

WEALTH OF INFORMATION

Long-Awaited Recognition for So-Called Dollars

Upcoming edition of the “Red Book” will showcase a wide variety of the commemorative medals.

➤ THIS IS GOING to be a great year for collectors of “so-called dollars.” For the first time, these significant pieces will be included in Whitman Publishing’s second deluxe edition of *A Guide Book of United States Coins* (the “Red Book”).

So-called dollars are U.S. medals about the size of a silver dollar. More than 750 varieties are known, half of which are associated with a fair or exposition; the others commemorate important events in American history.

At the invitation of Whitman Publisher Dennis Tucker, I collaborated with the editors on an 18-page appendix detailing so-called dollars, with more than 120 full-color images. Says Tucker, “[The reference] provides a history of so-called dollars, advice on collecting them, a study of rarity and a discussion of today’s market.” Sixty different types of medals will be showcased in the Red Book, including photographs, values in six grades from Very Fine through Mint State-65 and fascinating descriptions of each piece.

According to Red Book editor Kenneth Bressett, “The growing interest in medal collecting has prompted [Whitman Publishing] to acknowledge the important role medals have in today’s collector community, and to include examples of these important historical documents as part of the total story of American numismatics. It is hoped that this introduction to the world of medal collecting may be an inspiration to any who have overlooked them in the past.”

To give readers a sense of the so-called dollars’ vast history, here are three highlights from the upcoming deluxe edition of the Red Book.

1876 Centennial Exposition

Designed and engraved by Charles Barber, the 38mm U.S. Mint medal depicts allegorical symbolism and tells an interesting story about the United States. At the time of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, most of Europe considered the United States to be a third-world country. The obverse depicts Liberty, representing the United States, rising up with her left hand reaching for the stars and greatness. The intended message was that the United States would gain importance and be recognized



as a world power.

Historically, heraldry dictates that an olive branch appear in the figure’s right hand and a sword in the left (meaning peace is preferred, but action will be taken if necessary). In the case of the 1876 Centennial Exposition medal, the sword is in Liberty’s right hand, signifying that the United States was not to be trifled with.

1878 Wyoming Battle Centennial

This 36mm U.S. Mint specimen was created for the centennial of the Battle of Wyoming, a conflict that took place during the American Revolutionary War between American Patriots and

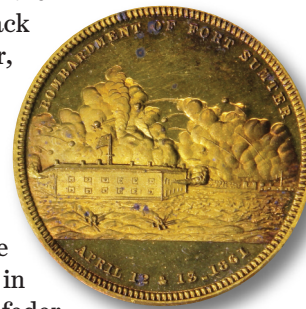


Loyalists (American colonists who supported the British crown) accompanied by Iroquois raiders. The obverse depicts Iroquois natives with tomahawks in hand, attacking a family of settlers. The reverse shows a memorial monument with the legend *DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI*

(“It is a sweet and noble thing to die for one’s country”). The dies were designed and engraved by George T. Morgan in 1878, the same year the first Morgan dollars were produced.

1861 Bombardment of Fort Sumter

One can almost see the explosions and feel the ground shake on the 34mm medal commemorating the 1861 Bombardment of Fort Sumter. Depicting the attack that initiated the Civil War, the obverse shows the bombs bursting and clouds of smoke as Fort Sumter was attacked by the South Carolina rebels. The reverse legend tells the story of how 75 “Yankees” in the fort held off 8,000 Confederate soldiers for 30 hours. Although it is unsigned, the issue is believed to have been engraved by artist George Hampden Lovett.



—Jeff Shevlin

PHOTOS: JEFF SHEVLIN