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The OTHER CONTINENTAL DOLLAR

MONTROVILLE DICKESON'S COMMEMORATIVES

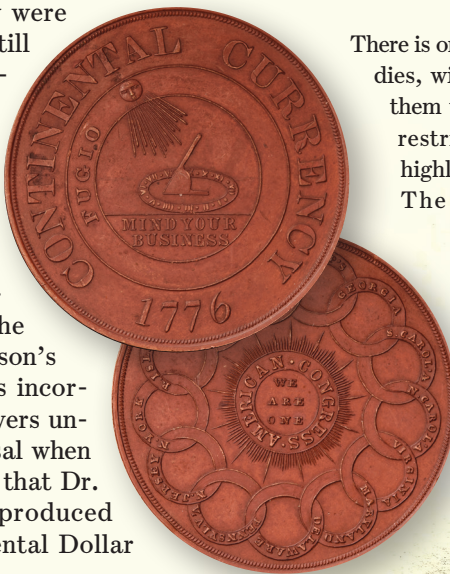
THE ACCEPTED numismatic canon regarding the status of the legendary 1776 Continental Dollar has been subject to several revisionist histories, including one published in the July 2018 issue of *The Numismatist* (Erik Goldstein's "The Myth of the Continental Dollar, Part 2," p. 36) that states they were minted in England. The jury is still out, but many believe the Continental Dollars were made right here in the United States and that quantities were shipped to England.

Given that conventional wisdom is sometimes wrong, is it possible that the common knowledge regarding the origins of the *other* Continental Dollar—Dickeson's so-called Continental Dollar—is incorrect? Numismatist Q. David Bowers unwittingly triggered our reappraisal when he recently sought confirmation that Dr. Montroville Wilson Dickeson produced the so-called Dickeson Continental Dollar for the 1876 U.S. Centennial Exposition. Could anyone point to hard evidence that Dickeson actually produced the medal?

Dickeson Dies

Jeff Shevlin discusses the history of the Dickeson restrikes in his February 2006 article, "Continental Dollar Restrikes," published in the *So-Called Dollar Collectors' Club Journal*. Based on the accepted knowledge at that time, Shevlin writes:

There is one set of dies, the Dickeson dies, with quite a history behind them that are an exception and restrikes from those dies are highly desirable by collectors. The Dickeson



▲ MONTROVILLE DICKESON (pictured) likely struck his Continental Dollar around 1861.



Not Actual Size

PHOTOS: JEFF SHEVLIN COLLECTION (DOLLAR) & AMERICAN NUMISMATIC MANUAL

dies went through the hands of quite a few prominent coin dealers before ending up at the Smithsonian where they are today. Sometime prior to the 1876 Centennial Celebration Dr. Montroville Wilson Dickeson (1813-82) had dies made that resembled the 1776 Continental Dollar. The dies were different enough from the actual Continental Dollars, so they were not confused with the originals by collectors at that time. Today these pieces are incorrectly referred to as Dickeson restrikes, but they are actually original strikings made by Dickeson from the original dies he produced. Pieces struck later from these dies should be classified as restrikes. These same dies were later used to strike additional copies by coin dealers such as Thomas L. Elder in 1917, Q. David Bowers in 1962, Robert Bashlow later that year, and also the Boy Scouts of America in 1964.

Shevlin goes on to describe and illustrate the die characteristics (degree of platform detail around the obverse sundial and the presence or absence of die gouges on the obverse) that could be used to distinguish between the original Dickeson medals and those that Thomas L. Elder, Empire Coin Company and Robert Bashlow produced. (These characteristics are also described but not illustrated by Thomas K. DeLorey in his 1980 *Numismatist* article “Thomas L. Elder: A Catalogue of His Tokens and Medals.”) The Boy Scout restrikes can easily be identified by text added to the dies.

We had no reason to question the accumulated knowledge of nearly 140 years until we were asked to cite proof that Dickeson prepared the Continental Currency Dollar as a Centennial Exposition souvenir. In his 1952 seminal article “Struck Copies of Early American Coins” published in *The Coin Collector’s Journal*, numismatic researcher Richard Kenney attributes copies of Sommer Islands *shillings* and the later Con-



Although unproven at the time, DeLorey’s attribution helped resolve the question of who issued the medals and when.”

tinental Dollar copies, which he describes as a souvenir for the 1876 centennial, to Dickeson. He notes the Continental Dollar dies were later acquired by Elder. Kenney cites Philadelphia dealer John W. Haseltine as the source for his information that 50 Continental Dollars were struck in silver, so we pushed back in time. In 1880 Haseltine cataloged the Dickeson Continental Dollar as an 1876 Centennial Exposition medal, even though he had previously listed the medal in a sale as early as 1873. In 1877 S.K. Harzfeld cataloged Dickeson’s Continental Dollar among the medals of the 1876 centennial. However, Dickeson’s Continental Dollar is not included in J.W. Holland’s 1876 list of Centennial medals as would be expected given Dickeson’s prominence in numismatics.

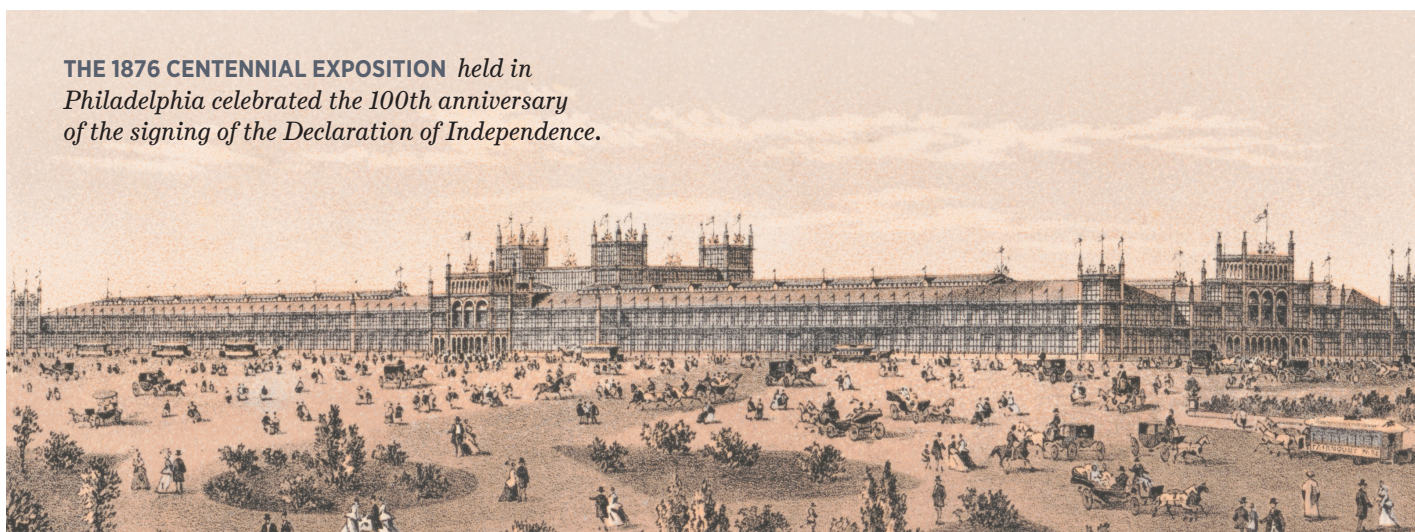
DeLorey proposed that medals—including the so-called Continental Currency medals—attributed to Elder in Harold E. Hibler and Charles V. Kappen’s 1963 *So-Called Dollars* were the work of Dickeson. Although unproven at the time, his attribution helped resolve the question of who issued the medals and when.

When Were the Continental Dollars Produced?

Julia Purdy, Bowers’s research assistant, prompted him to question the production date of Dickeson’s Continental Dollar when she called his attention to numismatist John Kraljevich’s inventory archive. Kraljevich identified one of the

THE 1876 CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION held in Philadelphia celebrated the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

ILLUSTRATION: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Continental Currency medals listed in a September 1863 William H. Strobridge auction catalog and noted that further research may yield an even earlier listing for the medals. Indeed, the March 1863 Strobridge sale had six Continental Currency medal lots, including a Continental Dollar in bronze and one in tin. We searched auction catalogs available on the Newman Numismatic Portal but did not find any earlier listings. Winning bidders whose names were penciled in the margins of the March catalog include early numismatists such as Edward Cogan, Samuel Bushnell, William Belcher and someone known only as “Emmett.” As far as we know, these are the earliest auction sales of the series, placing the pieces’ likely date of manufacture between 1860 and 1862.

Did Dickeson Commission the Medals?

The earliest Dickeson attribution we found is in Cogan’s auction of November 11, 1872, where Lot 200 was described as “1776 Continental Currency in Copper. Very Fine. Struck by Dr. Dickeson.” The two preceding lots were presumably original Continental Dollars described as having been purchased in London. We believe Cogan’s attribution is correct, but how did we come to that conclusion?

Dickeson published his *American Numismatic Manual* in 1859. In his groundbreaking book, he described a Sommer Islands shilling that was unique at the time of publication and an early seal that he had acquired and identified as a die for a 1792 pattern cent. Three medals/storecards appear later in auctions from 1861 on. The first to be

listed are Sommer Islands copies struck in a variety of compositions. These are almost always identified as Dickeson copies, as they are frequently muled with Dickeson’s Coin & Medal Safe c. 1860 storecard issued by the Evans and Watson safe company in Philadelphia.

Dickeson’s 1792 seal mated with a reverse die identifying it as a pattern cent appears at auction in 1861 as well. Although listed with U.S. Mint patterns and not attributed



◀ **THIS SOMMER ISLANDS** copy has been paired with a reverse that advertises Dickeson’s Coin & Medal Safe made by Evans & Watson. Not Actual Size

to Dickeson, we know it is his product, as he owned the seal. The tradition of striking copies of rare numismatic coins and medals was well-established by 1859 by dealers and medalists such as William Idler, John Bolen, Alfred Robinson and Thomas Wyatt in America and Kettle & Sons in England. The hobby welcomed these copies, which typically are identified by their makers or issuers in contemporary auction catalogs.

Cogan issued his own storecards in Philadelphia and would certainly have been aware of any tokens and medals issued by Dickeson, even though he did not attribute the Continental Dollar to Dickeson until 1872. Then again, we did not find the Dickeson Continental Dollar listed in a Cogan auction



◀ **DICKESON’S 1792 TRIAL CENTS** are often misattributed as U.S. Mint pattern pieces. Not Actual Size

before 1872. He sold the 1792 “pattern cent,” the Dickeson safe storecard and the Dickeson safe storecards mated with the Sommer Islands dies in an 1861 auction, so he was definitely aware of Dickeson’s foray into the medal business.

The sequence of the appearance of known Dickeson pieces suggests he began experimenting with producing additional medals after seeing the popularity of the Sommer Islands and 1792 trial strikes. Muling a Sommer Islands obverse with Dickeson’s Coin & Medal Safe reverse capitalized on the popularity of storecards among collectors at the time.



THE BEST EVIDENCE for Dickeson’s authorship of the Continental Dollar and Continental Currency Seal medal series appears in the E.L. Mason 1869-70 auction sales of Dickeson’s holdings, which includes much of his coin collection. Lot 298 in the December 1, 1869, sale is described as “Set of the facsimiles of the Continental Seals, including the Continental Currency. 4 pieces. Albitinum proofs.” Lot 299 reads, “Another containing Continental Currency. The same.” The May 1870 Mason auction featured the Sommer Islands copies and the 1792 cent albitinum proofs from Dickeson’s collection. (Albitinum is an arcane term for a soft, white metal sometimes used for proofing.)

While no direct evidence has yet been found that Dickeson actually offered any of the pieces

PHOTOS: HERITAGE AUCTIONS (CENT PATTERN) & PROFESSIONAL COIN GRADING SERVICE



THE SO-CALLED CONTINENTAL CURRENCY MEDALS
that DeLorey attributes to Montroville Dickeson feature obverse designs modeled after the vignettes on Continental Currency.

attributed to him for sale through printed ads or other references, the circumstantial evidence all points to his authorship. The first issues securely attributed to him were featured in his 1859 publication and appear contemporaneously with the Dickeson safe storecard. It seems he was seeking to capitalize on the popularity of his book by striking copies of rare coins and lending his name to a safe marketed to coin collectors. The unique 1792 supposed pattern cent struck in white metal and sold in his collection in 1870 appears to be a trial piece itself. The use of albitinum to describe the specimen may be significant.

While his collection did include other medals struck in albitinum, the presence of proofs of all the pieces attributed to Dickeson seems to be dispositive evidence of his authorship. To be fair, the description of albitinum proofs likely refers to white-metal strikes, but the term is found only in Mason's catalogs for the sale of Dickeson's collection. Coin dealer John W. Kline used the word a few years later to describe white-metal restrikes from Bolen dies. (See Neil Musante's 2002 book *The Medalllic Work of John Adams Bolen*.) The Continental medals are well-known in white metal, but the 1792 cent is extremely rare. The presence of the latter suggests the albitinum proofs were early strikes of the medals retained by Dickeson.

Why Did Dickeson Commission the Continental Series?

The Sommer Islands medals and 1792 pattern cent related directly to the publication of Dickeson's *American Numismatcal Manual*. He also discussed the Continental Dollar in the reference, identifying it as a likely medal as opposed to actual currency. Coin or medal, it clearly struck his fancy, as he wrote:

It was in itself a treatise, in the then condition of our country, in behalf of liberty; and contrasted now with the more artistic, but much less vigorous, designs upon the present coinage of our national mint, is worthy of imitation.

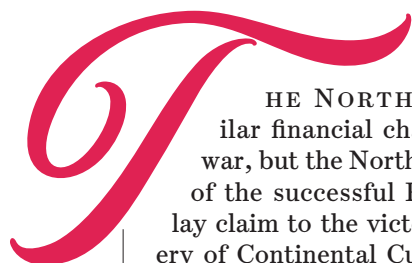
He concluded that "it was in reality a medal, struck off to commemorate the bold, fearless, and patriotic acts of the Congress that declared our country a free and independent nation."

The United States financed the Civil War through noninterest-bearing Demand notes in 1861 and legal-tender notes (or "greenbacks") in 1862. The country had experienced the disastrous collapse of the government-issued Continental Currency during the Revolutionary War, and citizens were understandably afraid of a repeat outcome. As one anonymous writer

PHOTOS: JEFF SHEVLIN COLLECTION (MEDALS); HERITAGE AUCTIONS (NOTES); & GETTY IMAGES/KARANDAEV

in the January 26, 1863, *New York Daily Herald* newspaper noted:

Paper money has usually proved a good servant, but always a bad master...Continental currency was not wholly a failure...the Continental victory was largely due to the Continental money, the memory of which should be forever enshrined in the hearts of the people as that of a champion who vindicated the liberties of the American colonies and fell gloriously in the moment of victory.



THE NORTH AND SOUTH faced similar financial challenges in paying for the war, but the North, arguably the rightful heir of the successful Revolutionary War, could lay claim to the victory enshrined in the imagery of Continental Currency. We believe Dickeson's infatuation with the Continental Dollar led him to design a series of medals to commemorate the value or function of Continental Currency in the establishment of the United States. In doing so, he was endorsing congressional efforts to finance the war to preserve the Union.

Three reverse dies (using our nomenclature)—called Continental Currency Seal dies in the notations in early auction catalogs—document issues of Continental Currency on May 10, 1775; November 29, 1775; and April 11, 1778. These were paired with three obverse dies featuring reproductions of designs used on Continental Currency notes, including the Perseverando vignette from the July 22, 1776, \$6 note; the Exitus In Dubio Est (“The Outcome Is in Doubt”) vignette from the May 20, 1777, \$3 note; and the Confederation vignette from the September 26, 1778, \$40 note. The three

obverse dies do not correspond to the dates commemorated on the reverse dies. It may be that Dickeson favored specific images and was not concerned with matching them to specific dates when the currency was issued.

The familiar Continental Dollar (with the 13 rings on the reverse) are the fourth obverse and reverse dies. Mules of obverse dies were also struck paired with each other and the Continental Dollar obverse. The 13-rings die was paired with at least one of the three Currency Seal obverse dies. At least two Currency Seal reverse dies were paired with the Continental Dollar obverse die. The table below documents the 18 possible die combinations that we have encountered in auction catalogs (along with the year they first appeared) or were cataloged by Hibler and Kappen. The brief descriptions used in early catalogs make accurate attributions difficult, as noted. Several die pairings are likely uncollectable today, have not been seen on the market in years, or do not appear in professional grading reports. All items are sufficiently rare that other die pairings may exist in addition to those noted here.

Who Produced & Struck the Medals?

Our research puts to rest the prevailing belief that the Dickeson Continental Dollars were produced for the 1876 Centennial Exposition. They may have been sold at the world's fair, but the scarce-to-rare status of genuine Dickeson examples makes it more likely that they were produced and sold in the early 1860s. This leaves us with several questions: who produced the dies, who struck the medals, and where did the dies reside before they resurfaced in Thomas Elder's collection in 1917?

Three clues point to Robert Lovett Jr. as the engraver of the dies and the probable person

KNOWN OR REPORTED DIE PAIRS	Obverse: Continental Dollar							Dates indicate the earliest auction reference we have observed prior to 1917, when Elder began using the dies. An “O” indicates an unconfirmed citation, and “1863?” notes an auction entry that does not identify which Continental Currency Seal die is being referenced. “HK” indicates medals cataloged in Hibler and Kappen that we have not positively identified in early auction catalogs. “HK/O” denotes medals in Hibler and Kappen that do not currently appear in the NGC census.
	Reverse: Thirteen Rings	Obverse: Perseverando	Reverse: May 10, 1775	Reverse: Nov. 29, 1775	Reverse: April 11, 1778	Obverse: Exitus in Dubio Est		
Obverse: Continental Dollar								
Reverse: Thirteen Rings	1863							
Obverse: Perseverando	1868							
Reverse: May 10, 1775	O	1863						
Reverse: Nov. 29, 1775		1863?						
Reverse: April 11, 1778	1996	HK						
Obverse: Exitus in Dubio Est	1868	HK/O	HK/O	1863	1878			
Obverse: Confederation	1868	1863	1863?	1863?	1863	HK/O		

to have struck the medals. The pairing of Dickeson's Sommer Islands copies with the Dickeson's Coin & Medal Safe storecard is the most obvious clue. Dave Baldwin, a recognized expert on Lovett medals, does not include the Sommer Islands copy among Lovett's medals on his website *lovettokensmedals.blogspot.com*. However, his page devoted to the works of Dr. Montroville Dickeson includes the Sommer Islands obverse and reverse dies paired with the Dickeson's Coin & Medal Safe die. The obverse die of the Washington Security storecard, which features a bust of George Washington with his name above and SECURITY below, also is paired with the two Sommer Islands dies. Baldwin notes that Russell Rulau states that Lovett most likely prepared the dies for the Sommer Islands shilling copies in his book *Standard Catalog of United States Tokens, 1700-1900*.

Rulau assumes that Dickeson struck the medals, but we have found nothing to indicate that Dickeson had the facilities to do so. More likely, he commissioned the medals from a full-service die-sinking firm such as Lovett's. Numismatic author Pete Smith et al. note that E.L. Mason opened a coin shop in 1860 in a property he rented from Dickeson. Mason sold much of Dickeson's collection at auction 10 years later. Perhaps the two men partnered to market the Dickeson medals.



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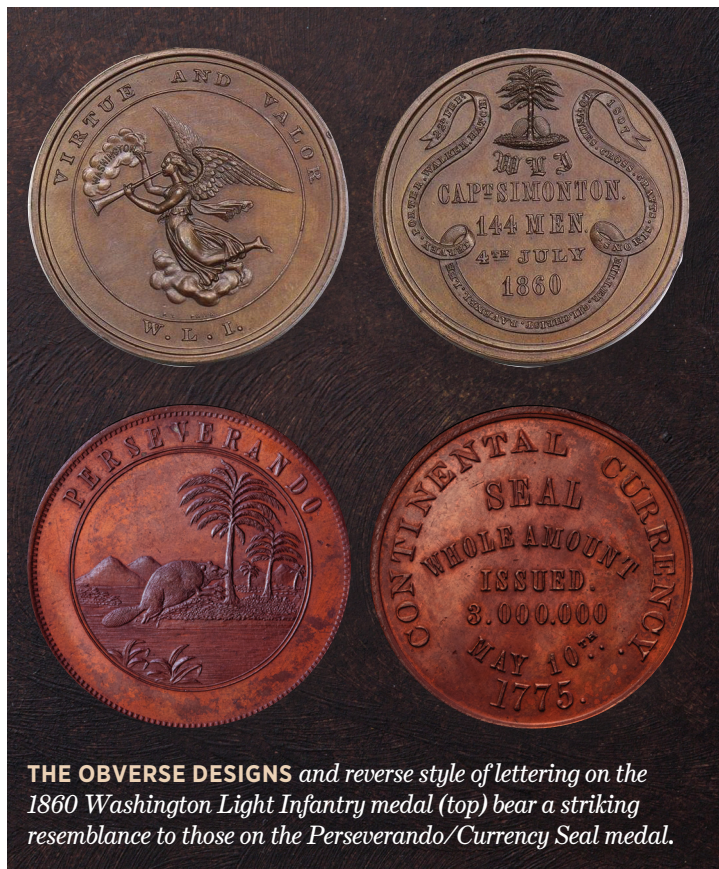
Baldwin proposes that Lovett made the reverse die for Dickeson's 1792 cent trial piece. The Dickeson's Coin & Medal Safe storecards, the Sommer Islands copies and the 1792 trial cent all first appeared at auction in early 1861, suggesting they were produced in 1860 after the publication of the first edition of Dickeson's *American Numismatological Manual*.

Lovett's 1860 medal for Captain Simonton and the Washington Light Infantry (WLI) provides the third clue. The obverse features the WLI crest with a winged Victory centered within a circle and wide outer band stating VIRTUE AND VALOR W.L.I. The design compares favorably with the Perseverando and Exitus in Dubio Est vignettes used on two of the Currency Seal dies. The serif-style lettering on the reverse is similar to that on the Currency Seal reverse dies, suggesting they were cut by the same hand. The shape, width, serif style and character spacing of the capital letters appear to be nearly identical.

Assuming Lovett did produce the dies as we suggest, what happened to them, and how did they end up in Elder's hands in 1917? Robert Lovett Jr. closed his business and moved with his son to McConnelsville, Ohio, to live with his sister-in-law not long after his wife died in November 1876. Robert passed away in 1879, followed a few years later by his son in 1883. Researchers Harold Levi and George Corell report that Robert's possessions passed to his son and then to Robert's brother George H. Lovett in New York.

The editors of the *American Journal of Numismatics* reported in the January 1895 issue that New York engraver and die-sinker Robert Snider purchased George Lovett's business, including his large press and other equipment. Snider advertised in Thomas Elder's publications, so we know they had a business relationship. It appears that Elder purchased some of Snider's historic dies before Snider died in 1917. Although someone else could have purchased the Dickeson series dies, a non-Lovett die that Snider had owned was in Elder's possession in 1924. In an article published in *The Numismatist* in February 1924, author Robert King reported that Snider owned the 1870 Henning & Eymann die used for Elder issues that are cataloged as DeLorey-57 and -58. Although King attributed these two medals to Snider, DeLorey presents evidence that they were actually struck for Elder in 1924 by Charles Hanson in Chicago.

PHOTOS: JEFF SHEVLIN COLLECTION (PERSEVERANDO MEDAL), STACK'S BOWERS GALLERIES (SIMONTON MEDAL) & GETTY IMAGES/KARANDAEV



THE OBVERSE DESIGNS and reverse style of lettering on the 1860 Washington Light Infantry medal (top) bear a striking resemblance to those on the Perseverando/Currency Seal medal.

Thomas Elder sold the reverse die for the Dickeson 1792 trial piece for the U.S. cent in his May 18, 1917, auction as Lot 59. Again, the die could have come from another source, but it is more than a coincidence that it was sold at the same time that Elder began using the Dickeson Continental Dollar, Perseverando and Confederation dies. In addition, Elder began employing the Lovett Washington Security die from the Dickeson Coin & Medal Safe storecard in 1916 as well.

Although our evidence is circumstantial, it helps explain how John J. Ford Jr. and later Robert Bashlow came to own several of the Dickeson dies we argue were produced by Robert Lovett. Bashlow also combined an Elder Hendrick Hudson die with a Sommer Islands die that we contend was produced by Lovett. The most logical path for these dies to land in Bashlow's possession was for them to have passed from Robert Lovett Jr. to his brother George Lovett, to Robert Sneider upon George's death, and to Thomas Elder near the time of Robert Sneider's passing. This would explain why no other record of the dies appears prior to 1916-17.

Conclusions

Numismatic common knowledge can go unchallenged for years. We document hard evidence from auction records that proves Montroville Dickeson's Continental Dollar existed in 1863, suggesting it was probably struck in 1861 or 1862. It definitely was not produced for the 1876 Centennial Exposition. Although some might have been sold during that event, we believe the medals would be more common today had they been offered as souvenirs.

Our evidence for the medals being the work of Robert Lovett Jr. and their absence from the numismatic marketplace before their acquisition by Thomas Elder is more circumstantial. Nevertheless, it does explain the known history of the dies. Future researchers can test our theory as new evidence becomes available.

Acknowledgments

Dave Bowers's research assistant, Julia Purdy, inspired our research after calling our attention to Kraljevich's archive. Dave Bowers suggested edits and comments on the Continental Dollar discussions. David Baldwin and Katie de Silva reviewed our manuscript and our comments about the Lovett brothers. We thank them all for their thoughtful feedback. ■

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