

= Cleveland Centennial half dollar =

The Cleveland Centennial half dollar is a commemorative United States half dollar struck at the Philadelphia Mint in 1936 and 1937 , though all bear the earlier date . Sometimes known as the Cleveland Centennial Great Lakes Exposition half dollar , it was issued to mark the 100th anniversary of Cleveland , Ohio as an incorporated city , and in commemoration of the Great Lakes Exposition , held in Cleveland in 1936 .

In the mid @-@ 1930s , commemorative coins were quickly increasing in value , and Cincinnati businessman Thomas G. Melish , a coin collector , sought to get Congress to authorize several new issues , of which he would be the sole distributor . He was successful with the Cincinnati Musical Center half dollar , from which he profited greatly , and with the Cleveland piece . Brenda Putnam designed the coin , which was approved by the Commission of Fine Arts after suggestions by sculptor Lee Lawrie .

Melish distributed the Cleveland coins via sales at the exposition , at local banks , and by mail order from his office in Cincinnati . Sales were good , and the full authorized mintage of 50 @,@ 000 was struck . Congress had inserted safeguards in the legislation to prevent repetition of past abuses , and though some of the coins were minted in 1937 , there was no change of date , meaning collectors would only have to purchase one piece to have a complete set . Thousands remained in dealer inventories for years , and the coins remain inexpensive by the standards of commemorative coins of the era .

= = Background = =

The area known as the Western Reserve , now in eastern Ohio , was the subject of dispute among the states after the American Revolutionary War , several of which claimed it as part of their territory . Although political rights to the area were given up to the federal government , Connecticut kept land ownership , and used part of its holdings to resettle those whose homes had been destroyed by the British during the war . The remainder was sold to the Connecticut Land Company in 1795 . Moses Cleaveland was a surveyor , a lawyer , and one of the company 's directors . In 1796 , he set out a townsite along Lake Erie , that came to bear his name . In 1830 , a newspaper , to be called the Cleaveland Advertiser , was begun . The editor found the name one character too long to fit in the printing form , and dropped the first " a " in Cleaveland ? a change that was adopted by the public . The town of Cleveland became a city in 1836 .

Thomas G. Melish was a prominent Cincinnati businessman , who had inherited the Bromwell Wire Company . Melish was also a coin collector , who came up with an idea for a commemorative coin that he would control . At the time , commemoratives were not sold by the government ? Congress , in authorizing legislation , designated an organization which had the exclusive right to purchase the coins at face value and vend them to the public at a premium . The result was the 1936 Cincinnati Music Center half dollar , an issue controlled by Melish and issued to commemorate an anniversary that did not exist . Melish sold only a few coins at the issue price , which was high , keeping back most for later sale once scarcity drove the price higher . By 1936 , the market for U.S. commemorative coins had become , according to Q. David Bowers , " as hot as a volcano " and " Congress gave [Melish] permission to have his own commemorative coins minted and to charge the public whatever he liked for them ! " Melish , who had friends in Congress , had in early 1936 also tried to get lawmakers to authorize other commemorative issues that he would control . The only one of these that came to fruition was the Cleveland Centennial half dollar .

= = Legislation = =

A bill for a Cleveland Centennial half dollar was introduced into the United States Senate by Ohio 's Robert J. Bulkley on March 23 , 1936 , and it was referred to the Committee on Banking and Currency . The bill was to honor the 100th anniversary of Cleveland 's incorporation as a city , and the Great Lakes Exposition , to be held there in 1936 . The original bill would have provided for 50

@, @ 000 pieces , which could be purchased from the United States Bureau of the Mint at any time , and could be struck by any or all of the three mints then in operation . The bill was reported out of committee by chairman Alva B. Adams of Colorado on March 26 , drastically amended .

Adams had held hearings on other commemorative coins on March 11 , 1936 , and had heard of the abuses as issuers sought to get collectors to buy their coins . These included getting additional designs authorized (as in the case of the Arkansas Centennial half dollar) and having the coins struck at all three mints . As the law required coins to bear the year of striking , minting them in successive years at multiple mints created more varieties that coin enthusiasts would have to buy to keep their collections complete . The committee heard of the Oregon Trail Memorial half dollar , authorized in 1926 and still being struck in 1936 , and of commemorative coins created with intentionally low mintages as a way of inflating prices . When legislation for a Cleveland half dollar came before his committee , Adams struck the entire bill , after the enacting clause , and substituted a new version . The original legislation had given the Cleveland Centennial Commemorative Coin Committee , controlled by Melich , discretion to have the new piece struck at any of the mints , at any time even over the course of years , in any amount up to the authorized limit of 50 @, @ 000 . Adams 's new text kept the total limit , but set a minimum of 25 @, @ 000 that had to be issued . Adams 's amendment required that all the coins be of a single design , be struck at a single mint (to be selected by the Director of the Mint) . It provided that all the coins be dated 1936 even if struck later , and that the Cleveland committee could purchase no less than 5 @, @ 000 at a time . In a separate report , Senator Adams noted that Bulkley 's original bill " contains certain provisions which the committee recommends be eliminated not only from such bill but also from all subsequent bills relating to the issuance of commemorative coins . "

The bill , as amended , passed the Senate without recorded vote on March 27 , 1936 . The House of Representatives received the bill on April 1 , and referred it to the Committee on Coinage , Weights , and Measures . It was reported back to the House on April 16 , having been amended to require the Cleveland committee to purchase not less than 25 @, @ 000 coins at one time , eliminating the possibility that the committee could order an initial 5 @, @ 000 and then fail to purchase any more . The full House considered the bill on April 23 , 1936 , with the bill reported by John Joseph Cochran of Missouri as an emergency measure . When he asked for unanimous consent to pass the amended bill , Pennsylvania 's Robert F. Rich asked how many coinage bills were going to be considered and if it would not be possible to consolidate a dozen of them into one bill . Cochran replied that he had consulted with Ohio 's Robert Crosser and been informed that " if we do not get the authority to print the coins now it will be useless " . The following day , Bulkley moved that the Senate concur in the House amendments , which it did , and the bill was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on May 5 , 1936 .

= = Preparation = =

Brenda Putnam , a well @-@ known sculptor , was engaged to design the coin . On May 1 , even before Roosevelt signed the legislation , the Director of the Mint , Nellie Tayloe Ross , sent sketches that had been submitted by Putnam to the Commission of Fine Arts . That commission had been charged by a 1921 executive order by President Warren G. Harding with rendering advisory opinions on the designs of public artworks , including coins . On May 2 , commission chairman Charles Moore responded to Ross , giving preliminary approval , and stating that one of its members would work with Putnam as she prepared the necessary plaster models . That representative was Lee Lawrie , who suggested to Putnam that she use stars to represent the cities of the Great Lakes region . Putnam had placed , on the map on the reverse , sketches of buildings to represent the sites of Chicago , Detroit , Cleveland , Buffalo , and Toronto . When Lawrie wrote to Moore to report this and other progress , Moore joked about the coin having an enlarged star for Cleveland ,

At funerals I hear read the Scriptures to the effect that " one star differeth from another in glory " . So I suppose Miss Putnam 's big star for Cleveland refers to the glory rather than the size of the city . Well , as a voter in Detroit I don 't mind , and probably no Chicago person will ever see one of the coins . I am convinced that the whole movement is a coin @-@ collector 's racket that is going on all

over the country .

Putnam 's models were approved by the commission on June 2 , 1936 . The Medallic Art Company of New York reduced the models to half @-@ dollar sized hubs from which coinage dies could be prepared .

= = Design = =

Putnam 's obverse features Moses Cleaveland , in a depiction based on the only known portrait of him , by an unknown artist . Surrounding Cleaveland are two lines of inscription , UNITED STATES OF AMERICA * HALF DOLLAR and MOSES CLEAVELAND * LIBERTY . The designer 's initials , " PB " are beneath Cleaveland 's head . The reverse shows a map of the Great Lakes region with nine stars to represent its cities : Cleveland , Buffalo , Chicago , Detroit , Duluth , Milwaukee , Rochester , Toledo and Toronto . Cleveland gets the largest star , which is transfixes by a compass . Anthony Swiatek and Walter Breen , in their book on commemoratives , stated that " we have not found documentation , but we suspect that the compass was intended to show Cleveland as the center of industry within a radius of approximately 900 miles " , thus encompassing , the authors suggested , not only the Great Lakes cities represented , but New York , Boston , Washington , and St. Louis . The other inscriptions required by law appear in the upper right of the reverse , and 1836 GREAT LAKES EXPOSITION 1936 CLEVELAND CENTENNIAL surround the map

Numismatist David Bullowa , in his early work on commemoratives , stated , " the design of this issue is pleasing ... the obverse and reverse alike are sharply defined , interesting and not crowded " . Art historian Cornelius Vermeule , in his work on U.S. coins and medals , wrote that the half dollar " manages to combine most of the faults found in the better designs of the 1920 's and 1930 's . " After complaining about the flat design and the large amount of lettering on both sides , Vermeule critiqued , " the bust of Moses Cleaveland can only be described as commonplace , and the view of the Great Lakes , bisected by a large compass , is nothing short of incomprehensible . " Nevertheless , Vermeule suggested that Putnam did the best she could to squeeze the required text onto a half dollar , and she might have done better with fewer words to place .

= = Production , distribution , and collecting = =

Melish , in his capacity as treasurer of the Cleveland committee , ordered 25 @,@ 000 pieces in July 1936 . They were shipped from the Philadelphia Mint , where they were struck , on July 20 . In addition to those pieces , 15 coins were struck and set aside for inspection and testing at the 1937 meeting of the annual Assay Commission . Melish had arranged for the Philadelphia Mint to place the first 201 struck into individual numbered envelopes ; these were later placed in special cardboard holders , the first by itself and each two thereafter together , with a notarized statement from Melish .

The Cleveland Centennial and Great Lakes Exposition opened on June 27 , 1936 , and before it closed on October 4 , some four million people passed through its gates . Located on a 150 @-@ acre (61 ha) site by the shores of Lake Erie , there were artistic and industrial exhibits , as well as the usual amusements . The half dollars were sold at the fairgrounds , at Ohio banks , and by mail order from Melish 's office in Cincinnati . Editor Lee Hewitt commented in the Numismatic Scrapbook , " it seems strange that Mr. Melish , living in Cincinnati , should be the distributor of the Cleveland issue . " The Cincinnati Musical Center coin had quickly sold out , the pieces Melish allowed on the market many times oversubscribed , but for the Cleveland piece , " Melish 's sales strategy had to be very different ; the coins would have to be aimed at the Exposition visitors and the general public at \$ 1 @.@ 50 each , not at his own coterie of greedy speculators " .

Melish sent form letters to collectors warning that his committee had received offers from speculators to buy the entire issue and suggesting they act quickly to get their orders in . By the end of July , Melish wrote that 24 @,@ 000 pieces had been distributed and that the remaining thousand soon would be . Sales were good enough that in February 1937 , Melish ordered the 25 @,@ 000 pieces which remained from the authorized quantity . In addition to those 25 @,@ 000 coins , 15

more pieces were struck , intended for the 1938 Assay Commission . Because of the legislation , the new pieces resembled the old exactly , including bearing the date " 1936 " . So many were produced that thousands were hoarded by coin dealers . In 1942 , Melish offered 16 @, @ 000 Cleveland Centennial half dollars to prominent dealer Abe Kosoff for any advance on face value . Kosoff , who would , after Melish 's death , auction his coin collection , declined .

In 1941 , the Western Reserve Coin Club of Cleveland celebrated its 20th anniversary by countermarking 100 Cleveland Centennial half dollars with a special design . The Secret Service objected , and many were destroyed . The club made similar markings for its 50th and 75th anniversaries , without government interference . The Cleveland Centennial coin is the most common commemorative of the many different designs struck in 1936 . R.S. Yeoman 's A Guide Book of United States Coins , published in 2015 , lists the issue at between \$ 215 and \$ 300 , depending on condition . An exceptional specimen sold at auction in 2014 for \$ 4 @, @ 700 .