

This Day in History... October 7, 1891

American Numismatic Association

On October 7, 1891, coin collectors gathered in Chicago to found the American Numismatic Association. Their goal was practical: to connect people who loved coins but lived too far from major cities to easily find new specimens, reliable information, or fellow collectors.

In the late 1800s, collecting coins could be an isolated hobby. Dr. George F. Heath of Monroe, Michigan, learned about world history through the coins in his collection. A coin could reveal the portrait of a ruler, the name of a nation, a changing political system, or the artistic style of its time. Yet Heath lived in a small community, far from the better-known numismatic societies in cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Montreal.

Those city organizations were active, but they did not serve collectors everywhere. Finding specific coins was difficult. So was identifying them correctly, learning their history, and locating trustworthy people with whom to trade or buy. Heath believed collectors in smaller communities needed a way to communicate with one another.

In 1888, he created that connection himself. Heath printed, published, and distributed a modest four-page leaflet called *The Numismatist*. Its early issues listed coins he wanted, duplicate coins he had available for sale, and short discussions of numismatic subjects. The publication soon found readers among collectors facing the same problems. Its subscriber list grew as people discovered that they were not alone in their interest.

Heath saw that the publication could do more than link individual collectors by mail. In the February 1891 issue of *The Numismatist*, he asked, "What is the matter with having an American Numismatic Association?" He answered his own question with a clear argument for cooperation: "There is nothing like the alliance of kindred pursuits to stimulate growth and interest."



Stamp pair pictures an Indian Head Penny, a quarter, a 20-dollar Gold Double Eagle, and a Morgan-type Silver Dollar.

that its foundation "was not laid for today alone but for the long and distant future as well." Each member, he added, could contribute to its success. The statement reflected the ANA's purpose: to encourage study, share dependable information, and bring collectors into closer contact.

Conventions soon became an important part of that work. Heath suggested gatherings where members could meet face to face, exchange coins, and discuss their shared interest. Smaller meetings were held annually from 1891 through 1895, with additional gatherings in 1901 and 1904. A larger convention in Columbus, Ohio, in 1907 proved successful enough that the organization decided to make its convention an annual event. Today, ANA conventions continue to bring together collectors, dealers, researchers, exhibitors, and young numismatists.

The association gained federal recognition on May 9, 1912, when Congress granted it a federal charter signed by President William H. Taft. That charter defined its educational purpose: advancing knowledge of coins, paper money, medals, and related subjects; promoting the exchange of information; and encouraging cooperation among people interested in numismatics. Congress amended the charter in 1962, allowing for a larger Board of Governors.

In 1967, the ANA opened its national headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It remains home to the Edward C. Rochette Money Museum and the Dwight N. Manley Numismatic Library. The association also continues to publish *The Numismatist*, the journal that grew from Heath's small 1888 leaflet. More than a century after its founding, the ANA still serves the need Heath recognized: helping collectors learn from the money of the past and from one another.



Issued for the 100th anniversary of the ANA.

The proposal drew a favorable response. Heath and other organizers called for a meeting in Chicago. The founding convention took place on October 7 and 8, 1891. Five men—Heath, William G. Jerrems, David Harlowe, J. A. Heckelman, and John Brydon—attended in person and held 26 proxies for others. Together with 61 charter members, they established the American Numismatic Association, usually known as the ANA. William G. Jerrems Jr. became its first president; Heath served as president from 1892 to 1894.

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