
Medals of the 1893 World's Fair

When a collector attempts to build a collection, he realizes how scarce some specimens really are. Then he decides on another course of action.

by Donald Scarinci

THE 1893 WORLD'S Columbian Exposition held in Chicago was the most successful world's fair up to that point, with a constant stream of visitors, events and participants. It not only was a celebration of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America, but also a celebration of America's industrial strength.

The fair saw the striking of the first United States commemorative coins, as well as many medals associated with the event. Perhaps the most well known and most important medal made for the 1893 World's Fair were those created by renowned sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and presented to award recipients. As most collectors know, the reverse was rejected by United States Treasury officials, who turned to Mint Chief Engraver Charles Barber to create a new reverse design. The result was not a collaboration of the two artists, but a rivalry of two separate designs.

Notwithstanding production delays caused by the designs of the medal, Congress anticipated that this piece would be widely reproduced, so it enacted a law to prevent such action. Nathan N. Eglit notes in his book *Columbiana the Medallion History of Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Exposition of 1893* that, "since this was an official government mint issue special permission had to be secured from the Treasury Depart-



An overall view of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition exhibit grounds. The fair drew a constant stream of visitors, a large number of exhibits and, at the time, an unprecedented number of events.

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The reverses of three varieties of 1893 World's Columbian Exposition medals were designed by U.S. Mint Chief Engraver Charles Barber. A 38mm bronze specimen (top)— HK-233 graded MS-65 by NGC—is the finest known and has the more common reverse with C. EMMERICH & CO. Another bronze variety (center) has the less common CHAS. EMMERICH & CO. The third variety (bottom)—a gilt-bronze, 38mm medal with W.W. KIMBALL CO.—is very rare, with only two known.

ment by exhibitors winning awards to reproduce this medal for advertising purposes. By act of Congress passed March 2, 1895, provision was made for punishment by fine or imprisonment to reproduce this medal by photography, lithography, electrotyping, drawing or other means without such special permission.”

Perhaps this unprecedented legislation led to few overall varieties of the official award medal for the 1893 fair. There are only about seven different varieties in all sizes currently known.

The most common variety of the official 1893 World's Columbian Exposition award medal is the 76.3mm bronze version, which came in a white metal case. (It is cataloged as Eglit 90; Baxter 87; Marqusee 348.) The medal in this size also was produced as a uniface specimen that could be placed on plaques. The two halves are sometimes found joined to make a single medal that has the appearance of a cast variety.

Small medal varieties are known to exist—two 38mm bronze, a 38mm gilt bronze, a 38mm silver-plated bronze and a 26mm silver. These smaller pieces often were used for advertising.

One such example of this use is the 38mm bronze specimen with the common reverse inscription C. EMMERICH & CO. (It is cataloged as Eglit 19 and HK-223.) It is the only readily available small-size variety, with approximately 500 known. They are decidedly rare finds in high grades, with John Raymond listing only 64 known and only six in uncirculated grades. However, Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC) has listed 16 of these bronze medals in uncirculated grades—in Brown, three each in grades MS-62, MS-64 and MS-65, and five in MS-63; and in Red-Brown, one each in MS-62 and MS-64.

The 38mm bronze medal also exists with the less common reverse inscription CHAS. EMMERICH & CO. An example of this medal—struck from broken dies—recently was auctioned by Stack's on March 2 as Lot 365. (It is now in the author's collection.) The cataloger wrote, “The C. EMMERICH & CO. name plate was removable from the die so other companies could be sponsors and new medals made. Perhaps this particular version with C. EMMERICH & CO. was removed in favor of the CHAS. (version) late in the production run. This (latter) version of the ever-popular medal may indeed be rare.”

Although unlisted in the second edition of Harold E. Hibler and Charles V. Kappen's book *So-Called Dollars*, there is a 38mm, silver-plated, bronze medal from the fair with the reverse inscription C. EMMERICH & CO. This medal is very rare, with only three known at the present time. In addition to the uncirculated one in the author's collection, there are two other examples of this variety. One is from Charles Kirtley's June 11, 1988, Sale 36, Lot 164. The other example is from Kirtley's October 17, 1992, Sale 89, Lot 2186. According to Raymond, the plating is partially worn off both specimens.

The gilt-bronze, 38mm medal is extremely rare, with only two examples currently known. One was graded by NGC as MS-63, while the other one, which is a nicer piece, is still raw. The reverse inscription on these two

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known pieces is W.W.KIMBALL CO. The medals presumably were made for advertising purposes, like the small bronze alloy variety, but not much else is known about them.

Two 26mm silver medals are known to exist. One specimen from this variety was graded by NGC as MS-60. The other piece remains raw, and its condition is unverified. Because of the size of this medal, the space for the reverse inscription is smaller than that found on larger varieties. Thus, the inscription on this medal is in two lines, and, because it is so small and somewhat worn, it unfortunately is illegible. Further research is needed to determine the origin and circumstances of this medal's issue. The gilt-bronze and these small silver varieties also remain unlisted in Hibler & Kappen.

Medal Descriptions

The following descriptions are from *Columbiana the Medallie History of Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Exposition of 1893* by Nathan N. Eglit. The images at the right—the obverse and reverse of the 38mm bronze variety—were used because they more clearly show the designs of Saint-Gaudens and Barber.

Saint-Gaudens' obverse depicts a full length figure of Columbus landing on soil of the New World he has discovered. He is clothed in armor covered by a short cloak of the type worn in that period. Behind him can be seen three figures who have followed him ashore from a boat, part of which appears. On a rectangular plaque to his right is the inscription CHRISTOPHER / COLUMBUS / OCT XII / MCCCCXCII. Above this plaque are the pillars of Hercules and the inscription between them PLUS ULTRA. In small letters at the lower edge of the medal, is the inscription AUGUSTUS SAINT GAUDENS FECIT.

Barber's reverse depicts two angels separated by a globe atop a rectangular plaque, on which is inscribed: WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION / IN COMMEMORATION OF THE / FOUR HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY / OF THE LANDING OF COLUMBUS / MDCCCXII-MDCCCXCIII. Two erect flaming torches are on either side of the plaque, and below it is Columbus' largest ship, the *Santa Maria*. In exergue is inscribed C.F. BARBER FECIT. In a band on the lower part of the medal is inscribed to: C. EMMERICH & CO.

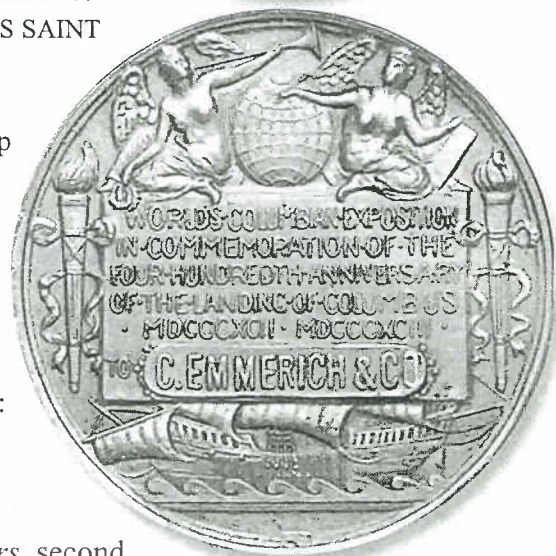
Sources

Hibler, Harold E., and Kappen, Charles V. *So-Called Dollars*, second edition. Clifton, NJ: The Coin & Currency Institute, Inc., 2008.

Raymond, John. E-mail to author, January 14, 2010.

www.socalleddollar.com.

www.socalleddollar.com/abWorldsFairs.html.



○ Bronze variety with Saint-Gaudens' classic obverse, and Barber's reverse with C. EMMERICH & CO.