

= Norse @-@ American medal =

The Norse @-@ American medal was struck at the Philadelphia Mint in 1925 , pursuant to an act of the United States Congress . It was issued for the 100th anniversary of the voyage of the ship Restauration , bringing early Norwegian immigrants to the United States .

Minnesota Congressman Ole Juulson Kvale , a Norse @-@ American , wanted a commemorative for the centennial celebrations of the Restauration journey . Rebuffed by the Treasury Department when he sought the issuance of a special coin , he instead settled for a medal . Sculpted by Buffalo nickel designer James Earle Fraser , the medals recognize those immigrants ' Viking heritage , depicting a warrior on the obverse and a vessel on the reverse . They also recall the early Viking explorations of North America .

Once authorized by Congress , they were produced in various metals and sizes , for the most part prior to the celebrations near Minneapolis in June 1925 . Only 53 were issued in gold , and they are rare and valuable today ; those struck in silver or bronze are much less expensive . They are sometimes collected as part of the commemorative coin series .

= = Background and inception = =

On July 4 or 5 , 1825 , the vessel Restauration sailed from Stavanger , Norway for the United States , with 45 emigrants aboard . According to what The New York Times deemed " bacchanalian " legends of its passage , the expedition anchored off an English seacoast village and traded ashore some of its rum , only to depart in haste when local officials took an interest . Off Madeira , expedition leader Lars Larsen is said to have fished a cask from the sea , which proved to be filled with rare wine that was thoroughly enjoyed by those aboard . After they arrived in New York on October 9 , 1825 , the ship was seized pursuant to a court order , as the passengers exceeded the permitted number for a ship of its size by 21 , counting a baby girl born to the Larsens en route . In addition , a fine was to be imposed , but because the immigrants spoke no English and had no knowledge of American laws , President John Quincy Adams issued a pardon , releasing the ship and remitting the fine . Initially settling on land they purchased near the shore of Lake Ontario , about 35 miles (56 km) from Rochester , New York , the passengers were the first of many Norse @-@ Americans who crossed the Atlantic , especially to the northern and western United States .

Ole Juulson Kvale was a Minnesota congressman of the Farmer @-@ Labor Party , and a proud Norse @-@ American . Kvale was a member of the Norse @-@ American Centennial Commission , which was to organize a 100th anniversary celebration of the Restauration 's voyage . This celebration was important to a Norse @-@ American community that had been perceived as antiwar during World War I , and was attempting to display both ethnic pride and assimilation . Kvale , a Lutheran minister , was also a member of the House Committee on Coinage , Weights , and Measures , and in January 1925 approached the Treasury Department , seeking its support for a commemorative coin in honor of the anniversary . He was told that the Treasury would oppose it . Commemorative coins for ethnic heritage groups were unlikely to pass Congress at that time due to the controversy caused by the 1924 Huguenot @-@ Walloon Tercentenary half dollar , seen by some as Protestant propaganda .

On February 3 , 1925 , Kvale and his son Paul met with Treasury officials , bringing a draft bill authorizing the Bureau of the Mint to strike commemorative medals for the anniversary . Acting Mint Director Mary M. O 'Reilly and Treasury Undersecretary Garrad Winston were dubious about the idea of striking silver medals that would be between the quarter and half dollar in size . Paul Kvale suggested making the medal octagonal or hexagonal . O 'Reilly and Winston favored the idea , and , after Congressman Kvale met with legal counsel to the Treasury and with other officials , he was assured of the department 's full support . Kvale also successfully lobbied the Post Office Department for the issuance of commemorative stamps ; he told Third Assistant Postmaster General Warren I. Glover that , in a broader sense , the medal recognized the North American explorations of the Vikings around the year 1000 . Kvale declared that in seeking the souvenir medal and stamps , he was contributing to the " growth of the Norwegian heritage by having it ' preserved

in metal ' as well as ' paper time capsules ' . "

= = Legislation = =

Kvale introduced a bill for a Norse @-@ American medal in the House of Representatives on February 4 , 1925 . It was referred to the Committee on Coinage , Weights , and Measures . On behalf of that committee , Kvale reported it favorably to the full House on February 10 . In the report , Kvale stated that the 40 @,@ 000 medals would be struck without expense to the government , and that Treasury officials supported the bill . " In view of the importance of this celebration to the many descendants of the Norse immigrants into this country , and through these to the State of Minnesota , which is officially sponsoring the event , and to the great Northwest , which they have been such a large factor in developing , the committee believes that such a medal is fitting and proper and that this bill should be enacted into law . "

South Dakota Senator Peter Norbeck also introduced legislation for a Norse @-@ American medal on February 5 , 1925 . It was referred to the Committee on the Library . On the 6th , that committee was discharged of responsibility for the bill and it was referred instead to the Committee on Banking and Currency . Norbeck , on behalf of the Banking Committee , reported the bill favorably and without amendment to the Senate on February 13 . It was passed by the Senate without objection or amendment on the 18th .

The Senate @-@ passed bill then was transmitted to the House of Representatives , and was referred to the Coinage Committee on February 20 . It was brought forward on February 27 , 1925 . When the Speaker , Frederick H. Gillett , asked if there was objection to the consideration of the bill , Ohio 's James T. Begg asked if there was anyone who could give him information about it , and if there was not , he would object . Kvale stated that he could , and when Begg asked if Treasury Secretary Andrew W. Mellon favored the bill , assured the Ohioan that this was so . Kvale had the Senate @-@ passed bill substituted for the one he had introduced , and it received the House 's endorsement without objection or amendment . It was passed into law with the signature of President Calvin Coolidge on March 2 , 1925 .

The act provided for a maximum of 40 @,@ 000 medals , to be struck at the Philadelphia Mint , from design models prepared by the Norse @-@ American Centennial Commission . Medals would be turned over to a designated agent of the commission on payment of the cost of making them . They were to be made subject to the provisions of section 52 of the Coinage Act of 1873 . That section permitted medals of a national character to be struck at the Philadelphia Mint , but forbade Mint personnel from making dies for private medals , and was enacted after Philadelphia Mint Chief Coiner Franklin Peale had for some years run a private medals business on Mint premises , prior to his firing in 1854 .

= = Preparation = =

Kvale hoped that his friend and fellow Minnesotan , Senator Henrik Shipstead , could persuade sculptor Gutzon Borglum to design the medal for no fee or a nominal one . Borglum , who was busy with construction at Stone Mountain in Georgia (he would later sculpt Mount Rushmore) , had designed the Stone Mountain Memorial half dollar ; he had no time to accept the work . Buffalo nickel designer James Earle Fraser , a member of the Commission of Fine Arts , was engaged for a fee of \$ 1 @,@ 500 , about the usual for a commemorative coin .

Fraser prepared designs and submitted them to the Mint ; O 'Reilly sent them to the Commission of Fine Arts on April 14 , 1925 . The commission approved them ; its only suggestion was that the first " the " be removed from the inscription on the reverse , " AUTHORIZED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA " , and this was done . Sketches had been printed in the Minneapolis Journal on March 29 , provoking some reaction from those who felt that the design implied that Norwegians still dressed like Vikings in 1825 , and that the date , 1000 , should be moved from reverse to obverse to eliminate the confusion . The public objections had no effect on events .

= = Design = =

The obverse of the medal shows a Norwegian Viking chieftain who has just come ashore from his ship (seen behind him) and is armed for war , with horned helmet , shield , sword , and sward (dagger) . He is intended to be landing at Vinland , the lands in the Americas explored and to some extent settled by the Vikings about the year 1000 . The helmet is most likely an anachronism , as they are not believed to have been used for two millennia prior to the Vinland landing , and were probably ceremonial , rather than intended for battle . The centennial and the years are recognized on the obverse . The reverse shows a Viking ship , along with the authorization by Congress and the approximate year in which Vinland was settled . " OPUS FRASER " (Fraser 's work) , the artist 's signature , is to the left of the ship .

Numismatist Anthony Swiatek , in his volume on commemoratives , wonders if Leif Erikson , the famed explorer of that period , would not have been a superior choice . He concludes that Kvale would not have supported such a depiction , because " he was interested in pure romanticization . He saw a Viking ship and his chieftain in full regalia " .

Julie Shultz , in her journal article on the 1925 celebration , finds it significant that the medal has nothing to do with the arrival of the Restauration in an already @-@ formed United States , but symbolizes ethnic pride in the early explorers . Noting that one of the stamps depicts a Viking ship and the other the Restauration , she concludes of these three government issues for the celebration : " Though outwardly , these souvenirs were to symbolize the Norwegian immigrant heritage that began in 1825 , they actually invert the dominant narrative by using an American form to proclaim that Norwegians were the first Europeans to land on American soil . "

= = Production , distribution , and collecting = =

Six thousand silver medals on a thin (1 @. @ 6 mm) planchet were struck between May 21 and 23 , 1925 , at the Philadelphia Mint . They were handled like ordinary coins : they were counted , bagged , and transported to the Fourth Street National Bank of Philadelphia for the centennial commission 's use . Between May 29 and June 13 , a total of 33 @, @ 750 pieces were struck on a thick (2 mm) silver planchet . The reason for the two varieties is uncertain ; Swiatek theorizes that the Norse @-@ American Centennial Commission might not have liked how the thin ones looked , or might have wanted collectors to buy two medals . One hundred were struck in gold , on June 3 and 4 ? Kvale received the second one struck . The medals cost the commission 30 cents each for the thin ones , 45 cents for the thick , and \$ 10 @. @ 14 for the gold . The retail price of the thin ones is uncertain (Swiatek estimates \$ 1 @. @ 75) , the thick ones are known to have cost \$ 1 @. @ 25 , and the gold pieces about \$ 20 . They were sold by mail order ; none were sold at the celebrations or in person . There was a sales limit of one per person , but purchasers could buy on behalf of as many family members as they wanted . The thin pieces were not offered for sale until November or December 1925 , and sold mostly to numismatists ? the commission 's secretary , J.A. Horvik , was frustrated that more " Norsemen " were not buying the medal . After the celebrations , Kvale took 5 @, @ 000 medals to New York , hoping to sell them , but was not successful . Of the 100 gold pieces struck , 47 were eventually returned to the Treasury when they could not be sold , and some of the silver pieces (most likely thick ones) were as well .

The Norse @-@ American Immigration Centennial Celebration was held at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds near Minneapolis from June 6 ? 9 , 1925 . Automobile caravans were organized to bring attendees from the Red River Valley , bearing the slogan , " The Norsemen are Coming ! " President Coolidge was present ; he called the Viking explorers " these sons of Thor and Odin " , and told attendees , " the pledge of the Norwegian people has never yet gone unredeemed . I have every faith that through the vigorous performance of your duties you will add new lustre to your glories in the days to come . " The New York Times noted that commemorative stamps and a congressionally authorized medal had been issued for the celebration . " Seldom before has the celebration of a similar event been so honored by the Government , as has this centennial . "

The Times had inaccurately described the medal as " the first commemorative medal to be issued in the history of the mint " . The publicity people for the celebration had billed it as the first medal to be issued pursuant to an act of Congress , but in October 1925 , Mint Director Robert J. Grant learned that a medal had been authorized by Congress for the centennial of American independence in 1876 , and it had been issued in different sizes . He informed Kvale , who was intrigued by the fact that the independence medal had been issued in a 3 @-@ inch (76 mm) size . The congressman felt that the larger size would allow the detail of his medal to be better shown , which would help when one was exhibited in a museum display case . Not all members of his board were enthusiastic about the idea , but between 60 and 75 of these larger medals were struck , likely in December at the Philadelphia Mint , with Kvale undertaking to purchase any that were not sold . They were plated in silver by a private firm in Washington , D.C. , and about 30 were presented or mailed to dignitaries , including one to President Coolidge .

The Norse @-@ American medal is not a coin , and is not legal tender . Due to its similarity to a coin , and the fact that it was authorized by Congress , it is sometimes collected as part of the U.S. commemorative coin series . Though the silver ones can be purchased for less than \$ 100 up to \$ 500 , and the silver @-@ plated one for between \$ 500 and \$ 3 @,@ 500 , the gold specimen has sold for as high as \$ 40 @,@ 000 . Some medals were used as pocket pieces or worn in mountings to the fair , and display damage or wear .