

# Raleigh Coin Club Newsletter

October 1997

## *A Modern Commemorative Story*

by [Dave Provost](#)

Quick. List all of the modern commemoratives that were issued by the U.S. Mint in 1993. Go ahead. Think. I'll wait. [Insert theme music from *Jeopardy!* here.]

If you're good, or had a *Red Book* handy, you probably came up with a six coin list (twelve if you separate proofs from uncirculated issues): the silver half dollar, silver dollar, and gold half eagle pieces honoring James Madison, and the clad half dollar, silver dollar, and gold half eagle commemorating the 50th anniversary of World War II. If you're not so good, who knows how many you came up with! (Only kidding!)

Either way, I'm willing to bet that you didn't list the Ben Franklin Firefighters Silver Medal among your 1993 commemoratives. In many ways, this attractive medal parallels the modern commemorative coin issues that have been produced by the Mint since 1982, and is a worthy addition to any such collection.

The piece was approved by Congress in 1992 with an authorized mintage of no more than 1.5 million pieces. All of the medals were struck at the Philadelphia Mint, and were produced in both proof and uncirculated conditions. The medals were sold by the Mint during 1993 and 1994; the proof medal sold for \$36.00 (\$33.00 pre-issue) and the uncirculated piece sold for \$32.00 (\$29.00 pre-issue).

The medal is larger than a silver dollar at 1.6 inches in diameter, and contains one full ounce of silver; a standard U.S. silver dollar contains just 0.7734 ounces of silver. The obverse is dominated by a forward-facing portrait of Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of our country. The inscription "Organizer of Our First Fire Service in 1736" is included to the right of Franklin's portrait.

Some collectors have questioned the appropriateness of using Ben Franklin as the medal's main device. I believe this is largely because they are unaware of Franklin's strong ties to the earliest days of organized fire fighting in this country. It was Franklin, in fact, who formed Philadelphia's first fire company in 1736, and it was Franklin again who established the first fire insurance company in the American colonies in 1752. He was also a tireless promoter of fire safety, fire fighting programs.

We are all familiar with Franklin as an author, and of his many pearls of wisdom that have become part of our everyday language -- "A penny saved is a penny earned," for example. One of Franklin's most famous quotes "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," though now used in countless situations, was originally linked to Franklin's community fire prevention efforts. The phrase was intended to raise

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awareness about the dangers of carrying hot coals in open warming pans, a common practice in 18th century America.

The reverse of the medal depicts a modern-day firefighter rescuing a small child. Reverse inscriptions include "To Serve and Protect," "Fire Service Bill of Rights," and "By Act of Congress."

The Mint collected surcharges on the medal, just as they do on the modern commemorative coins, and split the proceeds among an unprecedented eight different groups:

- 1) The Benjamin Franklin National Memorial at the Franklin Institute;
- 2) The Institute of Life Safety Technology and Emergency Management Education;
- 3) The International Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation;
- 4) The International Association of Fire Fighters Burn Foundation;
- 5) The National Fire Protection Association's "Learn Not to Burn" Foundation;
- 6) The National Volunteer Fire Council Foundation;
- 7) The National Association of State Fire Marshals; and
- 8) The International Association of Arson Investigators Foundation.

The medal proved to be popular, and enjoyed a sellout of the available proofs; I believe that some of the uncirculated pieces were still in stock when the medals were taken off sale at the end of 1994.

If you're a collector of Franklin exonomia, attractive silver medals, or even U.S. commemoratives, keep an eye out for the Franklin Firefighters medal at the next coin show you attend -- you may come across 1993's commemorative secret!