

Collectors Forum

A group of collectors meets on the fourth Monday of each month at the North Richland Hills Library. This is a casual meeting with no specific format, but with a topic for each meeting and the conversation is allowed to flow freely. The next meeting is Monday, July 25th.

This meeting is open to anyone interested, and is not associated with NETCC. There are no dues, no membership rolls, just fun. If you or someone you know is interested, contact Kevin Kell: kevinkell@1scom.net.

Cincinnati Musical Center Commemoratives

The market for United States commemorative coins spiked in 1936 with 15 new issues. At the time, the entire mintage of such issues was sold by the Mint at face value to a group authorized by Congress, who then tried to sell the coins at a profit to the public. Even more profit could be realized if the production could be split amongst the three mints, thereby creating rarities.

Thomas Melish, a coin collector and entrepreneur from Cincinnati, came up with an idea for a coin with the stated purpose of commemorating the 50th anniversary of Cincinnati, Ohio as a center of music. He formed the Cincinnati Musical Center Commemorative Coin Association that would be allowed to buy the entire Mint issue, and resell the pieces at high prices. Congressional approval authorizing 15,000 pieces to be struck at the three mints was secured in March 1936.

Melish hired sculptor Constance Ortmyer, a relatively unknown American artist, to design the coin, but the Commission of Fine Arts refused to recommend the designs. Members objected to the depiction of Stephen Foster on the obverse, finding no connection between Foster, who died in 1864, and the supposed anniversary. Foster did live in Cincinnati for a brief period while working as a bookkeeper, but his main contributions to American music came later when he lived in Pittsburgh. Nevertheless, the designs were approved by the Mint, and 5,000 sets from the three mints were issued and sold to Melish's group.

The obverse of the Cincinnati Musical Center half dollar displays a bust of Stephen Foster, facing to the viewer's right, and below it, the words "STEPHEN FOSTER AMERICA'S TROUBADOUR", a phrase taken from a biography of Foster published earlier in the 1930s. The reverse shows a kneeling figure, intended to be the goddess of music. In the upper left portion of the field, or background, is the date 1886, in the lower right 1936, and beneath the latter the mint mark. The goddess kneels on the mottos required by law to appear, and



near the edge is "CINCINNATI A MUSIC CENTER OF AMERICA".

Criticism of the coin's reverse was almost immediate. The four-string lyre was compared to a toy bought at a dime store. The goddess of music was compared to a dancer with leg cramps.

The first 200 pieces from each mint were collected in sets of three and originally sold for \$7.75; a notarized letter from Melish specifying the striking sequence was attached to the three-coin set. Since Melish controlled distribution, prices soon spiked to \$40 per set.

Only a handful of these numbered and notarized sets remain today, and they are rarely offered for sale. The remaining 4,800 three-coin sets were placed in the same kind of holder with a celluloid strip to hold the coins in, but lacking the documentation. It is estimated that today fewer than 50 of these sets in unnumbered holders remain intact.

Melish tried to get Congress to authorize 1937-dated pieces, but he was not successful. While he had managed to get Congress to allow another commemorative under his control, the 1936 Cleveland Centennial half dollar, Congress was growing tired of the abuses in the commemorative market.

Of the three Mints, the Denver issue today is the most available in gem condition, followed by the Philadelphia issue and finally by the San Francisco, which is extremely difficult to find in gem.

Special Meeting Activity Calendar

- July** – Weenie Roast
- September** – Show n' Tell night
- November** – Veteran's night,
Officer/Director elections
- December** – Christmas party

We need volunteers to give programs in 2016. Contact Kevin Kell if you have an interest.

Upcoming Local Coin Shows

- July 22-24** – Texas Coin Show, Grapevine Convention Center. \$3 or free with NETCC membership.
- August 13** – Texoma Coin Show, US 75, Exit 65, Denison. Free.
- August 26-28** – Cowtown Coin Show, Forest Hill Civic/Convention Center. \$3.

June New Members: None.

June First Time Visitors: Marshall Garnell.

