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Depression-inspired wooden nickel from the state of Washington was the 1933 issue from Blaine, shown in obverse and reverse



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WOODEN NICKELS - take 'em!

A HISTORY OF WOODEN MONEY

WHO EVER FIRST SAID " Don't take any wooden nickles" was obviously not a numismatist, for if he were he would know that wooden money forms an interesting and important part of collecting. As long ago as the Byzantine Empire wood was used for making money. The Byzantines were great traders and found wood a convenient and easily obtainable means of exchange. In the eastern areas of the ancient world, wood was also used as a means of exchange although the value of the money was seldom stabilized. The media of exchange reflected the unstable situation that existed in the last few centuries before Christ.

The wooden tally sticks of England and China are the best known examples of wooden odd and curious money. In England, willow tally sticks were used in the late Middle Ages, and in Asia they were employed as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century. These sticks, made of light wood could be marked to indicate the amount of money that was due. The sticks were then cut in half lengthwise by the creditor who kept half and gave the other half to the debtor. Wooden money was used almost exclusively in Asia. Japan issued necessity money in wood during the Russian-Japanese war. Other countries to issue wooden money were Tibet, China, and areas in Africa and the South Seas.

During the post World War 1 depression in Europe, wooden money was used as a medium of exchange. This money was similar to well known porcelain tokens that were issued in the period that found German and Austrian currency worthless.

It was also because of depression that wood was used in the United States to make money. The city of Tenino Washington, in Thurston County issued the first wooden money in the U.S. in 1931. This allowed the people of the city to have a medium of exchange to replace the frozen assets of the bank. Besides being an easily obtainable medium of exchange, it enabled the Chamber of Commerce of Tenino to make the most of the fact that their city had issued the long maligned wooden money. This currency was issued in the denominations of 25¢, 50¢, \$1.00, \$5.00, and \$10.00. They were issued in various series starting with the December, 1931 set.

The number of pieces printed varied from 105 of the December, 1931 ten-dollar pieces to 5000 of the April, 1932 twenty-five cent pieces. In order to protect against counterfeiting the signatures of the three trustees of the bank were stamped on the issues. The rectangular tokens were printed by Tenino's newspaper and made of Sitka spruce with a sheet of paper in between the two pieces of wood.

Blaine, Washington issued the first wooden nickel in 1933. This issue was also made for the purpose of assisting the depression stricken people of the city. It commemorated the Peace Arch, under which President Johnson and Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson signed a treaty for mutual use of the Columbia River, when they were in office. Today both the Tenino and Blaine issues are desirable numismatic items. When one compares the December, 1931 \$10.00 Tenino piece with a total issue of 105 to the 1931 S Lincoln cent with an issue of 866,000 it is obvious how scarce these pieces are.

The Tenino and Blaine issues brought a great deal of publicity to wooden money. Orders from all parts of the world poured into these cities.

It was not long after therefore, that some enterprising individuals sought to take advantage of the publicity gotten by the wooden issues of Washington. These individuals issued several different varieties for the Century of Progress worlds fair in Chicago in 1933. After 1933 wooden nickels were issued in every part of the country for every imaginable purpose. To honor the opening of GONE WITH THE WIND in Atlanta, to commemorate the Kewanee Illinois Hog Days, and to memorialize the death of Will Rogers, to open different types of businesses, to honor birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

It was discovered that issuing wooden money was an easy way of paying for local celebrations and anniversaries. These issues in the late thirties and forties were printed on $2\frac{1}{4}$ x4 inch pieces of light wood. Many of these issues were printed by the John B Rogers Producing Company of Fostoria, Ohio. In the early fifties, however, rectangular issues which were extremely fragile and relatively expensive to print were replaced by thin circular tokens similar to those issued by Blaine in 1933. These



In 1933, the city of Tenino, Washington issued this thin sheet of timber with a \$1 evaluation. President Calvin Coolidge was portrayed in ink.

wooden issues were also too fragile and relatively expensive to print. Since 1957 the most common type of wooden money has been printed on $1\frac{1}{4}$ pieces of harder wood. Usually these issues have a stock design on one side saying "wooden nickel" or a similar slogan and a special design on the other side..

The first Canadian issue of wooden money was issued at Prescott, Ontario, 1938. This issue commemorated the St. Lawrence International Peace Centennial. There were 5000 pieces issued.

In Montreal Quebec, 1880, the Dominion Exhibition issued a black walnut wooden medal. There were only 30 known issued pieces. It is the rarest issue in Canada.

After two decades of obscurity, wooden money again received a great deal of publicity last spring. On May 20, 1964 the First National Bank of Monroe, Wisconsin issued 20,000 wooden nickels which were to be used in place of standard coins because of the coin shortage. The news wire services picked up the story and soon orders for these wooden nickels were flooding into the bank as they had thirty years earlier in Tenino. After all but 450 of these nickels had been distributed, the Treasury Department decided that the bank in Wisconsin was issuing their own money because the tokens had no expiration date, as did all other wooden tokens. Since the Secret Service seized the issue, the 1964 Monroe tokens have become very scarce.

The great success of these wooden issue caused many businessmen to issue wooden nickels to advertise their store or business. It seems that people do not wish to discard wooden money and they do serve as excellent advertising devices.

In order to classify wooden money we can say there are three principal groups of wooden nickels:

- 1.. Depression issues
- 2.. Celebration issues
- 3.. Private advertising issues

In the last fifteen years, wooden nickels have become extremely popular numismatic items. Due to the rise in coin prices many collectors have turned to the vast field of wooden money to find enjoyment while there is no need to spend a great deal of money. In the spring of 1964 the International Organization of Wooden Money Collectors was founded, and it now has about 1000 members in the United States and Canada. In January 1st; 1975 the Canadian Association of Wooden Money Collectors was founded. The Canadian Association has 185 members in Canada and United States, plus one member in Darwin, Australia. Whoever says

" DON'T TAKE ANY WOODEN NICKELS " is passing up an enjoyable aspect of our hobby which affords a vast collecting area at a relatively low cost.



ATTENTION ALL COIN CLUB PRESIDENTS AND EXECUTIVES ETC:

The Ontario Numismatic Association and the Canadian Numismatic Association has joined to gather to promote COIN WEEK CANADA, April 14th; to 19th; 1980 in Ontario.

You will receive from your reginal director a Coin Week Canada Kit. We would like for you to set up displays in your local shopping malls, schools, Libraries, and stores, etc. We would like to see this hobby of Numismatic to grow. In order for it to grow we must work hard to promote our local clubs and our various associations.

Lets have a successful COIN WEEK CANADA, APRIL 14 to 19, 1980 this year.



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SHOW AND BOURSE

FEBRUARY 16, 1980

BARRIE, ONTARIO...

Huronian Numismatic Association's Coin,
Stamp and Antique Show
Bayfield Mall, Bayfield Street,
Barrie, Ontario

MARCH 1st; 1980

NORTH YORK, ONTARIO.....

North York Coin Club's Annual Coin Show &
White Elephant Sale.
North York Community Hall
5090 Yonge Street,
Willowdale, Ontario.

For information... Chairman.. Harvey Farrow
P.O. Box 294, Sta; " A ",
Willowdale, Ontario.

MAY 23 to 25, 1980

Ottawa, Ontario.....

ONTARIO NUMISMATIC ASSOCIATION'S
18th; Annual Convention
Downtown Holiday Inn Tower,
100 Kent Street, Ottawa, Ont;

For information... Host Club... City of Ottawa Coin Club
P.O. Box 6092, Sta; "J",
Ottawa, Ontario.

JUNE 29th; 1980

Brantford, Ontario.....

Brantford Numismatic Society's
20th; Anniversary Coin Show
Bourse - Draws - Exhibits - Awards
Auditorium - Brantford & District Civic
Centre, South Market St;
Brantford, Ontario.

For information... John Barchino
P.O. box 953,
Brantford, Ontario,
N3T 5S1

JULY 22 to 26 1980

MONTREAL, QUEBEC...

C.N.A. 1980 Convention

For information... Guy Lestrade,
P.O. Box 114,
Station "B",
Montreal, Quebec,
H3B 3K9

OCTOBER 19th; 1980

Tillsonburg, Ontario...

Tillsonburg Coin Club's

Annual Coin Show

Tillsonburg Community Centre,
Tillsonburg, Ontario.

For information... Doug Mitchener
1 Myrtle Street,
Tillsonburg, Ontario,
N4G 4G4

JULY 15 to 18, 1981

Toronto, Ontario...

International Paper Money Congress and Exhibition

For information.....Interpam '81'
P.O. Box 704, Sta; "B"
Willowdale, Ontario,
M2K 2P9.

Membership

NEW MEMBERS:

The following applications have been received and if no written objections are received, their acceptance will be acknowledged in the February issue of the Ontario Numismatist.

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1136 Lorne R. Wilson, 903 - 45 Caroline St; N;
Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 2Y6

1137 A. Nielsen, P.O. Box 277, Sta; 'A', Weston,
Ontario, M9N 3M7

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LM 53 Carl Anderson, Willowdale, Ont.

LM 54 Gary Braunwarth, Calgary, Alta.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

C85 CANADIAN LARGE CENTS CLUB,	
(old address)	c/o Leslie A. Winners, P.O. Box 212 Pineville, La. 71360 U.S.A.
(new address)	c/o Louis H Lewry 1161 3rd; Avenue N.W. Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada, S6H 3V1

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Sudbury Coin Shop Ltd;
99 Elm Street, West,
Sudbury, Ontario,
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Cash or trade. Correspondence invited.

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