

IMMEDIATE RELEASE DATE: Nov 15, 2011

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Money Museum Unveils Coins That Could Have Been

Photos, video of new display's rarities available for download

There was a time when putting George Washington on a U.S. coin was considered way too controversial. Consequently, Washington didn't appear on a regular issue U.S. coin until 1932.

A new exhibit at the Money Museum explores coins that could have lined people's pockets — like the 1863 Washington two-cent piece — but never made it past a trial design and thus were never approved for circulation. This display of 19th century pattern coins is an expansion of the museum's interactive, multimillion-dollar Harry W. Bass Jr. Exhibit. The world-class, permanent gallery displays 80 years worth of pattern coins.

Pattern coins can tell visitors a great deal about the times they were created, with items of special interest for coin collectors, history buffs, artists and designers.

"Artistically, the various designs provide an interesting look at what coin designers were thinking at the time," said Douglas Mudd, Money Museum curator. "This is what our money could have looked like. It's one of the finest collections out there."

The collection reveals much about America's political climate during the 1800s, Mudd said. While seeing former presidents and other important historical leaders on money is common practice today, it was a different story in the 1800s. At that time, Mudd explained, portraits of real people on currency had been traditionally reserved for monarchs.

"The fact that it was so controversial to potentially put George Washington on a coin during that era is something that we forget in the modern age," Mudd said.

Economically, the coins document the debate over the use of a gold or silver standard to back U.S. currency.

Another major economic topic of the time was the potential introduction of a world-wide currency standard — several series of patterns were created during this period to explore how U.S. coins could be made to match the standard used by the Latin Monetary Union, such as the famous "Stella" series of gold coins.

These specimens are part of the collection originally assembled by the late Harry W. Bass Jr., for whom the gallery is named. Bass was a life member of the American Numismatic Association for more than 30 years and was inducted into the ANA Hall of Fame in 1998. He was awarded the ANA's Medal of Merit in 1989. He also served as councilor and president of the American Numismatic Society.

[High-resolution photos of the pattern coin display are available](#) at the ANA's Facebook page, [Facebook.com/Numismatics](https://www.facebook.com/Numismatics). A [video of the display](#) is available on the ANA's YouTube channel at [YouTube.com/AmericanNumismatic](https://www.youtube.com/AmericanNumismatic).

This stunning collection of pattern coins can be viewed between the hours of 10:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday at the Money Museum, 818 N. Cascade Ave. Entry to the Money Museum is free for ANA members, \$5 for the general public and \$4 for seniors, students and military personnel with valid identification. Children under 12 are admitted for free.

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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.