



MONUMENTAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS & FAILURES ON COMMEMORATIVE COINS

Numerous issues were minted to raise funds for memorials and monuments, but only some reached their goal.

SCATTERED THROUGHOUT our nation's colorful and historic commemorative coinage are issues that were struck solely to provide funding for a monument, statue, memorial or museum. Such efforts led to projects that were successful and some that fell short. The following are stories of how a few such structures came to be, some "phantom" constructs that never made it past the drawing board, and the commemoratives that were struck to financially support their creation.

Lafayette Silver Dollar

The 1900 Lafayette silver dollar became the first commemorative issued to fund a statue. Although authorized for the government's participation in the 1900 Paris Exposition, the piece also marked the centennial of George Washington's death. On December 14, 1899, the entire mintage of Lafayette dollars (36,026) was struck in Philadelphia. The coins' real purpose, however, was to provide funds for the erection of

a statue, created by Paul Wayland Bartlett, of French military officer Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, which was featured on the coin's reverse. The Lafayette Monument committee also adopted the unique approach of asking schoolchildren to fund the project by contributing as little as one cent. (This was more effective than expecting their parents to purchase a coin for \$2.) In the end, Bartlett's finished statue appeared different than originally depicted, and an unexpected lawsuit concerning the monument ate into the profits. The work eventually was erected in the courtyard of the world-famous Louvre in Paris, where it stood among numerous other statues. Many years later, however, Bartlett's piece was removed to make room for the now-iconic modern steel-and-glass pyramid built for the art museum's lower-level expansion. It was relocated along the right

◀ **THE FIRST U.S. commemorative issued to fund a monument was the Lafayette dollar.**

Actual Size: 38.1mm



PHOTOS: ANA ARCHIVES/ROBERT B. KELLEY & HERITAGE AUCTIONS (LAFAYETTE DOLLAR)

Despite its large mintage, the 1925 Stone Mountain Memorial half dollar accomplished little, as the original issue sold for only \$1.



◀ **SALES FROM THE MCKINLEY DOLLAR** helped fund the McKinley Birthplace Museum (above). As a child, the president attended school in a one-room house that once stood on the institute's grounds. Not Actual Size

bank of the Seine, where it can be found today.

It's safe to say that the schoolchildren's pennies contributed to the \$50,000 needed to complete the statue, because as late as 1945, some 14,000 Lafayette dollars remained unsold. Dealer Aubrey Bebee attempted to purchase them, but he was too late, and the coins were melted.

McKinley Birthplace Memorial Gold Dollar

In 1916-17, assassinated U.S. President William McKinley was featured on a gold dollar that was struck to raise funds for a memorial building located in his birthplace of Niles, Ohio. Increased tourism appears to have been the main motive behind the piece. The edifice pictured on the reverse is, in reality, a museum and auditorium, and should not be confused with the McKinley Presidential Library or his tomb, both located in Canton, Ohio. In the end, the McKinley Birthplace Museum was completed exactly as depicted on the coin and is still in operation today. The museum is a reflection of McKinley's life, and the auditorium regularly holds related symposiums.

Stone Mountain Memorial Half Dollar

The 1925 Stone Mountain half dollar was a mammoth fund-raising effort. The Stone Mountain Confederate Monument Association distributed the coin nine years after sculptor Gutzon Borglum (of Mount Rushmore fame) began chiseling away at the Georgia mountainside near Atlanta. The project was plagued by numerous

problems, which included the temperamental Borglum, financial constraints and lawsuits. The artist subsequently abandoned the work in 1925, taking his designs with him. Over time, the sculpture had to be scaled back.

Despite its large mintage, the 1925 half dollar accomplished little, as the original issue sold for only \$1. Attempts were made to increase the price, but to no avail. The memorial also was met with strong opposition from northern congressmen who felt the leaders of a rebel army should not be honored. Sculptor Augustus Lukeman took over the project in 1925, but funds were depleted by 1928, and work was discontinued.

Despite other commemorative issues seeing multiple-year mintages, such as the Arkansas and Texas Centennials and the Oregon Trail Memorial half dollar, no measures were taken to issue the Stone Mountain coin past 1925. The State of Georgia purchased the property in 1958 and reorganized the monument association. Artist Roy Faulkner eventually completed the sculpture, which was dedicated in 1970.

Elgin, Illinois, Centennial Half Dollar

The 1936 Elgin Centennial half dollar had little to do with the City of Elgin, Illinois, except that the statue depicted on the commemorative ultimately was placed there. The work was designed and produced by local sculptor Trygve A. Rovelstad, who also conceived the idea for the coin.

► **THE ELGIN CENTENNIAL** half dollar depicted Trygve A. Rovelstad's statue of pioneers.

Actual Size: 30.61mm



PHOTOS: ANA ARCHIVES/ROBERT B. KELLEY (COINS) & THE MCKINLEY BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM

Much like the Stone Mountain issue, the Elgin half dollar was just the beginning of a long and difficult financial journey to completion. The specimen's primary purpose was to raise funds for Rovelstad's statue and little else, but sales were low until numismatist L.W. Hoffercker stepped in and offered his services as distributor. He previously came up with the idea for the 1935 Old Spanish Trail half dollar, and he apparently knew his way around commemorative coinage bills. By the time the 1936 Elgin piece was ready, however, the commemorative craze had peaked, and the issue was a failure. Of the 25,000 coins struck, 5,000 were returned and melted. This left Rovelstad's project severely underfunded, and although public interest waned, the sculptor's enthusiasm did not. Despite an original cost of about \$50,000, estimates of more than \$600,000 had been thrown around by the time Rovelstad died in 1990. The artist's death only galvanized public support, and in 2001 the finished bronze statue finally was dedicated. The Pioneer Memorial Foundation funded much of the \$456,000 needed to cast the statue, far more than the \$30,000 raised by commemorative sales in 1936.

Surprisingly, Rovelstad never was criticized for his dominating role in the project. Considering he was the coin's originator and designer, the statue's sculptor and the one who was paid for the work, it would be easy to chalk up this story to a lesson in self-indulgence. Unlike Borglum and Stone Mountain, the citizens of Elgin never forgot Rovelstad's vision. With this in mind, it is hard to cite this project as a failure. Despite taking more than 70 years to complete, the end goal finally was accomplished.

Booker T. Washington Memorial Half Dollar

The 1946-51 Booker T. Washington Memorial half dollar is among the most notorious monumental failures in the commemorative series. The coin was intended to help finance the construction of a birthplace memorial in Franklin County, Virginia, but the Memorial Foundation, headed by Dr. Sidney J. Phillips, quickly realized it was underfunded. The coin was issued over the course of several years, with little success. Each year, unsold pieces were melted simply to make way for more the following year. The mint also mishandled the commemoratives, and most ended up with abrasions and bagmarks.

With the Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial still in debt, the foundation created an entirely new issue: the 1951-54 Booker T. Washington/George Washington Carver half dollar. Proceeds from that commemorative went toward efforts to resurrect the memorial and to fund the George Washington Carver National Monument Foundation, also headed by Phillips. However,



▲ **WHEN SALES** of the Booker T. Washington Memorial half dollar (top) fell short of expectations, the Memorial Foundation created the Booker T. Washington/George Washington Carver half dollar in its place in 1951. Actual Size: 30.61mm

this numismatic "savior" proved futile, and in early 1955, the Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial Foundation disbanded, citing a debt of \$140,000.

Unable to support itself, the George Washington Carver National Monument located in Diamond, Missouri, was turned over to the National Park Service in 1953. Phillips claimed that if African Americans had supported the issues as originally planned, the projects would have been successful. Instead, all that remained was a glut of unsold half dollars that were dumped into circulation. The Treasury Department literally was left holding the bag of redundant Booker T. Washington and Washington/Carver coins, and ceased minting any new commemoratives for the next 28 years.

Statue of Liberty Centennial Coins

In 1982 the hiatus imposed on commemoratives was lifted, and a half dollar honoring the 250th anniversary of George Washington's birth was struck. That same year, President Ronald Reagan created the Statue of Liberty Restoration Foundation, aimed at refurbishing the iconic landmark as well as other buildings on Ellis Island. Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca chaired the foundation and used his business connections to secure pledges from private companies and wealthy individuals. The donations, however, only covered about half of the estimated \$260 million needed to complete the project.

The success of the Statue of Liberty coins opened the door to numerous commemorative programs involving monuments.



PHOTOS: ANA ARCHIVES/ROBERT B. KELLEY (COINS) & GETTY IMAGES/TRIGGERPHOTO

It was quickly realized that selling trinkets and T-shirts would not finish the job, so the subject of a commemorative coin was raised. With the Treasury's blessing, Congress authorized a copper-nickel-clad half dollar, silver dollar and \$5 gold piece, with surcharges going to the foundation. The introduction of a clad half dollar was a last-minute suggestion by numismatist and ANA legislative counsel David L. Ganz. He believed a low-cost clad commemorative would attract new and young collectors, and this proved correct. U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Katherine Davalos Ortega also urged the striking of a clad piece, stating it could be used as jewelry or keychains. In the end, the U.S. Mint's Statue of Liberty commemorative coin program proved to be its most successful, with more than \$83 million raised for the restoration.

Korean War Memorial Silver Dollar

The success of the Statue of Liberty coins opened the door to numerous commemorative programs involving monuments. One of them, the 1991 Korean War Memorial silver dollar, was met with mixed reactions. Congress authorized the Korean War Veterans Memorial in 1986, but the silver dollar struck to help finance it was not produced until five years later. The year 1991, the 38th

▲ **THE STATUE OF LIBERTY** Centennial Coin program proved to be the U.S. Mint's most successful, raising more than \$83 million. The funds went toward renovations to the iconic structure, as well as buildings on Ellis Island.

Not Actual Size

anniversary of the conflict's truce, was used as the basis for the commemorative. The seemingly strange number was symbolic of the 38th parallel, the latitude where North and South Korea are divided. Needless to say, it was an odd anniversary for collectors who were accustomed to centennials, sesquicentennials and bicentennials. The coin also was poorly designed, with a cluttered obverse including the word **COMMEMORATIVE**, which until then had never appeared on such issues. Because funds were needed in a rush, no design competition was held, and the mint did not work closely with the memorial committee. Despite these challenges, the issue sold quite well, and the memorial was completed in 1995. It featured 19 stainless-steel statues, a mural wall and a remembrance pool. Today, however, the memorial in Washington, D.C., is somewhat forgotten.

50th Anniversary of World War II Coins

The 1991-95 50th Anniversary of World War II

commemoratives used the now-popular formula of copper-nickel-clad half dollar, silver dollar, and \$5 gold piece. Like the 1986 Statue of Liberty coins, they were moderately successful. The issue's main purpose was to help finance the construction of a World War II Monument in Washington, D.C., which was completed and dedicated in 2004. It remains a popular tourist attraction.

However, sales from the coins also were intended to help fund a monument in France, honoring America's participation in D-Day. It should be noted that this would have been only the second foreign monument financed by sales of U.S. commemoratives, the first being the 1900 Lafayette statue in Paris. Plans for the French structure quickly became mired in controversy. An investigation revealed it was to be built upon leased ground, and a proposed \$40 surcharge to add a veteran's name to the monument's "Wall of Liberty" caused further backlash. Additionally, funding from the sales of commemoratives, which were meant to "encourage visits to the monument by U.S. citizens, especially students," was compromised when it was discovered that the nonprofit monument committee paid a travel agency for its promotional services. As such, the structure never came to fruition.

U.S. Prisoner of War Museum Silver Dollar

In 1994 the U.S. Prisoner of War (POW) Museum silver dollar became the first commemorative created solely to support the construction of such an institution since the failed Booker T. Washington and Washington/Carver issues. Intended to honor all American Prisoners of War from every U.S. military conflict since the American Revolution, the museum's origins can be traced back to the 1960s.

The idea for the project gained momentum during the Vietnam War. Andersonville, Georgia, already rich in history because of its National Cemetery and Civil War prison camp, was chosen for the site. Local and state funds

◀ **THE REVERSE OF THE U.S. Prisoner of War Museum silver dollar depicts the proposed structure, which was dedicated in 1998.**

Actual Size: 38.1mm



A COMMEMORATIVE HONORING women in military service was minted in 1994 to help restore an existing memorial that was started in 1932. The site eventually was dedicated in 1997.

Not Actual Size

were promised, and a 1984 agreement between the National Park Service and American Ex-Prisoners of War (AXPOW) raised additional money. Inspired by the recent success of the Korean and World War II commemoratives, AXPOW was able to secure Congressional legislation for a POW Museum coin in late 1993. The organization was grateful for the commemorative because it served as a promotional tool and attracted national interest. Final mintage figures were a bit of a disappointment and fewer than 55,000 business strikes exist today. In the end, almost 280,000 coins were struck, the sales of which just about covered the building's construction. The museum was completed and dedicated in 1998.

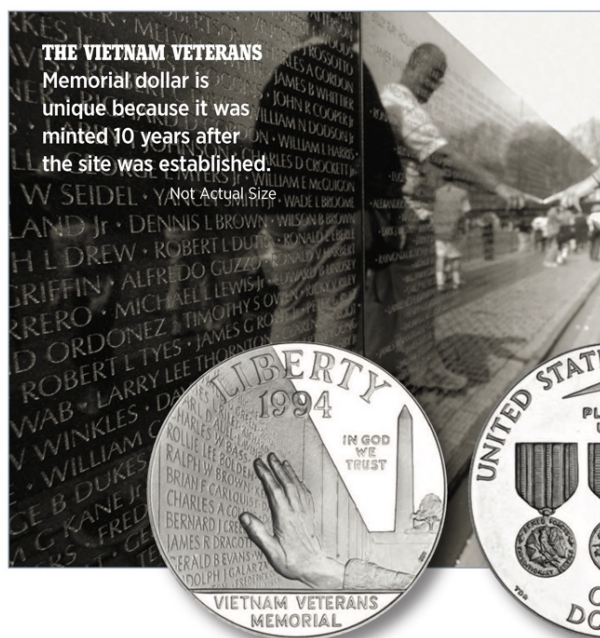
Over time, the POW Museum dollar has proved popular with collectors because of its nicely executed design. It also did well considering the museum is not located inside the beltway. Something else the coin had in its corner was that lawmakers had bundled it with two other coins—the 1994 Women in Military Service Memorial dollar and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial dollar.

Women in Military Service Memorial Silver Dollar

In 1988 the Women in Military Service Memorial Foundation sought to restore an existing ceremonial entrance in Arlington National Cemetery and use it as a monument to American service-women. The present structure had remained partially completed since its 1932 dedication, and funds from sales of a commemorative struck in 1994 were earmarked for the project's completion. The foundation's vision eventually was realized when the memorial was dedicated in 1997. As with the POW Museum issue, the specimen's design was attractive, particularly the reverse that pictured the actual memorial. Final mintages (311,138) were only slightly higher than the POW commemorative.

PHOTOS: ANA ARCHIVES/ROBERT B. KELLEY

The 1997 National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial dollar was issued to help fund an existing Washington, D.C., site honoring fallen officers.



THE VIETNAM VETERANS
Memorial dollar is unique because it was minted 10 years after the site was established.

Not Actual Size

supported by private funds.

This is where the silver dollar came in. The obverse of the coin features a section of the curved and winding memorial inscribed with the names of fallen officers dating back to 1791. Related statuary and a reflecting pool also are incorporated into the park. Considering that sales of the commemorative were used to maintain an existing memorial, it is no wonder the coin attracted little attention. Less than 25 percent of the authorized mintages were struck, with fewer than 30,000 in mint state.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Gold \$5

The year 1997 saw the mintage of a \$5 gold piece honoring Franklin D. Roosevelt. He is the last president collectors would expect to see on a gold specimen, since he took the country off the gold standard in 1933 and recalled all coins made from the precious metal. The year 1997 was itself unrelated to Roosevelt, and does not mark a birth or death centennial. Its real purpose was to help fund construction and maintenance of the newly dedicated Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C. Although the site was an appealing and popular tourist destination, the coin sold poorly. Issuing a silver commemorative along with the gold probably would have helped matters, but this was not an option. Final mintages tallied just over 41,000.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Silver Dollar

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial dollar also was produced in 1994, even though the structure depicted was already 10 years old. Its original intent was to provide funding for a visitor center, which was approved in 2006, and had been repurposed as an education building. Workers broke ground at the site in 2012, and at the time of this writing, it is still uncompleted. The building is controversial because, in accordance with the guidelines of the national mall, it must be underground so as not to interfere with the sightlines of existing memorials. Although the coin was not as interesting as some of its predecessors, almost 385,000 were sold. As with the POW dollar, the Vietnam issue commands a significant premium in mint state.

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Silver Dollar

The 1997 National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial dollar was issued to help pay for an existing Washington, D.C., site honoring fallen officers. Legislation enacted in 1984 authorized the new structure, which was built and dedicated in 1991. Although situated on three acres of federally owned land, its upkeep and maintenance are

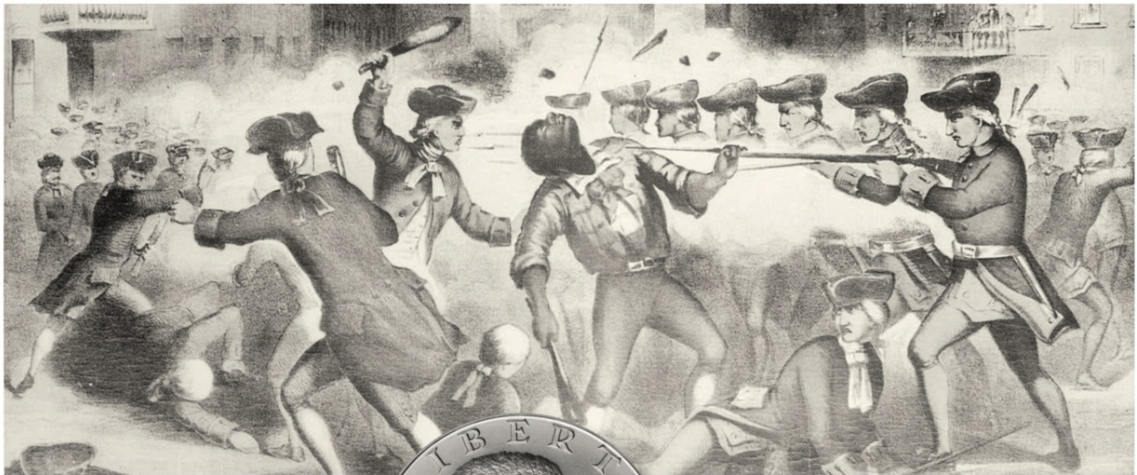


▲ THE GOLD \$5 FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT commemorative was intended to fund a memorial in the president's honor. Sales were low, and total mintage reached only 41,368.

Not Actual Size

PHOTOS: HERITAGE AUCTIONS (ROOSEVELT COIN) & GETTY IMAGES/BACKYARDPRODUCTION

PHOTOS: ANA ARCHIVES/ROBERT B. KELLEY (VIETNAM COMMEMORATIVE) & GETTY IMAGES/GEIR-OLAV LYNGBJELL

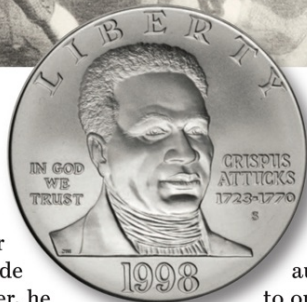


Interestingly, Roosevelt would not have approved of his memorial. It is rumored that he once told an aide that if a monument to him was constructed in the Capitol, it would need to be no larger than an average office desk and made of a simple block of granite. However, he probably would have gotten a kick out of the gold coin.

Black Revolutionary War Patriots Silver Dollar

One of the saddest commemorative coin fund-raising failures since the Booker T. Washington and Washington/Carver issues came in 1998. The U.S. Mint released the Black Revolutionary War Patriots silver dollar, featuring Crispus Attucks on the obverse. Attucks was among five U.S. civilians shot and killed by British soldiers during the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770. Apparently, Attucks was the first to die from his wounds, earning him the dubious honor of being first American casualty of the Revolution. The year 1998 was the 275th anniversary of Attucks' birth, which provided a nice historical tie-in for the coin's issuance. It has been noted that nothing else explains the coin's origin; there is no reference to African-American patriots anywhere on the piece, much less a possible memorial. Even Attucks' portrait was idealized.

The inspiration for a memorial honoring Black Revolutionary War patriots can be traced to 1984, when Congress encouraged the placement of markers and plaques at American historical sites noting the participation of African Americans. In 1986 Congress authorized legislation, planting the seeds for a national memorial. In 1998 the U.S. Mint issued the commemorative silver dollar to fund its creation.



◀ **CRISPUS ATTUCKS**, an African American patriot killed during the Boston Massacre (above), is pictured on the Black Revolutionary War Patriots silver dollar. Not Actual Size

Although 500,000 pieces were authorized, final mintages amounted to only 112,280, leaving the project drastically underfunded. The Liberty Fund was formed in 2005, apparently to complete the unfinished work. Then, in 2012, Congress once again approved legislation that formed the newly named National Liberty Memorial (NLM), which would recognize African Americans who fought in all U.S. wars. One would think that widening the scope of the project would guarantee its success.

However, despite being signed into law by President Obama, the NLM died in Congress in 2012. The Liberty Fund remains vigilant, hoping one day to see completion of the memorial. It currently maintains an active webpage (www.libertyfunddc.com) and works with legislators to secure a federally authorized site.

U.S. Capitol Visitor Center Coins

Beginning in 2000, commemorative coinage reforms were enacted that limited the U.S. Mint to releasing no more than two commemoratives per year. Because so many previous fund-raising efforts were failures, it was believed that producing fewer issues would attract more interest and sales. Unfortunately, the 2001 U.S. Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) coinage disproved this theory. Planning for the center dates back to 1991, when it became apparent that the existing spaces could not accommodate visiting tour groups. Design studies were executed, and after legislation was authorized, workers broke ground in December 2000. Built beneath a parking area on the east front of the

PHOTOS: STACK'S BOWERS GALLERIES (COIN) & WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Capitol, the CVC's three underground levels feature an exhibition hall, cafeteria, restrooms and gift shops. After September 11, funding was made available for additional security features. Although slated to open in 2004, the site was not completed until late 2008. Construction costs for the \$600 million facility were supplemented by surcharges placed on three commemoratives: a clad half dollar, silver dollar and \$5 gold piece. Many considered the designs, particularly the half dollar, to be poorly executed. Nevertheless, more than 390,000 coins were sold.

Unlike the Black Patriots Memorial, however, the CVC became a reality. It should be emphasized that this was a project close to Congress' heart and was sorely needed.

mintage was realized, and all three issues probably suffered because they shared an almost identical reverse.

U.S. Marshals Service 225th Anniversary Coins

The recent 2015 U.S. Marshals Service copper-nickel-clad half dollar, silver dollar and \$5 gold commemoratives are scheduled to fund a new structure honoring this branch of law enforcement. The 50,000-square-foot National U.S. Marshals Museum will be located at Fort Smith, Arkansas, is projected to cost \$50 million, and is scheduled to open in 2018. As of March 2016, the project is still almost \$33 million short. Should the museum be completed, it will be the first such institution

aided by commemorative coin sales since the 1994 Prisoner of War Museum issue. Of special note is that additional funds will be diverted to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., for which a silver dollar was previously minted in 1997.

Conclusion

In the end, there were successful endeavors as well as a couple outright failures. But as we have seen, some projects fall somewhere in-between. For example, while the Stone Mountain and Elgin issues served their intended purpose, the

finished product took decades. The Korean War and U.S. Capitol issues were "successful" in terms of accomplishing their objectives, but the coins themselves were, and remain, failures as far as collectors are concerned. Without a doubt the 1986 Statue of Liberty issues had a lot going for them. They were only the third modern commemorative issued, were national in scope, and were struck before the field became cluttered.

Despite the potential for failure, the U.S. Mint's commemorative coin program will continue to finance and promote the building of monuments, memorials, statues and museums. For many such structures, success is just a strike away! ■



▲ **THREE COMMEMORATIVES**—(from left) a copper-nickel-clad half dollar, silver dollar and \$5 gold piece—were minted to offset the cost of the National U.S. Marshals Museum, which is scheduled to open in 2018.

Not Actual Size

First Flight Centennial Coins

The 2003 First Flight Centennial coins celebrated the Wright Brothers' flights of December 17, 1903. A half dollar, silver dollar and \$10 gold piece were issued. Surcharges were earmarked for the "repair, refurbishing and maintenance" of the existing Wright Monument at Kill Devil Hill, North Carolina, which was dedicated in 1932. Orville Wright was still alive at the time of construction, making it the largest monument dedicated to a living person. While the 60-foot-high granite monument atop the 90-foot hill is impressive, it was not as inspiring when translated onto coinage. Only a third of the potential