

PEACE DOLLARS

ICONS OF POST-WORLD WAR I

The ANA spearheaded a \$1 coin to commemorate the termination of the “war to end all wars.”

POISON GAS. ROLLING TANKS. A death toll in the millions. World War I challenged Americans both mentally and physically. When an official armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, many called for an icon celebrating the end of the war and a new beginning of peace and prosperity.

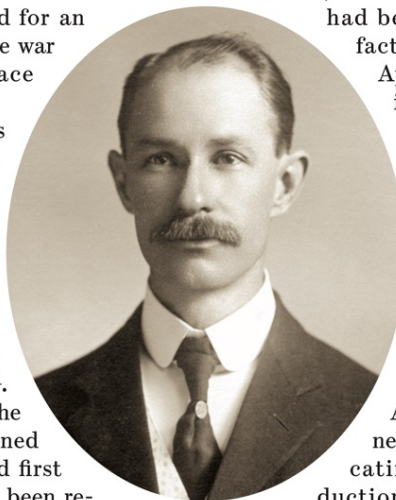
One of the greatest symbols of a country is its coinage, and some citizens called for a commemorative coin to mark the end of hostilities. Efforts for the issuance of a “Peace” coin were spearheaded by members of the American Numismatic Association, most notably Frank G. Duffield and Farran Zerbe. The resulting Peace dollar, designed by Anthony de Francisci and first issued in 1921, has long since been regarded as the ultimate symbol of the American cultural desire for world peace.

Many collectors credit an article in the November 1918 issue of *The Numismatist* authored by Editor Duffield as the inspira-

tion for the Peace dollar. He called for a “victory coin” to be issued as a circulating commemorative “in such quantities that it will never be rare.” At the time, he likely was not thinking of a dollar coin, because coinage of that denomination had been suspended since 1904. In fact, the Pittman Act, passed on April 23, 1918, called for the melting of 350 million silver dollars.

Although the seed for the iconic Peace dollar was planted in 1918, it would not come to fruition until 1921, thanks to the efforts of many additional ANA members.

Sentiment for a Peace coin grew steadily among numismatists, and several letters appeared in the pages of the ANA’s official journal over the next few years—some even advocating resuming dollar coin production. Duffield published a letter written by member M. Sorensen in May 1919 that echoed his call for a commemorative. Sorensen asked, “Why don’t [doesn’t] our Government issue a Victory Dollar?” Enthusiasm for such a coin was certainly



▲ EDITOR OF *THE NUMISMATIST*
Frank Duffield called for a “victory coin” commemorating the end of the great war and the desire for peace.

PHOTOS: ROBERT B. KELLEY (COIN) & ANA ARCHIVES

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the United States had never formally declared peace with Germany.*

extant, though no formal proposals were put forth until August 1920 at the official ANA convention in Chicago.

At the convention, a paper written by numismatic entrepreneur and ANA Past President Farran Zerbe entitled “Commemorate Peace with a Coin for Circulation” was presented to the Board of Governors by ANA President Moritz Wormser. The full text was republished in the minutes of the Board meeting in the October 1920 issue of *The Numismatist*. Zerbe noted that “a commemorative coin for general circulation would be a novelty.” He continued by emphasizing that previous commemoratives were sold at a premium over face value and did not circulate among contemporary coinage. He asked for acknowledgment of America’s “mighty moral force” in ending the battles of the Great War. This special issue was to commemorate our victory and depict our influence for peace. Certainly such a coin would be a great expression of America’s resolve.

Since President Theodore Roosevelt’s call for a renaissance in American coinage designs resulted in an open competition and some of the most outstanding artistic works in U.S. history, Zerbe advocated a contest among famous artists and sculptors. He proposed the half dollar as the “common choice” for the coin, noting that any commemorative should be “of good size for best art effects.” He even included a provision regarding a possible dollar, noting specifics of the Pittman Act that required silver purchased from domestic sources be coined to replace the millions of melted dollars. One statement from Zerbe’s paper is particularly amusing in retrospect—“I do not want to be misunderstood as favoring the silver dollar for the Peace Coin,” stated Zerbe, reiterating his prior stance that America had no need for a dollar coin.

ANA President Wormser and the rest of the Board were suitably impressed by Zerbe’s paper and formed the Peace-Victory Commemorative Committee to initiate Congressional action. Five

men were asked to serve on the committee. Naturally, Zerbe was selected; ANA member Judson Brenner was asked to chair the committee, and important Association members J.M. Henderson and Howland Wood were also invited. Congressman William Ashbrook of Ohio participated as the Congressional liaison. In December 1920, the committee met with Congressman Albert Vestal, chairman of the House Committee on Coinage, Weights and Measures. Although Congress supported the idea of a Peace coin, the United States had never formally declared peace with Germany, so the idea seemed to be in peril.

America ceased military operations against Germany on November 11, 1918, but did not sign a peace treaty until August 1921 or officially declare peace until November 1921. However, economic and political forces of the time, too numerous to discuss here, prevented the United States from signing the Treaty of Versailles, which formally ended World War I. Thus, a separate agreement was required before the issuance of a coin commemorating such peace. After the agreement was formally adopted by Congress, Joint Resolution 111 was presented on May 9, 1921.

◀ **FARRAN ZERBE WROTE** a paper entitled “Commemorate Peace with a Coin for Circulation” that was presented to the Board of Governors during the August 1920 ANA convention in Chicago.



PHOTO: ANA ARCHIVES

This legislation resolved that “all standard silver dollars coined under the provisions of [The Pittman Act]... be of appropriate design commemorative of the termination of the war... Each stand-

ard silver dollar of such design shall be known as the ‘Peace Dollar.’” This resolution marked the official birth of the name of the commemorative.

Unfortunately, the measure was defeated in Congress. Luckily, the Coinage Act of September 26, 1890, allowed for design changes without Congressional approval after the current coin circulated for 25 years. The ANA Committee and Congressman Vestal appealed to Director of the U.S. Mint Raymond T. Baker, who agreed with



▲ **THE OBERSE PORTRAIT** on the Peace dollar was a composite of classic Liberty models. Contemporary newspaper accounts claimed it was based on the artist's wife, Teresa Cafarelli de Francisci (above).

their proposals. Secretary of the Treasury Andrew William Mellon approved a design change for the dollar, and President Warren G. Harding issued an executive order in July 1921 requiring that new designs for medals and coins be submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts. However, as a formal proclamation of peace with Germany had not been yet made, the Mint thought it prudent to forestall efforts to issue the Peace dollar. Finally, President Harding announced the ratification of the formal peace agreements with Germany in November, and the process of designing the dollar was set in motion.

On November 23, the Mint sent invitations to eight prominent artists and sculptors, asking them to participate in a closed competition to design a coin "to be known as the Peace Dollar," which "in some way represented Peace or Limitation of Armaments." Each of the competitors had already designed (or would later design) a coin for the U.S. Mint—Robert Aitken (Panama-Pacific Exposition \$50), Victor Brenner (Lincoln cent), John Flanagan (Washington quarter), Anthony de Francisci (Maine Centennial commemorative half dollar), Henry Hering (assistant to Augustus Saint-Gaudens who completed much of the work on the famous double eagle), Hermon MacNeil (Standing Liberty quarter) Adolph Weinman (Walking Liberty half dollar) and Chester Beach (Hawaiian Sesquicentennial commemorative half dollar). The artists were given only until December 12—merely three weeks—to create finished designs. (Unfortunately, most of the original plasters have been lost over time, except for Anthony de Francisci's.)

According to the Smithsonian Institution, the



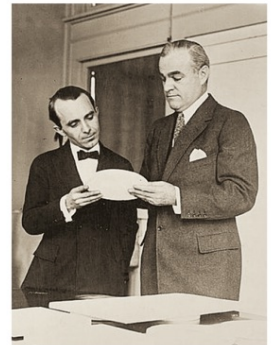
▲ **THE ORIGINAL PLASTERS** presented by Anthony de Francisci to the design committee were the unanimous winners of the competition. He was directed to prepare the finished models under the direction of sculptor James Earle Fraser.

obverse portrait was based on a Saint-Gaudens' work, *Nike Erini*. Contemporary newspaper accounts claim the portrait is based on de Francisci's wife, Teresa. In a 1973 interview with Mrs. de Francisci (nee Cafarelli), numismatic author Ed Reiter quoted her: "I was just an accessory. And really, my husband wasn't making a portrait of me. What he wanted was a portrait of liberty—an idealized portrait of what it represented to him." One may also see a resemblance to the Statue of Liberty, gifted to America by France in the 1800s—although the idea of de Francisci's wife being the symbol of peace and liberty certainly has a romantic quality.

According to his wife, de Francisci never expected to win the competition. He jokingly told 50 of his friends that if he won, he would give them each one of the new Peace dollars. Perhaps it was prophetic, but he did stay true to his word and distributed the promised coins. In fact, he and his wife never saved one for themselves.

Although the public was quite enthusiastic about a new icon for peace in the form of a dollar coin, the original design was blasted by the press. The December 21, 1921, issue of *The New York Herald* featured a scathing editorial entitled "The Broken Sword." The author of the piece implied that the broken sword clasped in the eagle's talons symbolized impotence, weakness and defeat, saying "a sword is broken when its owner has disgraced himself... when a battle is lost... or when the man who wears it can no longer render allegiance to his sovereign."

Letters and postcards from the general public lamenting the design choice began flooding the offices of government officials. Apparently, the pain and memories of wartime were still fresh in



▲ **SCULPTOR** Anthony de Francisci (left) and Director of the Mint Raymond T. Baker inspect a plaster model of the Peace dollar.

PHOTOS: WWW.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/NARA COLLECTION

Everything was completed by December 23. Morgan had to modify the reverse by hand, and he did so with incredible skill.

► **THE CONTROVERSIAL** design featured an eagle clutching a broken sword in its talons. This was intended to comply with the Mint's request for a figure "representing Peace or Limitation of Armaments," but many saw the broken sword as an unpatriotic symbol of defeat.



the minds of the American people. Realizing the potential public-relations nightmare, the Mint rushed to change the design. In its haste to produce the coin by the end of the year, the Mint had already begun making hubs from the plaster models with the broken-sword reverse. De Francisci did not have the requisite skills to re-engrave a master hub, so he merely supervised the work of Chief Mint Engraver George Morgan.

Everything was completed by December 23. Morgan had to modify the reverse by hand, and he did so with incredible skill. (This fact was essentially unknown until the release of Roger Burdette's 2005 book, *Renaissance of American Coinage, 1916-1921*.)

The final reverse design featured an eagle seated on a mountaintop, gazing peacefully into the distance. The first rays of the dawn of a new era of peace and prosperity peek out from the horizon. Numismatic researchers Leroy Van Allen and A. George Mallis claim the rays are the first sunrise of an "era symbolic of the abolishment of war and perpetuation of peace." The word "PEACE" is prominently featured on the rock atop which the eagle is perched. The obverse was slightly modified by replacing the Roman numerals with Arabic numerals, and revising Liberty's face and chin.

Finally, the Mint was ready to produce the coin, and the first Peace dollar was struck on December 28, 1921. Only about a million coins were produced with the 1921 date, which is impressive considering they were made for only four days. The low mintage makes the 1921 issue one of the key dates in the series.

The intent was to create a coin emblematic of liberty and peace. With its beautiful design, plentiful mintages, and creative symbolism and allegory, the Peace dollar has become strongly

associated with America's ideals of peace and democracy. In fact, counterstruck examples were privately issued for the 1978 Camp David Peace Summit, and similar examples were made for peace agreements in 1993 and 1995.

The role of the American Numismatic Association and its members in the creation of the Peace dollar cannot be understated. Frank Duffield, as editor of the Association's flagship publication, first published his desire for a coin symbolic of peace and the end of the First World War. Farran Zerbe's 1920 letter served as the formal impetus to spur the Association toward Congressional action, and the influence of the ANA's Peace-Victory Commemorative Committee led to the coin's ultimate creation.

The coin graphically represented America's culture and values in the postwar years. It continues to reflect them to the present day. ■

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◀ **MINT ENGRAVER** George Morgan modified the final reverse by hand under de Francisci's watchful eye. Morgan removed the broken sword and strengthened the sun's rays.

PHOTOS: ROBERT B. KELLEY (COIN) & NARA COLLECTION