

ANA PUTS "TWO-BIT" EXHIBIT ON THE ROAD

A new American Numismatic Association (ANA) Money Museum traveling exhibit of United States quarter dollars - two-bit coins - made its first appearance at the Shenandoah Valley Coin Club Show, December 2-3, 2000.

Entitled "The Quarter Dollar: Bits and Pieces in American History," the exhibit features specimens from early Spanish Colonial pieces to the latest releases in the U.S. Mint's 50 State Quarters Program.

"The Mint's 50 State Quarters Program has generated tremendous interest in America's quarters and coins in general," says ANA Curator Robert W. Hoge. "The quarter dollar is today's workhorse coin and has a wonderful heritage. The ANA has had a quarter-dollar exhibit in its museum since the Mint's 50 State program began in 1999 and decided it would be fun and educational to make a traveling display available for use by our member clubs."

Hoge notes that while numismatists are familiar with the story of the quarter and how it was nicknamed, much of the general public is unaware of the coin's legacy.

"The quarter is the direct descendant of the royal Spanish 2-real coin first struck in the New World in Mexico City in 1536," Hoge says. "In addition, the Spanish Milled dollar, which had a value of 8 reales and was known as a piece of eight,' was regularly used in the American colonies. Sometimes it was cut into eight equal pieces, or 'bits,' to make small change. So two bits (2 reales) was a quarter of the Spanish Milled dollar, which, in 1792, was formally adopted by the United States as the new nation's official value unit."

The ANA traveling exhibit features Spanish colonial silver 2-real pieces issued in 1753, 1757 and 1775 in Mexico and Peru. The display also shows a number of U.S. quarters, including an 1835 Capped Bust, 1854 Seated Liberty, 1893 Barber and 1917 Standing Liberty. The last piece was designed by Hermon A. MacNeil, who depicted Liberty with her left arm covered by a shield symbolizing protection, and her right hand clutching an olive branch of peace. However, controversy arose over the initial design because Liberty's right breast was exposed. Before its first year of production concluded, a covering of chain mail was placed over the exposure.

"Until 1932, regular issues of the quarter dollar coin always bore images of a personification of freedom - 'Miss Liberty' - and of the American Eagle," Hoge says. "In that year, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of President Washington's birth, his portrait by John Flanagan was placed on the 25-cent piece for what was originally intended to be a one-year, commemorative issue. However, with only slight modifications, this popular presentation of Washington has been retained since."

The current 50 State Quarter program calls for five new reverse designs to be issued each year for a decade, with each design commemorating the nation's states in the order they ratified the Constitution or were admitted to the Union.

"Under the current 50 State program, the Mint will have issued a greater variety of quarter types than it has produced in its entire history!" Hoge says. "I can safely say that two-bit coins are likely to be with us for a long time to come."

For more information about the ANA Money Museum or to find out how ANA-member clubs can display this new traveling exhibit, contact the ANA Money Museum at 818 N. Cascade Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80903-3279; telephone 719/632-2646; fax 719/634-4085; e-mail anamus@money.org; or visit the ANA's web site at www.money.org.

The American Numismatic Association is a congressionally chartered nonprofit educational organization dedicated to encouraging people to study and collect money and related items. The ANA helps its 28,000 members and the public discover and explore the world of money through its vast array of education and outreach programs, as well as its museum, library, publications, conventions and seminars. For more information, call 719-632-2646 or go to www.money.org.