



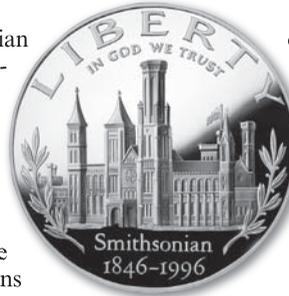
“My Two Cents’ Worth”

by Ed Reiter



TRIBUTE TO A TREASURED CURATOR

For 90 years, the Smithsonian Institution—affectionately known as “The Nation’s Attic”—has been home to a treasure trove of coins and related objects. They make up what is known as the National Numismatic Collection, and for much of the last century, significant portions of that collection have been on view for visitors and available for study by researchers.



Smithsonian 150th Anniversary silver dollar

That visibility was sharply curtailed in 2004, when Smithsonian officials closed the popular “History of Coins and Medals” exhibit after a 40-year run in order to free the space for a non-numismatic display centered around “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

The outlook brightened in 2009, when the Smithsonian opened a modest “Stories on Money” exhibit on the first floor of the National Museum of American History, the same Washington building where the Numismatic Collection had been housed until 2004. And now, thanks to a \$1.5-million endowment provided by numismatic donors, plans are going forward for an expanded gallery—three times larger than the present exhibit area—that’s scheduled to open in the spring of 2015 in a newly expanded part of the same museum.

Most of the material showcased in the gallery will come from the existing collection, which contains more than 1.5 million coins, medals, bank notes and related items. Only about 6,000 of these have ever been on public view at any given time, but past displays have featured some of the greatest rarities in U.S. numismatics, including the unique 1849 Liberty double eagle (\$20 gold piece) and two examples of the ultra-rare 1933 Saint-Gaudens double eagle.

Recently, the curatorial staff of the Numismatic Collection came up with the idea of freshening it, and strengthening weaker areas, by launching a new endowment fund in the name of Richard G. Doty, the collection’s senior curator, who died in June at the age of 71. Smithsonian officials approved the idea, a numismatic patron underwrote the cost of full-page ads in hobby periodicals and a fund drive is now under way to solicit contributions large and small.

“The government gives zero dollars to exhibitions at the Smithsonian,” said Karen M. Lee, a numismatic curator who worked

closely with Doty at the Museum of American History.

“All of the museums here have to raise their own funding for exhibits, websites, educational outreach and other programs. Federal dollars go only to fund curatorial positions, keep the lights on in the buildings and run the infrastructure of the museums, but never for any exhibits. We rely on private

donations to pay for those.”

The staff conceived the notion of a Richard G. Doty Acquisitions Fund partly as a way of reinvigorating the collection as the new gallery opens and partly as a memorial to Doty, who was warmly regarded not only by co-workers but also by his wide circle of numismatic friends.

“Dick’s death saddened us greatly,” Lee said. “But it also gave us special motivation to honor his memory by carrying on his work on the gallery and the collection. These were projects close to his heart, and we want to make sure they get the same loving care that he would have given them if he were here.”

Despite its vast size and the number of major rarities it embraces, the National Numismatic Collection has some surprising holes, according to Lee.

“There are gaps in the collection,” she said, “in terms of what we want to be able to put on display and use as teaching objects. For example, our Morgan dollar collection is pretty pedestrian—and what we’re lacking are not necessarily expensive big-ticket items, but interesting varieties that would appeal to the public and help researchers.”

Lee expressed gratitude for the generous donations from coin hobby sources that made the new gallery possible.

“We raised \$1.5 million totally through the numismatic community,” she declared. “People stepped up to the plate, they’re ardent supporters and we cannot honor them enough. That funding has enabled us to create a permanent gallery that will house the collection for the next 20 years.

“The Doty Fund will help us acquire new objects to increase the vibrancy of the collection even farther into the future.”

To donate, visit <http://amhistory.si.edu/donate/doty.cfm> or contact Amy Scerba Karaszia at KarasziaA@si.edu or (202) 633-4334. ☺

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