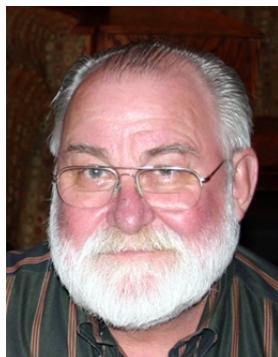


My name is Ron, and I am an exonumist.

“If there's a book that you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.”
Toni Morrison, Pulitzer Prize winner, Nobel Prize recipient, and Presidential Medal of Freedom awardee.



There are many numismatic authors who would have done a far better job of writing this book than I, if only one of them would have. However, none of them, not even one, has stepped forward to relieve me of this presumptive burden to fulfill my wish that there were a comprehensive reference on the Centennial medals of 1876.

I have been a coin collector since the fourth grade when my father gave me two brand-new blue penny folders and the pennies from that day's commerce at his pharmacy. He told me I could keep the pennies that would fit into the albums' empty holes. What's not to like? That continued until I had filled all the common openings. After several weeks of not being able to add a single penny to my collection, I did the only thing an inveterate collector could do; I decided to collect nickels. However, Dad told me I'd have to do it out of my

allowance, and that was the beginning of the problem. From that moment on, my taste in coins slowly but inexorably overhauled my ability to afford them. Starting new collections worked for a while, but inevitably I was drawn to that combination of rarity and quality that I could never quite afford. I know, I know. A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for, but what self-respecting collector has that kind of patience?

Fast-forward to 2002. My collections (Bust Halves, Morgan Dollars, Trade Dollars, and a U.S. Type Set) had challenged my wallet to the point where I had not added a single coin in two years. It wasn't for lack of interest. I attended my local coin club regularly, went to dealer shows, and read the standard monthly periodicals, but nothing grabbed my acquisitive attention. Then, at the June club meeting, Bill Parron, a best friend, part-time dealer, and fellow Navy veteran, showed me four medals in a fitted leather box and asked me if I would research them for him. He did not do this on purpose. He had no idea that exonumia can be contracted from just such a lovely set as this. I thought I was just doing a favor for a friend when I offered to research them for him so he could set a fair price on the set. Thanks to the Internet and eBay, I was able to tell Bill at the next meeting that he had a set of four of the medals struck by the U.S. Mint to commemorate the 1876 Centennial. I had found a similar set in a past auction, and I told him the selling price. He offered the set to me at that price, but I was too cagey for him. Besides, who cared about medals? They weren't even money – just metal disks whose practical function could only be as paperweights. Definitely beneath my numismatic station.

When Bill offered the set again in August, I resisted, but those four medals piqued my curiosity for some perverse unexplainable reason. I resolved to do a little more research. I discovered that there were a lot of commemorative medals issued in 1876 and that they fit into many collecting categories, such as Mint medals, Washington portrait medals, and so-called dollars, to name only a few. But what really floored me was how rare even the common ones were. If they were coins, I couldn't afford any of them, but they were only medals, with a much smaller pool of collectors, and the law of supply and demand meant that I could not only afford that set of four, but I might even be able to put together a nice collection. I bought the set from Bill at the September meeting, and the die was cast. (I must go on record here to pronounce that I bear Bill no malice. He had no idea what that simple transaction had started. Even my wife does not blame him.)

From just that inauspicious occasion, I discovered a whole new world of numismatics, one that theretofore had never appealed to me. After all, I was a coin collector, a U.S. coin collector, a specialist! If it wasn't a Morgan or Trade Dollar, or a Bust Half, it just didn't count. And then... hmmm... these medals were beautiful, with detail and depth of field that I had never seen in a coin, truly hand-held sculptures with beauty, history, and authenticity. After all, they were struck in the Philadelphia Mint. So

Preface

I told Bill what I'd found out, and, with my fingers crossed in my pocket, I asked him what he would sell them for. His reply took me aback. I expected a higher price, one that I truly could not afford, because I had learned that these medals were far scarcer than any coin I had ever owned, rarer than any dollar or half dollar I could ever hope to afford. I bought those medals on the spot, and they launched me on the most exciting, interesting, and enjoyable experience of my collecting career.

Overnight, I had become an exonomist. I had discovered the beauty, the rarity, and the relative affordability of medals. At first, new acquisitions came slowly as I discovered, to my chagrin, that very few dealers knew anything about Centennial medals, let alone had anything in their inventory. Enter eBay, the new marketplace to the world, and my collection began to take off. It was time to start a new library, but I couldn't find any books on Centennial medals. Next stop – the ANA Library and their wonderful lending and research program for members. To my surprise, Nancy Green, that absolute peach of a librarian, confirmed that no book dedicated to Centennial medals had yet been published, but there were some references that included some Centennials. I spent the next few weeks accumulating and reading those wonderful works by Rulau, Fuld, Julian, Loubat, Hibler-Kappan, Slabaugh, and Storer. Then came the illuminating discovery that H.W. Holland and Edouard Frossard had published contemporaneous lists of Centennial medals from 1876 through 1878 in the *American Journal of Numismatics* and the *Coin Collector's Journal*, respectively. Once again, Nancy came to the rescue and mailed me photocopies of those periodical articles, along with her plea that someone, maybe even I, should finally write the definitive work on Centennial medals.

That suggestion both thrilled and intimidated me. There was no way I considered myself qualified to write a definitive work on anything, let alone something I so far knew so little about. But the simple possibility of maybe someday writing something, anything, did spur me to do research more thoroughly and to take better notes, if only for the self-discipline of it. Now, years later, this book is the result of all those serendipitous bits and pieces that came together in their own unpredictable way, and I offer this book as my contribution, however humble, to the literature of exonomia, in the hope that those luminaries who preceded me will not look too far down their noses at my efforts.

It has always been surprising to me that no one has published a reference dedicated to the medals and tokens of the 1876 Centennial. There is certainly no shortage of collectors of exonomia from world's fairs, politics, Washington portraiture, the U.S. Mint, Masonry, labor unions, churches, Sunday schools, charities, you name it. The 1876 Centennial has it all, and more. The Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia was America's first world's fair and the biggest, most, and best attended up to that time. The presidential election of 1876 was so close and confusing that not even the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution was up to the task of resolving it. The first four sets of National Commemorative Medals authorized by Congress under the Act of February 12, 1873, were Centennial medals. And, without question, George Washington's portrait was the most frequent subject to grace Centennial medals and tokens.

So why has a Centennial effort such as this taken more than a century? Good question. I don't know the answer, but maybe we'll all find out soon, depending on the success or failure of this attempt at a definitive Centennial reference. Whatever the explanation, Centennial medals deserve more attention from the collecting fraternity. (What is a "fraternity," you may, and should, ask? Well, since there are ladies as well as gentlemen who collect Centennial medals, both "fraternity" and "sorority" would be sexist, so let's call ourselves a fraternity. It won't be the first new term necessitated by our exonomial hobby.)

Speaking of definitions, what do I mean by "Centennial"? Webster defines the word as "of or relating to a hundredth anniversary," which, of course, 1876 was. Not every medal or token with the date 1876 is Centennial, nor do all Centennial medals and tokens display the date of 1876. Similarly, some items dated 1875 are Centennial, as are some that have no date at all. This reference even includes four medals that anticipate the Centennial, namely the 50th, 94th, 98th, and 99th anniversaries. Typically, any medal or

token that was issued to commemorate, celebrate, mark, or simply take advantage of the 100th birthday of the Declaration of Independence can be considered to be Centennial.

One of the factors that contributed to the variety and range of medals and tokens during our 100th birthday celebration was the unalloyed patriotism and pride that were the hallmark of the Centennial. Only a little more than eleven years had elapsed since the end of the Civil War, and no country has ever undergone and survived a more divisive threat to its existence. With the threat of America's total dissolution averted, the process of reunification, known as Reconstruction, threatened to prolong de facto division indefinitely. It was no coincidence that the Centennial contributed to the end of Reconstruction and the ultimate healing of the country. It was the disputed election of 1876 (and, I maintain, the near-universal sense of patriotism that hallmarked the Centennial) that resulted in a compromise that ended Reconstruction once and for all.

Contrast this euphoric pride with the situation exactly 100 years later. As chronicled by Lynne Cheney in *The Eagle Screams*, written in 1976:

“Witness our own inability —unwillingness, perhaps—to put together a similar Bicentennial celebration. Philadelphia worked on Bicentennial plans for sixteen years, twice as long as it took to free the colonies from England, making and unmaking plans for an exhibition, discarding one site after another, trying to please social activists who wanted jobs for the poor instead of a party, businessmen who wanted the revenue from an exposition, homeowners who didn't want the disturbance. The American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission, which rejected Philadelphia's \$600-million final plan, was still trying to define its role six years after its creation, in a confused debate constantly interrupted by conflicting demands for “relevance”—relevance to the past, relevance to present difficulties, relevance to everybody's problems.”

Take, for example, the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia that was open in 1876 for exactly six months from April 10th to November 10th. Despite the difficulties presented by nineteenth-century transportation, one out of fifteen American citizens attended the fair. This is equivalent to 20,583,085 attendees based on our population in the 2010 census, which would be 3,430,505 attendees per month, which would be equivalent to 114,350 attendees every single day for six months! Add to this the fact that, though admission to the fair was only fifty cents; but, with inflation taken into account, that is equivalent to \$27.37 today! [Source: <http://www.halfhill.com/inflation.html>] That would be a daily gate of over \$3 million dollars a day, or a gross revenue for the entire exhibition of \$563,359,036, over half a billion dollars! Going to the fair was no trivial matter in 1876.

In this day of mixed opinions in our country about our country by our own countrymen, will we ever again be able to match the pride of our ancestors as described once again by Lynne Cheney:

“The Centennial celebration was full of incongruities that to a twentieth century eye have an adolescent quality, a certain painful awkwardness that we have little desire to repeat. Yet it was also informed by an enviable enthusiasm and exuberance that we... seem little likely to achieve. The image of the country that our centennial ancestors projected in their celebration was not objective, or realistic, or all-inclusive. But ... their party was full of vigor and spirit and life.”

Hear! Hear!