEDAL VARIETIES

### THE REVERSE



#### Variety 1

1. Star on sword hilt.
2. Single fold in hem.
3. Straw beneath America's feet.
4. Four daubs of paint on palette.  
Center brush longer to left.
5. Rounded date numerals.
6. Shorter ribbon ends.

#### Variety 2

1. No star on hilt
2. Double fold in hem.
3. Tapestry beneath feet.
4. No paint daubs on palette.  
Center brush shorter.
5. Flat date numerals.
6. Longer ribbon ends.

### The Obverse



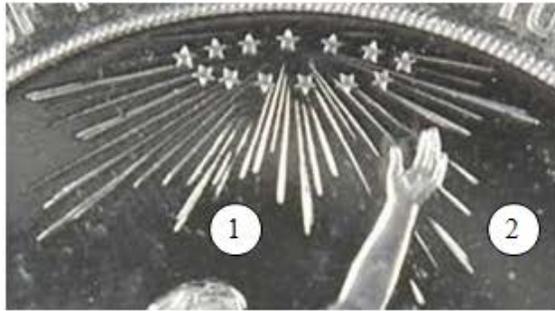
#### Variety 1

7. More rays, hand closer to stars.
8. Hair locks wide apart.
9. Ground cover more random.
10. Distinct hem in gown.

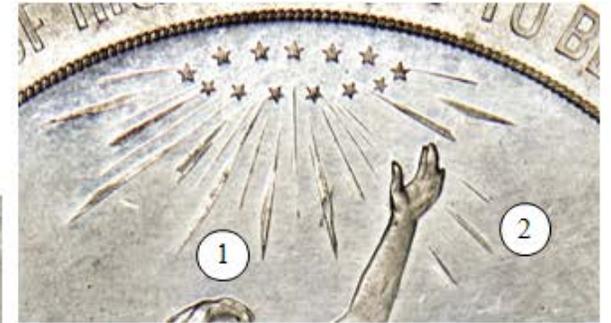
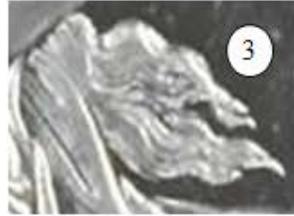
#### Variety 2

7. Fewer rays, hand farther.
8. Hair locks close together.
9. Ground cover more parallel.
10. No hem in gown.

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals



**Variety 1 Obverse**



**Variety 2 Obverse**

### Differences in Variety 1

1. 29 rays in the glory.
2. Five rays to the right of the arm.
3. Hair tresses widely separated.
4. No six-petal flowers in the lawn.
5. No hem in the gown.

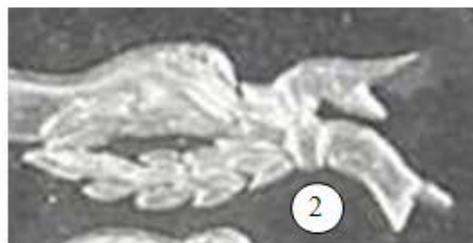
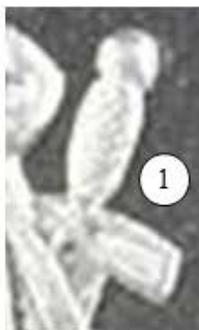


### Differences in Variety 2

1. 20 rays in the glory.
2. Only three rays to the right of the arm.
3. Hair tresses not separated.
4. Lawn has six-petal flowers in it.
5. The gown has a hem in it.



# The Centennial Commemorative Medals



- 8
- 9
- 8
- 9



**Variety 1 Reverse**

**Variety 2 Reverse**

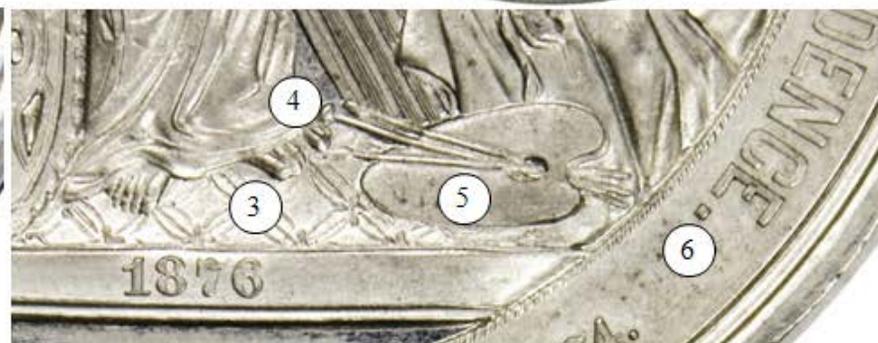
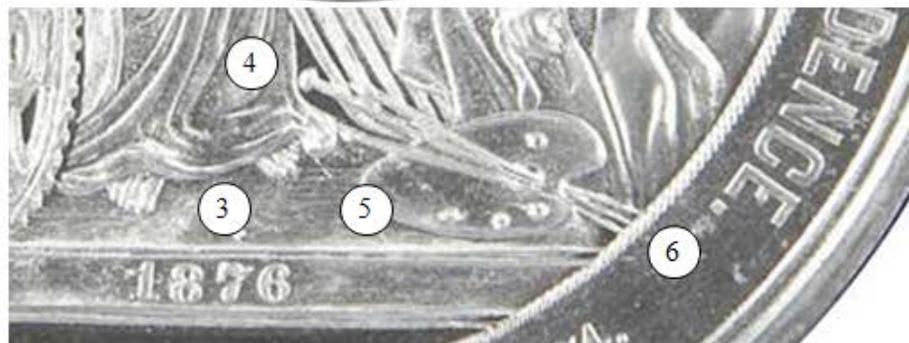
**Differences in Variety 1**

1. Star on the hilt of the sword.
2. Ribbon ends different.
3. America stands on a plain surface.
4. Left end of the middle brush is longer.
5. Four daubs of paint on the artist's pallet.
6. The brushes right ends touch the rope border.



**Differences in Variety 2**

1. No star on the hilt of the sword.
2. Ribbon ends different.
3. America stands on a parquet surface.
4. Left end of the middle brush is shorter.
5. No daubs of paint on the artist's pallet.
6. The brushes right end do not reach the rope.



## The Centennial Commemorative Medals

### 30. (Fantasy of) U. S. Centennial Large Commemorative Medal



(2.26 x)



(2.26 x)

**Obverse:** Similar to A20, though poor in its execution.

**Reverse:** Similar to A20, though poor in its execution.

This medal is an electrotype of a poor quality original fantasy medal. There is an obvious, irregular seam along the edge, which indicates that the medal was probably made in two halves and then assembled. Though it is only 36 mm in diameter, it weighs 22.4 grams, slightly heavier than the 37.7-mm A40 of the same thickness. This could be explained if the medal were constructed from two electroplate copper shells, filled with lead, and then assembled. The purpose for which the original and this electrotype were struck is unknown.

**Cross-refs:** Not listed.

**Diameter:** 36 mm.    **Edge:** Plain

<b>Alloy</b>	<b>No.</b>
Bronze	30bz

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## 40. U. S. Centennial Small Commemorative Medal



(2.16 x)



(2.16 x)

**Obverse:** Lady Liberty wears a long gown with a long shawl or veil billowing behind; resting on her right knee; sword in her right hand pointed to the ground; left hand pointing upwards; above her head a glory (halo of 13 stars from which radiate a number of lines representing beams of light); ray variety 1 has a total of 29 rays with one ray passing through the rightmost star of the halo; in exergue "1776"; surrounded by a circle of small beads, outside of which is inscribed: "THESE UNITED COLONIES ARE AND OF RIGHT OUGHT TO BE FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES."; all surrounded by a circular solid line just inside the rim.

**Reverse:** In eight lines: "IN // COMMEMORATION // OF THE // HUNDREDTH // ANNIVERSARY // OF // AMERICAN // INDEPENDENCE" (lines 2, 3, and 8 curved; lines 1 and 4-7 straight); around, a laurel wreath; outside the wreath in a circle is inscribed: "BY AUTHORITY OF THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES"; below: "1876"; all surrounded by a circular solid line just inside the rim.

A large coining press was brought to the Exhibition in Fairmount Park, and the silver impressions were struck in situ and retailed for \$3 each (in contrast, bronze and gilt pieces were struck within the Mint and were sold for \$1). (from <http://www.harrybassfoundation.org/basscatalogs/BASSSALE1/b1-3-e.htm>)

**Cross-refs:** F-2, H-10; J-CM-10; HK 20-22a. L-83.

**Diameter:** 37.6 mm.      **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.	Wt	Note
Silver (.999)		22.0 gm	Unique, disposition and whereabouts unknown.
Silver (.900)	40si	24.7 gm	10,133 pieces were struck.
Gilt	40gi	21.4 gm	10,863 struck.
Bronze	40bz	21.4 gm	11,163 struck.
White Metal	40wm		Joe Levine has handled three white metal specimens in his Presidential auctions. He purchased all three from the Barber family, where they had been in the personal collection of Charles Barber, the son of William Barber, the engraver.

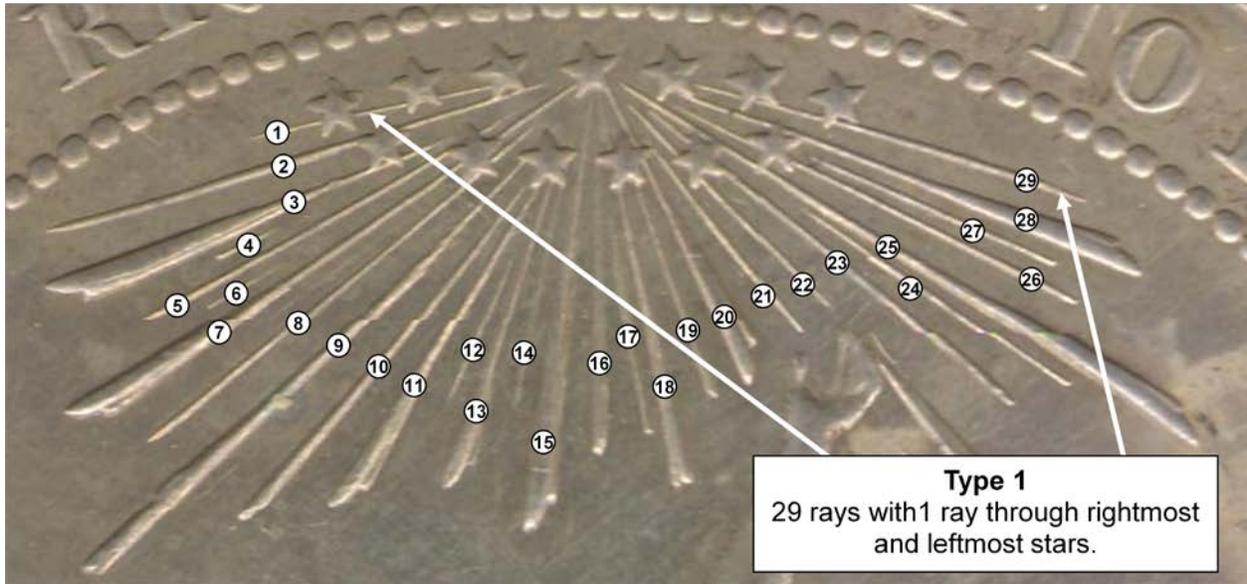
# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## Small U.S. Commemorative Medal Varieties

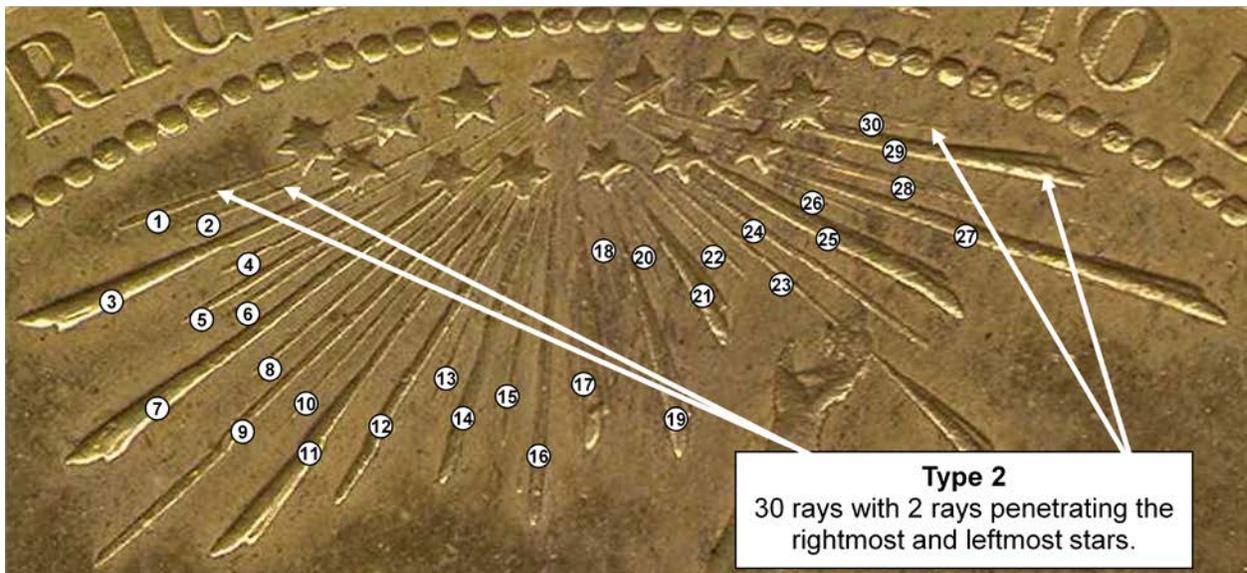
It appears that there are several obverse die varieties for the small U.S. Commemorative medals. There are three distinct ray patterns in the glory above America's head and two different placements of the 1776 date below her feet.

**Ray Varieties.** The three distinct ray patterns are referred to as R1, R2, and R3.

**Ray Variety 1:** R1 consists of 29 rays with one ray passing directly behind the rightmost and leftmost stars.

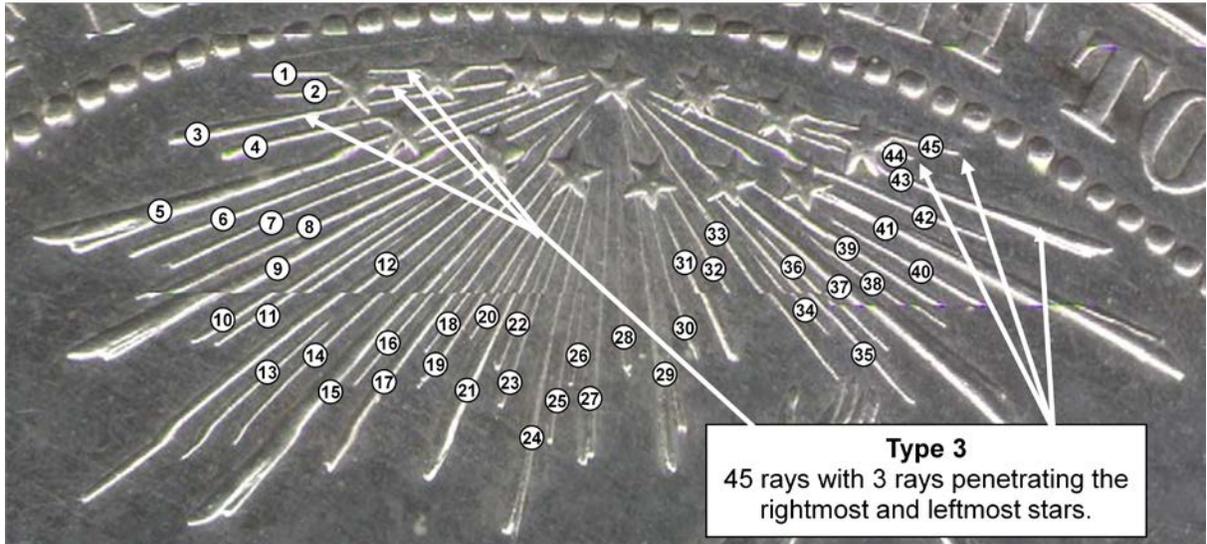


**Ray Variety 2:** R2 consists of 30 rays with two rays penetrating the rightmost and leftmost stars.



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Ray Variety 3: R3 consists of 45 rays with three rays penetrating the rightmost and leftmost stars.



**Date Varieties.** The date varieties are referred to as D1 and D2. D1 and D2 differ in the placement of the date 1776 relative to the inscription below it.

**Date Variety 1:** In D1, the "1" of n"1776" is positioned almost directly above the "T" of "THESE."



# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

**Date Variety 2:** In D2, the “1” in “1776” is positioned well to the right of the “T” in “THESE.”



With three different ray patterns and two different date positions, one might assume that there would be six possible combinations (three times two). However, this is not the case, because the ray pattern and date position are not independent, since they both appear on the same obverse die. Therefore, it is not a matter of arithmetic but merely of how many differing dies the Mint created. I cannot explain how these varieties occurred. The distribution of the varieties across this issue’s alloys is summarized in the table below. Note that so far I have found only nine of the possible 18 combinations, and they include only four of the possible six dies: D1R2, D1R3, D2R1, and D2R2.

	Ray 1	Ray 2	Ray 3
Silver Date 1		Si D1R2	Si D1R3
Silver Date 2	Si D2R1	Si D2R2	
Gilt Date 1			
Gilt Date 2	Gi D2R1	Gi D2R2	
Bronze Date 1			Bz D1R3
Bronze Date 2	Bz D2R1	Bz D2R2	

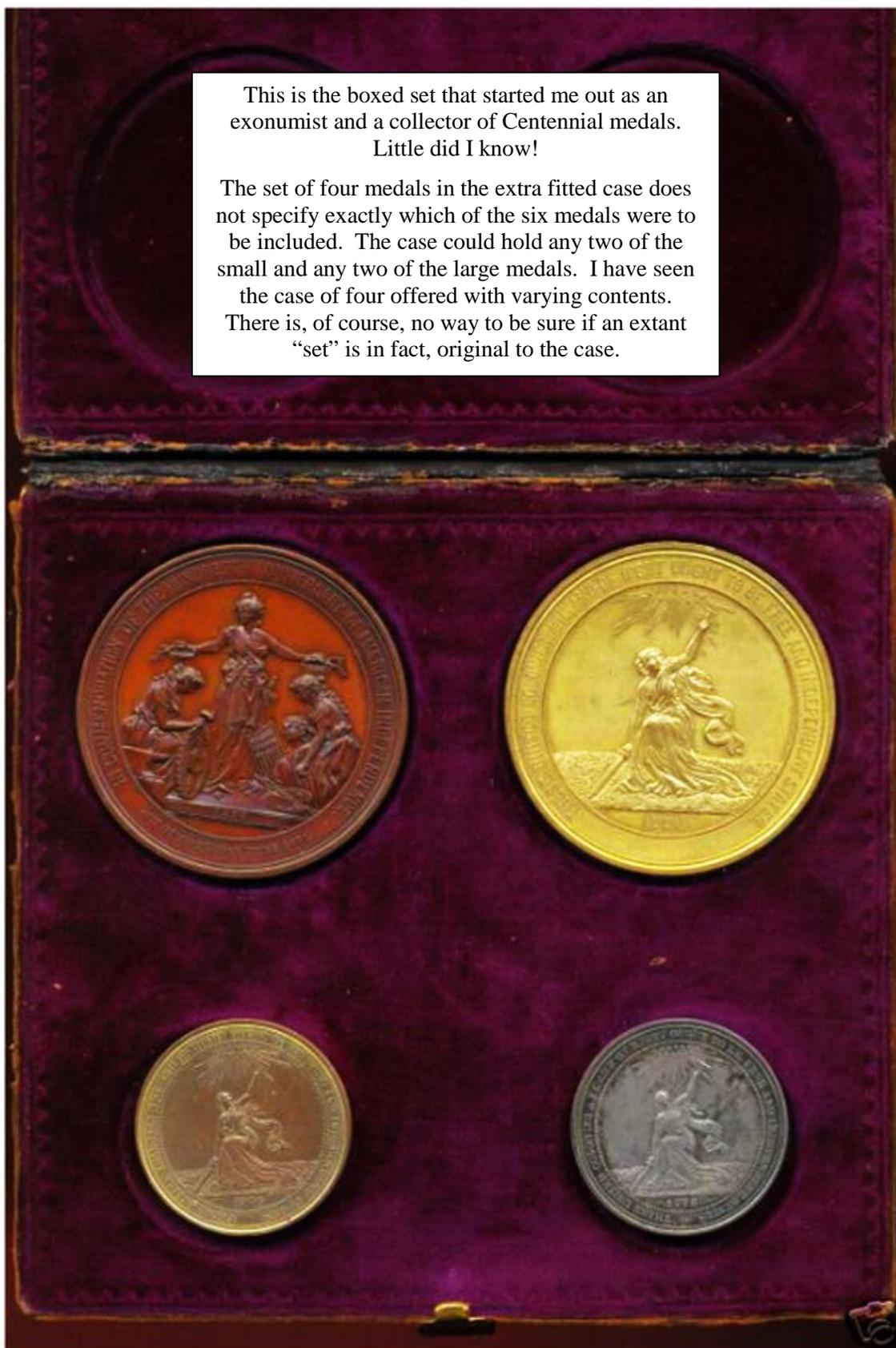
# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

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## The Boxed Centennial Set

This is the boxed set that started me out as an  
exonumist and a collector of Centennial medals.  
Little did I know!

The set of four medals in the extra fitted case does  
not specify exactly which of the six medals were to  
be included. The case could hold any two of the  
small and any two of the large medals. I have seen  
the case of four offered with varying contents.  
There is, of course, no way to be sure if an extant  
“set” is in fact, original to the case.



# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

This early broadside announcing the sale of the official Centennial Memorial Medals includes an “Independence Gilt Medal” for twenty-five cents. Later broadsides omit this reference, leading one to suspect that it was initially planned but later canceled for some unknown reason. For what it’s worth, I have never seen one.

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION,  
UNITED STATES  
*Centennial Memorial Medals.*




**I**N response to a universal popular demand, finding its expression in an act of Congress, the Centennial Board of Finance has caused to be prepared, at the United States Mint, a series of Medals to enable every one to preserve in the future an imperishable memorial of the Centennial year and the International Exhibition:

These Medals are of various sizes and materials, and will be found handsome works of art, aside from their intrinsic value and interest as commemorative of the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the American Republic. Every citizen must desire to possess and hand down to his children some memento of an occasion which has attracted the attention of the world, every stranger will wish to carry home with him a token of his visit, and nothing more appropriate for such purpose can be desired than these emblematic medals.

Under the act of Congress the manufacture or sale of Memorial Medals, other than those issued by the Centennial Board of Finance, is prohibited under the same penalties incurred for counterfeiting the coin of the United States. These are therefore the only official medals obtainable, and at the close of the Exhibition the dies will be destroyed.

The Medals are offered at the following prices, cases included:

Silver Medal,	\$3.00
Large Gilt Medal,	3.00
Large Bronze Medal,	2.00
Large White Metal Medal,	1.00
Small Gilt Medal,	.50
Small Bronze Medal,	.50
Independence Gilt Medal,	.25
Sets of four, extra case,	9.00

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

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## The Commemorative Medals Die Trial Set

Fred Berson tells an interesting tale about the Centennial Commemorative medals, which he related in the June 1976 issue of the TAMS (Tokens and Medals Society) Journal. In 1974, Fred was on the prowl searching for the same boxed four-medal set of Commemorative medals that got me started into collecting Centennials. His information was that the Centennial Exhibition Commission, in order to bolster flagging sales of its Commemorative medals, offered two large and two small medals in a fitted leather case for \$11, the same as the combined price of the four medals. Apparently, this promotion was not very successful, since only 60 or 70 boxed sets were sold in all.

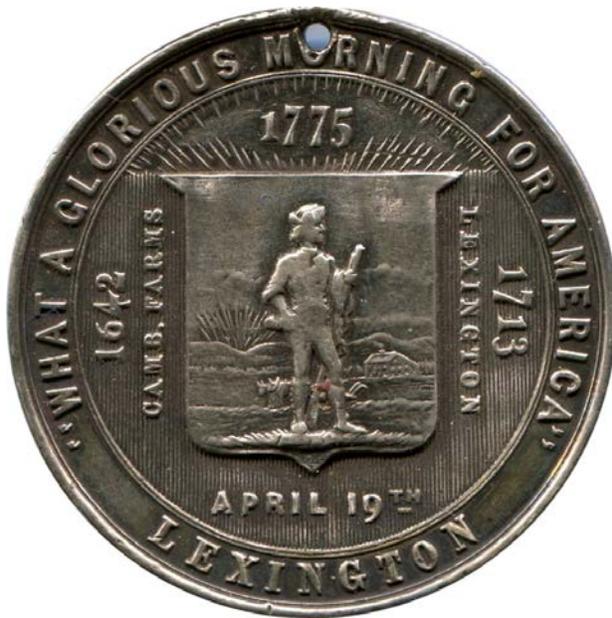
In the course of his search, a dealer in New York called to announce that they had one of his desired sets. When Fred arrived in New York, he stared appreciatively at a near-mint box containing perfect medals, but --and this was a big "but" -- the box (he called it a casket) contained not four but five medals. The casket had a beveled glass cover, a purple plush-lined interior, and a rear-panel with a trick opening mechanism.

As he made the rounds of dealers and other experts, no one was able to identify or explain Fred's find, until a visit to the New York City Numismatic Museum. Their medals expert, Dr. Brady, was unable to explain the set, but he did introduce Fred to another gentleman in the reading room, who turned out to be Don Taxay, the renowned numismatic author. As befits the reputation of and expectation from one of numismatic's most respected experts, it was not long before Mr. Taxay could announce his conclusion. The five-medals constituted a die trial set! Upon lifting the fitted lining out of the box, there on the bare wood was the number "2" in pencil. Though this may indicate that there was a #1 set, Mr. Taxay doubts that it survived, but who can know for sure?

The die trial set in the casket consisted of two large medals, one gilt, the other silver-washed lead; and three small medals in gilt, bronze, and silver. Except for the lead example, the other four medals could have been circulation strikes were it not for their thicknesses. Mr. Berson states in his article that the large medals were 3/8 inch (9.53 mm) thick; the small medals, 1/8 inch (3.18 mm) thick. This is considerably thicker than their issued counterparts (9.5 mm vs. 4.8 mm for the large, and 3.1 mm vs. 2.5 mm for the small). For most medals, this variance (98% for the large and 24% for the small) would not be remarkable, since private issuers were not held to strict standards, but for the U.S. Mint this is a big deal. One can be fairly confident that Commemorative medals this thick will be die trails and not circulation strikes. After all, the number "2" hints that there might be a number "1" out there, and that would mean five more die trials yet to be found. Happy hunting!

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## 50. Battle of Lexington Centennial



(2.1 x)



(2.1 x)

**Obverse:** The Lexington town seal, featuring a minuteman, standing left, powder horn in his right hand and musket in his left, on a shield-shaped landscape with a two-story farm house nestled in foothills behind which the sun rises on a pair of oxen yoked to a plow; around the shield, a center disk formed by two thin circular lines; above the shield: "1776" in glory on a plain field; on a field of narrow vertical lines emblematic of night, to left in two vertical lines: "1642 / CAMB. FARMS"; to right in two vertical lines: "1713 LEXINGTON"; below: "APRIL 19TH"; around, between the rim and the disk, clockwise from 8:30: " "WHAT A GLORIOUS MORNING FOR AMERICA" "; below, counterclockwise from 7:00: " LEXINGTON".

**Reverse:** In seven lines, the first and last curved: "CENTENNIAL / CELEBRATION / OF THE / BATTLE / OF / LEXINGTON / APRIL 19.1875".

Lexington was originally settled in 1642 as the Cambridge Farms parish of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and later incorporated as Lexington in 1713. The Battle of Lexington, on April 19, 1775, was the first engagement of the Revolutionary War. At sunrise, local Patriot militia initially confronted 700 British regulars in search of American supplies. After the first skirmish, the outnumbered militia fell back to the North Bridge in Concord, where they were reinforced and subsequently defeated three British companies and forced their retreat back to Boston. Despite the fact of American victory, the battle's casualties were one-sided, with eight Minutemen killed and ten wounded, compared to only two British wounded. However, during the retreat back to Boston, the British were harrassed from every quarter by farmers and rebels along the way, suffering over 250 casualties. The following day, Samuel Adams exclaimed to John Hancock, "What a glorious morning for America!"

**Cross-refs:** F-34, H-2; J- HK-16-18, CM-24.

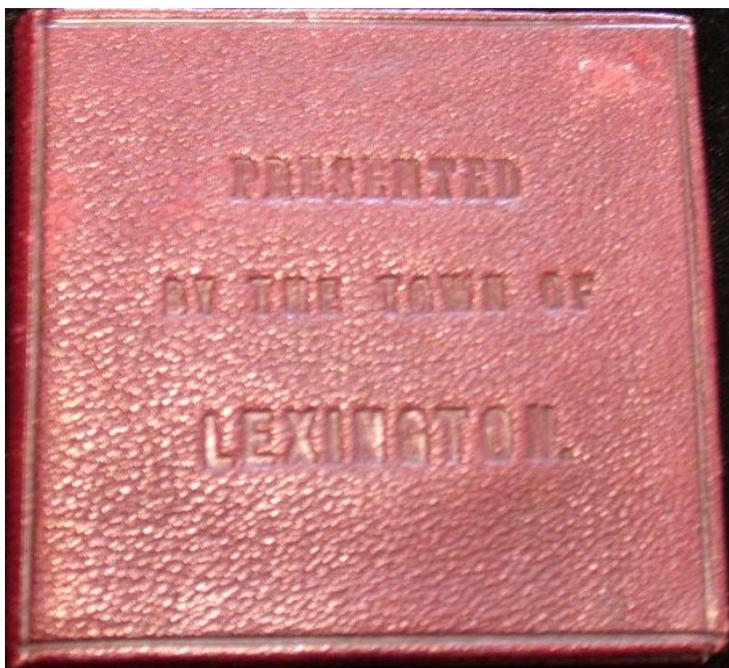
**Diameter:** 38.5mm.      **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.	Weight	Note
Gold	50go	36.4 gm	Struck at the U.S. Mint., Proof. 4 struck.
Silver	50si	26.7 gm	100 struck at the U.S. Mint.

## The Centennial Commemorative Medals

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Gilt	50gi	312.4 gm	Jonathan Brecher reports two gilt versions. The first is gilded white metal, holed; the second, probably gilded copper.
Bronze	50bz	31.4 gm	200 struck at the U.S. Mint.
White Metal	50wm	22.9 gm	Julian states that the Mint refused to strike the white metal versions requested by the engraver, Henry Mitchell, who then had them struck outside the Mint. Quantity unknown. The unholed version is considerably scarcer.



This is the leather case in which the Battle of Lexington medal was presented.

(Photo courtesy of Joe Levine)

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## 60. Mecklenburg Declaration Centennial



(2.67 x)



(2.67 x)

**Obverse:** In the center, the dates: "1775 1875"; above, a branch of a tree bearing on the left a hornet's nest with six hornets flying beneath and on the left a Phrygian cap marked: "LIBERTY"; below, two clasped hands; the whole surrounded by a glory of rays; within a denticled rim.

**Reverse:** In a center disk formed by a beaded circle: "20 / MAY / 1775"; outside, clockwise around from 7:00: "MECKLENBURG DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE"; with a denticled rim.

This medal celebrates the centennial of the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, on May 20, 1775, more than a year before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Whether this signing ever occurred is a matter of controversy among historians. Suffice it to say that the state of North Carolina assumes the veracity of the tradition and uses the date of May 20, 1775 on both its flag and seal. The hornet's nest is taken from a remark by Colonel Tarleton to General Cornwallis during the occupation of Charlotte in Mecklenburg County in 1780: "Ah, general, I think you've gotten into a hornet's nest." The Phrygian cap is symbol of liberty that dates back to ancient Rome. The clasped hands signify the reconciled and reunited North and South after the Civil War.

**Cross-refs:** H-3; J-CM-28.

**Diameter:** 30.4 mm.      **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.	Weight	
Silver	60si	12.5 gm	1,010 struck.
Copper	60cp		According to Swoger "a small number of [copper] patterns were struck."
Bronze	60bz	11.1 gm	1,025 struck

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

## 70. Nevada Centennial



(2.16 x)



(2.16 x)

**Obverse:** In the center, the cracked Liberty Bell without beam on a bank of clouds; to the left, a soldier in Revolutionary uniform at "Present Arms" with a musket; to the right, a soldier in 19th-century uniform at "Present Arms" with a rifle; above, on a banner: "CENTENNIAL"; to the left in a vertical line: "1776"; to the right: "1876"; the whole surrounded by a single circular line; around, from 8:00 to 4:00: "LET GOD BE WITH US AS HE WAS WITH OUR FATHERS."

**Reverse:** Inside a singular circular line, a view of a silver mine with a shaft and minecar to the left, a logging train, a wagon and team of horses, a logging train passing over a vaulted stone bridge, and a smelting works; in the foreground, a plow and a sheaf of wheat; in the background, the sun rises over the Sierra Nevada mountains; above, "NEVADA"; clockwise around from 8:00 to 4:00: "MADE FROM NEVADA ORE AT INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION"; counterclockwise "ALL FOR OUR COUNTRY" flanked left and right by a five-pointed star.

**Cross-refs:** H-110; HK 19, 19a, J-CM-36;

**Diameter:** 37.7 mm.      **Edge:** Plain

Gold            70go            Two were struck. \*

Silver          70si            2,531 were struck. \*

Bronze        70bz            Six are known. \*

\* Data courtesy of Rusty King.

### Silver Production at the Centennial Exhibition

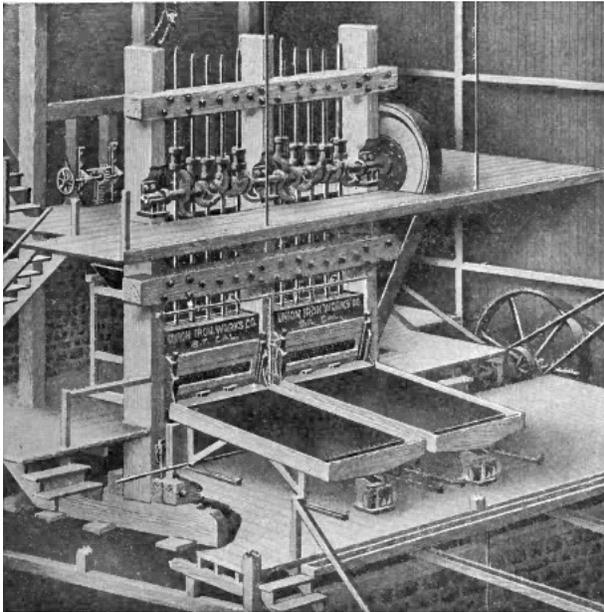
(Photos courtesy of Fred Holabird.)

In 1873, a select committee of influential businessmen and local politicians recommended to the state government in Carson City that the state of Nevada should consider participating in the great Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. The Comstock Lode in Virginia City had just produced record amounts of silver and gold, and it was a matter of great pride to trumpet the success of the state's mines and good business to expand the market in Nevada silver and gold. The state legislature appropriated

# The Centennial Commemorative Medals

\$20,000, the fourth largest appropriation among the states, behind only Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York. The sum was so generous that the committee decided to erect a quartz stamp mill to demonstrate the transformation of Comstock ore into refined silver and gold. To this end, tons of roughly crushed ore were shipped by rail over the three thousand miles to Philadelphia, where exhibition visitors could see for themselves the almost magical process of turning nondescript stone into gold and silver, almost before their very eyes.

Upon entering Machinery Hall, visitors could hear the Nevada exhibit before they ever saw it. Five 775-pound hammers took turns dropping from a height of eight inches ninety-five times every minute, reducing

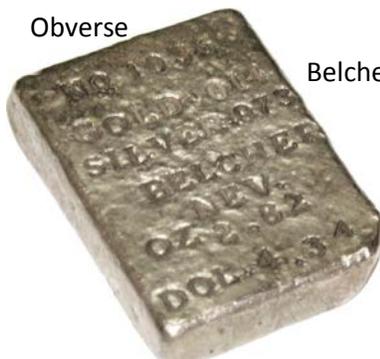


A Stamping Mill, c. 1876

the incoming ore to gravel. The gravel was then carried to the stampers, 120-pound steel dies and shoes that smashed the gravel into a great cast-iron mortar, until it could sift through screens as fine as 120 holes per square inch. After water was added, the sand slurry was fed into grinders, where the mixture spent three hours being turned into putty. Then, mercury was added and a process of amalgamation went on for another four and a half hours. Once the water was filtered out, the silver-gold-mercury amalgam was heated, splitting out the gaseous mercury for reuse, and concentrating the gold and silver into bullion to be sent to the U.S. Mint, where it was smelted into pure ingots. The silver was used to strike the Nevada silver Centennial medals, and the gold defrayed the expenses of minting the silver and bronze medals. The finished medals were then sold in the California and Nevada Building on the exhibition grounds.

The quartz mill at the exhibition could process twenty tons of ore in a single day, and \$200 worth of silver and gold (about 130 Troy ounces at 1876 prices) were extracted from each ton, for a maximum total of 2,600 ounces per day. At this rate, the mill could have produced a maximum of about 413,400 Troy ounces during the course of the Centennial Exhibition in the 159 open days between May 10 and November 10, 1876. Since Mint records (according to Swoger) indicate that 2,531 of the silver medals were struck using only 2,010 Troy ounces, it is clear that the mill was more than capable of supplying all the silver required for the entire run of silver medals, with plenty left over to fund the entire operation.

It is probable that some of the output from the mill in the form of bullion ingots was placed on display both at the exhibit in machinery Hall and in the California and Nevada Building, where the medals were sold. None of these original ingots produced at the exhibition are known to have survived, but two ingots produced in Nevada and shipped to the exhibition are known to exist: one from the Belcher mine and the other from the Consolidated Virginia mine, both of which extracted bullion from the Comstock Lode in Virginia City. These are thought to be the only such marked survivors of the Centennial, with the possible exception of uncataloged and, thus, unknown ingots in institutional collections.



Belcher Ingot



Consolidated  
Ingot

