

America's First World's Fair

The fair has long since ceased to exist in living memory, but the medals live on!

Following the end of the American Civil War, Americans began to prepare for the celebration of the nation's 100th birthday in 1876. Various citizens of Philadelphia proposed that an exhibition should be held in that city and a resolution to that effect was adopted by the Select and Common Councils in January 1870. Subsequently, the Legislature of Pennsylvania supported this resolution and a request was submitted to Congress. Early in March 1870, a bill was presented to the House of Representatives and was adopted by Congress on 3 March 1871.

This Act created a Commission composed of one delegate from each state and territory appointed by the President to one-year terms. The chief duty assigned the Commission was to "prepare and superintend the execution of a plan for holding an exhibition, and, after conference with the authorities of the city of Philadelphia, to fix upon a suitable site within the corporate limits of the said city where the exhibition shall be held."

The Commission was charged to hold its meetings in Philadelphia. During 1871, President U. S. Grant appointed the various commissioners, and the first meeting was held on 4 March 1872. The Commission was incorporated by an Act of Congress of 1 June 1872, which also created the incorporated Centennial Board of Finance. The Commission met in only nine sessions, from March 1872 until its final adjournment. Its responsibilities were carried out chiefly by an Executive Committee formed in May 1872 and composed of thirteen members who in turn chose a Director-General to whom all subsidiary bureaus and committees were required to report. Acting in cooperation with the Directors of the Centennial Board of Finance, the Executive Committee maintained control of the basic functions of the gathering, display, and judging of exhibits.

The Exhibition was financed largely by the sale of stock to the public (see certificate on next page).

The grounds to be used by the International Exhibition were acquired by the City of Philadelphia as part of Fairmount Park. On 4 July 1873, a tract of approximately 450 acres overseeing the west bank of the Schuylkill River was formally transferred to the United States Centennial Commission for use as the exhibition grounds. Exactly one year later, the ground was formally broken for the Exhibition buildings. At the request of Congress, the President invited foreign nations to participate in the Exhibition on 5 June 1874. Despite fears of a European boycott and high American tariffs making foreign goods not worthwhile, no European country declined the invitation. In fact, all thirty-four states were represented; and twenty-six had their own buildings. Forty-nine countries were represented; nineteen had their own buildings. Of the total of 30,864 exhibitors, 22, 689 were from countries outside the United States!

The International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine opened to the public on 10 May 1876 and closed on 10 November 1876. It quickly became known simply as the Centennial Exhibition (aka Centennial Exposition). The United States Centennial Commission continued in existence until all of the financial accounting was completed, and their final session was held on 15 January 1879.

Quite the Contrast!

The efficient involvement of the Federal government in exhibition business in the 1870s contrasts sharply with the fiasco of our Bicentennial celebration 100 years later. As Lynne Cheney wrote in her essay "1876: *The Eagle Screams*": "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 Centennial Exhibition



Photo courtesy of Matthias Schmitt at www.hwph.de

The Centennial Exhibition

Notable Events at the Exhibition:

Philadelphia's International Exhibition astonished the world with a lot more than just the largest buildings ever built for a world's fair. The marvels displayed in those buildings proclaimed that America, that brash upstart of a new country, was ready to take center stage in the arts, sciences, manufacturing, and agriculture. Included in this tour de force were innovations running the gamut from the magnificent, as represented by the largest steam engine in the world, to the sublime, in the Statue of Liberty, to the merely prosaic, such as ketchup.

George Corliss brought his giant double vertical rotative steam engine, which powered virtually every exhibit at the fair. George Pullman rolled in his luxurious Palace Car. Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated his new telephone. Charles Hires introduced root beer. Henry Heinz announced his newest food product – ketchup. Wallace Farmer fired up his Electric Dynamo, while Thomas Edison contented himself with demonstrating the quadruplex telegraph, which allowed simultaneous bidirectional transmission of multiple telegrams over the same wire. Meanwhile, kudzu, future scourge of southern landscapes, quietly decorated the Japanese pavilion. George Westinghouse introduced the air brake, Samuel Colt test fired his 45-caliber pistol, and Cyrus McCormick showed off his new wire-baling reaper. Charles Goodyear hawked his new rubber tires, while Amos Whitney and Francis Pratt claimed their engine could make those tires roll faster. In addition, the exhibition visitors were treated to many new introductions to America. Among them were bananas, kindergarten, the first municipal water treatment plant, a monorail, and the tallest penny-farthing bicycles yet seen.

The National Woman Suffrage Association established their Centennial Headquarters in Philadelphia. In preparation for the opening of the Centennial Exhibition on July 4th, 1876, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Matilda Joslyn Gage wrote their *Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage Association*. Their request to read it at the opening ceremonies was declined. Nevertheless, Ms Anthony and four other suffragettes attended the opening ceremonies, and after the U.S. Declaration of Independence had been read from the podium, they marched to the speakers' rostrum where they presented their own declaration to Vice President Thomas Ferry. Then they returned down the aisle, distributing copies of their declaration "to all and sundry"; whereupon they continued to Independence Hall and read their declaration aloud to an assembled crowd.

The fair has long since ceased to exist as a living memory, but its legacy lives on into the 21st century. Bell Telephone, Heinz Foods, Hires Root Beer, Edison's General Electric, McCormick's International Harvester, Otis Elevator, Westinghouse, Colt Firearms, Pratt & Whitney, and Columbia Bicycles all cut their teeth at the Philadelphia International Exhibition and still cut a wide swath in the world's economy. And for exonumists, the medals of the exhibition live on.

The Centennial Exhibition

750. "GEORGIUS WASHINGTON"/"International Exhibition"



(1.5 x)



(1.5 x)

Obverse: Undraped bust of George Washington to right; in truncation of neck in two lines: "LOVETT / PHILA."; around from 7:00 to 5:00: "GEORGIUS WASHINGTON PRAES. PRIM. RER. CONF. AMER. MDCCLXXXIX"; same as the obverse of the Bailey and Co. Japanese Embassy Medal (Baker 368).

Reverse: Around the outside from 6:30 to 5:30: "TO COMMEMORATE THE HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE"; inside that, a circle of thirty-eight stars; in the center, in seven curved lines: "INTERNATIONAL / EXHIBITION / HELD AT / FAIRMOUNT PARK / PHILADELPHIA / MAY 10. TO NOV. 10. / 1876".

Cross-refs: B-424, F-47, H-75.

Diameter: 53.1 mm. **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.
Bronze	750bz
White Metal	750wm

760. George Washington / "Government of the People"



(1.9x)



(1.9x)

Obverse: .George Washington, three-quarters bust, partially right, in civil dress with a sword cradled in his right arm; to left from 10:00: "1776"; to right from 1:30: "1876"; below from 9:00 to 3:00, an arc of 13 5-pointed stars; all within an olive wreath of two braches tied at the bottom.

Reverse: Memorial Hall viewed from the right front corner; above in two curved lines: "A GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE / PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE."; below in two curved lines: CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION / PHILAD^A P^A U.S.A." (The underscores of the superscripted "A's" are actually round dots.)

Cross-refs: B-429, F-65, H-92.

For B 429, Rulau-Fuld state: "The Washington bust in civil dress on this piece is after the Gilbert Stuart portrait, and the medal is German in origin. Only a very limited number were made. R7."

Diameter: 42.2 mm

Edge: Plain

Alloy

No.

Notes

Silver

760si

Bronze

760bz

White Metal

760wm

Terracotta

760tc

Dreyfuss sale, 4/12/86; Charles Kirtley sale, 2/17/87, lot 26.

Leather

760lr

NASCA, 4/28-29/81, lot 1738.

Wood

760wd

NASCA, 4/28-29/81, lot 1739.

The Centennial Exhibition

770. Liberty/Independance



(3.5x)



(3.5x)

Obverse: Bust of Liberty to left in Phrygian cap, draped, with a star at her bosom; "PHILADELPHIA" to left; "EXPOSITION" to right; "1876" below. With an integral (i.e., part of the planchet) loop for suspension. Sometimes seen with the loop filed off. With and without the suspension loop. The example I have without the loop looks like the loop may have been clipped off.

Reverse: In five straight lines: "CENTENNIAL / ANNIVERSARY / OF THE INDEPENDANCE / OF THE UNITED STATES / JULY 4TH 1876"; with a straight horizontal bar below. (Note the misspelling of "Independence.")

Cross-refs: Not listed.

Diameter: 23.3 mm. **Edge:** Plain

Alloy **No.**

Bronze 770bz

White Metal 770wm (in the ANS collection)



With the integral suspension loop.

780. International Exhibition



(3.2x)



(3.2x)

Obverse: A crude eagle facing forward, head right, with outstretched wings; on its breast a shield emblazoned "REPUB UNI", a ribbon in its beak, clutching ten arrows in its right claw, an olive branch in its left; curving above "CENTENNIAL"; curving below "1776-1876"; the whole surrounded by a beaded circle. The planchet includes an integral loop for suspension.

Reverse: Inside a beaded circle, curving above "INTERNATIONAL", curving below "EXHIBITION"; with a six-petaled flower at 9:00 and 3:00. Note the misspelling of "International" with a leading "J."

Cross-refs: Not listed.

Diameter: 25.7 mm.

Edge:

Flip:

Rim:

Alloy	No.
Gilt	780gi
Silver Plate	780sp
Bronze	780bz
White Metal	780wm

The Centennial Exhibition

790. Washington Bust R./"Union Forever"



(2x)



(2x)

Obverse: In the center, undraped pig-tailed bust of George Washington to right; above and around, thirteen six-pointed stars; above and around: "TO COMMEMORATE THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE" (there is a dot beneath the "T" and "H" of 100TH); beneath in two curved lines, separated left and right from the previous inscription by a diamond: "DECLARATION / OF INDEPENDENCE".

Reverse: In the center, a woven ring containing a pair of clasped hands surrounded by a glory; above, around "UNION"; below, around: "FOR EVER"; outside the ring clockwise from 7:00 to 5:00 "INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION AT PHILADELPHIA"; below. "1876"; the whole surrounded by a circular oak wreath.

Cross-refs: B-425, H-95.

Diameter: 39.8 mm. **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.	Wt	SG	Note
Silver	790si			
Gilt	790gi			
Silver-plated	790sp			
Bronze	790bz			
White Metal	790wm			

800. Danish Medal MDCCLXXXVI



(1.5 x)



(1.5 x)

Obverse: In the center, a standing female figure representing America, wearing a Phrygian (liberty) cap presents wreaths to Art seated on her left and to Mechanics, sighted at her right, while Commerce and Agriculture stand behind ather left and right, respectively; in exergue, "H. OLRİK INV." to left and "F. SCHMAHLFELD FEC." to right; above, clockwise around from 11:00: "INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION"; below the figures: "PHILADELPHIA . 1876" Below that: "V. CHRISTESEN."

Reverse: Head of Washington to left in an oval panel within a wreath of oak to the right and laurel to the left, tied at bottom; a winged cherub on each side together bear a circlet of thirteen stars with their inner hands and palm branches in their outer hands; below, a spread eagle facing left and holding olive branches in its rightclaw and four arrows in the left; behind the eagles claws, a banner inscribed with "E PLURIBUS UNUM"; above, clockwise around from 11:30: "MDCCLXXXVI."; around, counterclockwise from 9:30: "FIRST IN WAR, FIRST IN PEACE, FIRST IN THE HEARTS OF HIS COUNTRYMEN."

These medals are often referred to as the "Danish" medal because Schmahlfeld, the maker, Ohlrik, the diesinker, and Christesen, the publisher, were Danish by nationality. They produced the medals in the United States, however.

Cross-refs: B-426, F-309.

Diameter: 52.7 mm. **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.
Silver	800si
Gilt	800gi
Bronze	800bz
White Metal	800wm

The Centennial Exhibition

810. Danish Medal "LET US HAVE PEACE"



(1.5x)



(1.5x)

Obverse: In the center, a standing female figure representing America, wearing a Phrygian (liberty) cap presents wreaths to Art seated on her left and to Mechanics, sighted at her right, while Commerce and Agriculture stand behind ather left and right, respectively; in exergue, "H. OLRIK INV." to left and "F. SCHMAHLFELD FEC." to right; above, clockwise around from 11:00: "INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION"; below the figures: "PHILADELPHIA . 1876" Below that: "V. CHRISTESEN."

Reverse: Closely similar to the last, but with differences in the obverse inscriptions. Head of Washington to left in an oval panel within a wreath of oak to the right and laurel to the left, tied at bottom; a winged cherub on each side together bear a circlet of thirteen stars with their inner hands and palm branches in their outer hands; below, a spread eagle facing left and holding olive branches in its rightclaw and four arrows in the left; behind the eagles claws, a banner inscribed with "E PLURIBUS UNUM"; above, clockwise around: "LET US HAVE PEACE.."; below, counterclockwise around: "1776. THE CENTENNIAL YEAR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. 1876."

Cross-refs: B-427, F-79, H-77.

Diameter: 52.7 mm. **Edge:** Plain

Alloy	No.
Silver	810si
Bronze	810bz
White Metal	810wm

820. Danish Medal “Centennial Year”



(1.5 x)



(1.5 x)

Proxy Pics:
Obverse borrowed;
Reverse Photoshopped.

Obverse: In the center, a standing female figure representing America, wearing a Phrygian (liberty) cap presents wreaths to Art seated on her left and to Mechanics, sighted at her right, while Commerce and Agriculture stand behind ather left and right, respectively; in exergue, "H. OLRIK INV." to left and "F. SCHMAHLFELD FEC." to right; above, clockwise around from 11:00: "INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION"; below the figures: "PHILADELPHIA . 1876" Below that: "V. CHRISTESEN."

Reverse: Closely similar to the last, but with differences in the inscriptions. Head of Washington to left in an oval panel within a wreath of oak to the right and laurel to the left, tied at bottom; a winged cherub on each side together bear a circlet of thirteen stars with their inner hands and palm branches in their outer hands; below, a spread eagle facing left and holding olive branches in its rightclaw and four arrows in the left; behind the eagles claws, a banner inscribed with "E PLURIBUS UNUM"; above, clockwise around: "MDCCLXXVI."; below, counterclockwise around: "1776. THE CENTENNIAL YEAR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. 1876."

As far as I know, this medal (Roman date with “Centennial Year” inscriptions) is described only by Holland (H 76), and I have never seen one. It may or may not actually exist. The image above is a Photoshopped Proxy Pic to illustrate what Holland describes.

Cross-refs: H-76.

Diameter: 52.7 mm. **Edge:** Plain

Alloy **No.**

White Metal 820wm

The Centennial Exhibition

830. Danish "EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE" Medal



(1.5 x)

(1.5 x)

Obverse: According to Levine in his Auction #4086 Lot 306 in 1986: "RARE 1876 CENTENNIAL MEDAL. 52mm. Copper. AU, with an area of dark toning on the obverse extending from 2:00-4:00. The obverse depicts a group of five allegorical female figures; America, with a liberty cap at the center presenting wreaths to Art and Mechanics left and Commerce and Agriculture, right. EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE in banner above. This is the identical die used for the reverse of the famous 1876 Centennial "Danish" medal (Baker 426-7) except that the top legend has been changed from INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION and there is now no inscription in the exergue." This medal sold for \$52.80.

Reverse: Per Levine: "A wreath encircling a small group of various fruits, probably intended as an award medal."

Cross-refs: Not listed.

Diameter: 52.7 mm. **Edge:** Plain

Alloy **No.**

Bronze 830bz