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# *Collecting* **WASHINGTON MEDALS**

A SAMPLER







## COVER STORY

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**A**N IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT in numismatic bibliomania occurred in 2016 with the publication of *Medallic Washington*, a two-volume survey written by Neil Musante. Medal collectors in general, and George Washington medal collectors in particular, have greatly benefited from the knowledge presented in this work. Musante, who previously published a well-received book about die-sinker John Adams Bolen, has received widespread praise for his magisterial text.

*Medallic Washington* supersedes previous books and has now become the essential reference on Washingtoniana. A long-standard reference in this field was W.S. Baker's *Medallic Portraits of Washington*, first published in 1885. For more than a century, Washington medals were known by Baker numbers. It is now also common to use Musante GW numbers. Susan H. Douglas' fine 32-page 1949 monograph on the subject, taken from three articles published in *The Numismatist*, is worth obtaining for those focusing on specimens celebrating the inauguration centennial. Dave Baldwin, an expert on the work of the Lovett family—who produced many Washington medals—maintains an excellent website that includes all of that family's Washington-inspired works ([lovetttokensmedals.com/index.html](http://lovetttokensmedals.com/index.html))

Noted exonumists Russell Rulau and George

Fuld published *Medallic Portraits of Washington* in 1985, with a second edition debuting in 1999. (Read more about this reference in "Bookmarks," p. 83.) A number of auction catalogs and fixed-price lists also highlight Washington medals. Among the latter is Jack Collins' 1991 catalog of the F.C.C. Boyd and John J. Ford Jr. collections.

It is not surprising that many references have been devoted to Washingtoniana over the past century and a quarter. Our nation's first president, who holds a singularly prominent place in American history, remains a heroic figure that attracts considerable collector interest. His story—from birth, inauguration, political victories, military achievements to death—has been a rich field for medalists and die-sinkers since the 1790s. Special interest in Washington has been expressed on several occasions, including his passing in 1799; the United States' centennial celebration in 1876; the centennial anniversary of his inauguration in 1889; and the bicentennial of his birth in 1932. In fact, there has been a flood of Washington medals over the years.

A collector new to the field has access to much well-researched information, especially after the publication of Musante's work, but where to begin? Assembling a complete collection—perhaps the instinctive approach for some numismatists—would be virtually impossible. The

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▲ **THE HOLY GRAIL** of Washington medals, the “Washington Before Boston” specimen has been restruck many times. Shown here is a 1979 example produced by the Paris Mint. Actual Size: 69mm

best course of action might be to start with a sampling of medals, representing different artists and the milestones that mark the great general’s life. Let’s look at some examples reflecting some lesser-known engravers, as well as four notable ones: Robert Lovett Jr., C.C. Wright, Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Laura Gardin Fraser.

**W**ashington’s leadership during the Revolutionary War and his two terms as president elevated him to the status of American royalty—but, of course, he and his fellow Founding Fathers assiduously avoided claiming him as such. Clearly, the most prominent of the medals commemorating the great leader was the “Washington Before Boston” specimen, engraved by Frenchman Pierre-Simon-Benjamin Duvivier (1730-1819). First produced in about 1788-89, these pieces are the Holy Grail of Washingtoniana. Throughout the years, many have been restruck in Paris and, after a reworking by Charles E. Barber, at the United States Mint.

In fact, somewhat of a cottage industry has sprung up around



**THE “HERO OF FREEDOM”** medal refers to Washington as “The Pride of His Country.”

Actual Size: 38mm



the collection and study of Washington Before Boston medals. Serious hobbyists might attempt to include a variety of the offerings in their cabinet. My piece (similar to the one shown at the left) is a Paris medal likely from the early 20th century. They are still produced today.

After Washington’s death in December 1799, several versions of funeral urn medals were issued to venerate his life. These small pieces—perhaps best described as medalets—usually were holed and might have been worn during processions or other commemorative events. Some are quite rare,

▼ **CABINET MEDALS** depict the upright case that contained the U.S. Mint’s holdings of Washington specimens, surmounted by a bust of the Founding Father. Actual Size: 60mm



including the variety that shows a skull and crossbones in lieu of an urn.

Among other examples issued around 1800 is the “Hero of Freedom” medal, which extols Washington as THE PRIDE OF HIS COUNTRY AND ORNAMENT OF HUMAN NATURE. Several additional early Washington pieces are known by the name of the engraver or issuer, including Thomas Halliday, Obadiah Westwood and Daniel Eccleston (the latter of whom is responsible for a very large and impressive piece).

Two generations later, around 1860, the U.S. Mint produced a fabulous medal honoring our first president and highlighting the other Washington specimens in its possession. One in particular, known as the Cabinet Medal, is 60mm in diameter and was designed by Anthony C. Paquet (1814-82), creator of the 1861-S “Paquet Reverse” Liberty Head double eagle (gold \$20). Examples were restruck in the 19th and 20th centuries and remain popular with collectors.

## The Lovetts & Centennial Exhibition Medals

The most prominent medals of Washington at the time of the Civil War and after are those of the Lovetts, the first family of die-sinkers in 19th-century America. Robert Lovett Sr., along



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## The most prominent medals... are those of the Lovetts, the first family of die-sinkers in 19th-century America.”

with his three sons, had a prolific output of medals, tokens and storecards that depicted a variety of themes. Two sons, George H. Lovett (1824-94) and Robert Lovett Jr. (1818-79), were extensively involved in the creation of numerous Washington pieces. George Lovett was responsible for 10 medals that highlight Washington and his headquarter sites during the Revolutionary War. These historic items depict buildings in such places as Harlem, Dobbs Ferry and Newburg.

Of the many Washington medals created by George and the younger Robert, I have chosen to highlight one by the latter that commemorates the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia. This 55mm white-metal

issue (also struck in bronze) depicts Washington facing right on the obverse, with the Latin inscription GEORGIUS WASHINGTON PRAES. PRIM. RER. CONF. AMER.

MDCCLXXXIX around the outer edge. Despite the medal being struck for the 1876 Centennial celebration, the legend pays tribute to Washington's inauguration in 1789. (Lovett had earlier used the obverse die on two medals in 1860.)

► **ROBERT LOVETT JR.** created numerous Washington-themed medals, one of which commemorates the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876 (below).

Actual Size: 55mm



lion people to 250 pavilions. Attendees had the opportunity to see a typewriter, telephone and sewing machine for the first time. It was fitting that Lovett, a Philadelphian, would create this medal.

Although Robert Lovett Jr. produced many historical and political medals, as well as merchant tokens and storecards, he is best remembered for his engraving of the 1861 Confederate cent. The coin—with the image of the Roman goddess Minerva on the obverse, and cotton bales and other representations of southern agriculture on the reverse—never circulated. The story of the Confederate cent has been the subject of many articles and also a book, *The Lovett Cent: A Confederate Story* by Harold Levi and George Correll.

The 1876 centennial celebration spawned many medals, including a number of wooden examples. One Washington “medal”—a term I use loosely here—was produced by the Ornamental Wood Company. It features Jean-Antoine Houdon's portrait of the Founding Father on the obverse and some perfunctory information on the reverse. This 63mm piece is attractive because of its unusual nature and can be obtained for little expense.

▼ **ORNAMENTAL WOOD COMPANY** recognized the 1876 Centennial Exhibition with this unusual medal.

Actual Size: 63mm





Another significant event of the second half of the 19th century was the centennial commemoration of Washington's inauguration, observed April 29 to May 1, 1889. It is difficult to understand today the enormous outpouring of enthusiasm that took place in Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago and other cities.

► **THIS LARGE MEDAL** was crafted by sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Washington's inauguration.

Actual Size: 112mm

Many books and pamphlets were published to mark the celebrations. One such text was a massive tome edited by Clarence Winthrop Bowen and published in 1892. Fittingly, the cover features an image of a gilt-bronze piece that represents the most famous medal commemorating the inaugural centennial. The work was created by Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907), an Irish immigrant who became one of America's leading sculptors and medalists. He was noted for the magnificent gold double eagle (\$20), introduced in 1907, and for his collaboration with President Theodore Roosevelt to rein-vigorate the design of early 20th-century American coinage.

### Saint-Gaudens Medal

Saint-Gaudens' centennial medal is one of my favorites. The motif of the huge 112mm piece is an appealing example of the Beaux-Arts style, harkening back to Renaissance specimens. The high-relief, left-facing sculpture on the ob-

▼ **CHARLES CUSHING WRIGHT'S DIES** were used to create this elaborate specimen, which features an image of Washington inspired by Jean-Antoine Houdon's bust (right) on the obverse and 13 interlocking rings on the reverse.

Actual Size: 54mm



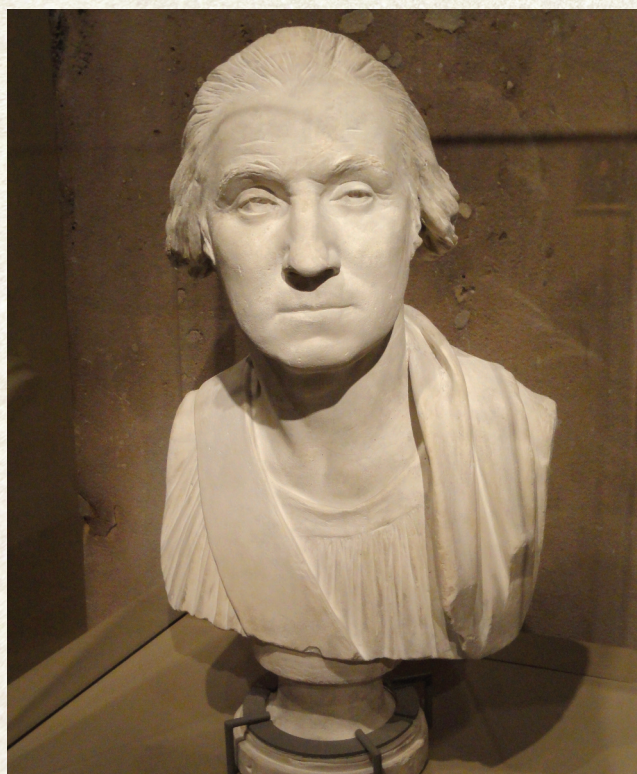
verse highlights Washington as PATER PATRIAE, or "Father of the Country." On the right side is the fasces, symbolizing the authority of his presidential office. Below the image of Washington is the name Philip Martiny, Saint-Gaudens' assistant who did preliminary work on the medal.

The reverse is equally impressive. A large eagle with outspread wings sits atop a lengthy inscription noting Washington's inauguration and the committee in charge of the bicentennial celebration, and the dates April 30, 1789, and April 30, 1889—both in Roman numerals. Thirteen stars ring the obverse while 38 stars circle the reverse.

So many medals were created in 1889 to commemorate the inauguration that Susan Douglas wrote of them in *The Numismatist*. Her three installments were reprinted as a monograph in which 61 medals are noted, including the Saint-Gaudens example, identified as Douglas-53.

### C.C. Wright Medal

Another notable medal, known as the "Thirteen Links" (Douglas-52 in bronze and Douglas 52A in white metal, per Musante's reference), is a work from dies originally created in 1853 by Charles





Cushing (C.C.) Wright (1796-1854), who perhaps is best known for his magnificent Erie Canal completion medal, engraved in 1826. Samuel H. and Henry Chapman, prominent coin dealers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, used Wright's Washington dies to strike the medal in the 1880s.

The obverse of Douglas-52 reflects Houdon's bust of Washington, completed in the late 1780s or 1790s. The portrait also is the basis for the current Washington quarter design by John Flanagan (1865-1952). But the real beauty of this 54mm medal is the reverse. Here, there are 13 interlocking state rings, signifying the unity of the new nation and its first states in 1789. In the middle is a radiating sun. The design is a more elaborate rendering of the reverse of the Fugio cent, which states in the center WE ARE ONE.

**THE "PROCLAIM LIBERTY" MEDAL** *elegantly commemorates the bicentennial of our first president's birthday.*  
Actual Size: 76mm



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**The real strength of this piece is the reverse, which shows a standing Liberty with outstretched arms.”**

It is interesting that the Wright medal bears 42 stars on the obverse, while the Saint-Gaudens example has 38. The reason is that four states—North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Washington—were added to the Union in November 1889, and Saint-Gaudens' work preceded the Wright/Chapman medal.

### Laura Gardin Fraser Medal

The final medal in this discussion was engraved by another well-known artist, Laura Gardin Fraser (1889-1966), part of a very prolific team that included her husband, James Earle Fraser. Perhaps their most beautiful piece was the Oregon Trail Memorial commemorative half dollar, issued between 1926 and 1939. Laura was an excellent sculptor and medalist in her own right, as reflected by her being presented with the American Numismatic Society's prestigious J. Sanford Saltus Medal in 1926.

Her Washington medal, known as “Proclaim Liberty,” was struck in 1932 to commemorate the bicentennial of the great leader's birth. The obverse is a simple portrait inspired by the Saint-Gaudens' medal from 43 years earlier. The lettering is minimal, stating only WASHINGTON, with the dates 1732 and 1932, flanking the statesman's coat of arms under his image.

The real strength of this piece is the reverse, which shows a standing Liberty with outstretched arms holding a torch and sword. The reverse has

simple lettering: PROCLAIM/LIBERTY /THROUGHOUT/ALL THE LAND. As with the Saint-Gaudens medal, there also is an eagle (though much smaller) with 13 stars surrounding it. The medal shown here is a 56mm bronze example, but 76mm pieces also were struck in bronze and silver. President Herbert Hoover received the sole

platinum specimen.

Musante's book ends with 1890, but of course other notable medals have been produced over the past 125 years, as Laura Gardin Fraser's work attests. Also in 1932, John Flanagan, who trained under Saint-Gaudens and also in France, created the obverse portrait for the Washington quarter, an image that is used to this day.

### Conclusion

George Washington has been a rich subject for medallic offerings. Many other medals could have been presented here, but I chose an illustrative sampling of several that were designed by some of the most important American medalists. Other subjects linked to the well-known image of the first president were the commemoration of the Revolutionary War, Indian Peace medals, Masonic medals, U.S. Assay Commission medals and more.

This feature has been revised and expanded from one prepared for *The Virginia Numismatist* in its Spring 2016 issue. As part of that article, I argued for the value of collecting Washington medals as an adjunct to acquiring colonial coins and also as a meaningful enterprise for Virginia numismatists. But, of course, the field is vast, and the opportunities for developing a niche abound for any collector. Acquiring Washington medals—and learning about them—can be a meaningful and enjoyable pursuit. ■