

U.S. Mints first steam press and the ANA

The first steam press used by the United States Mint also struck medals for the American Numismatic Association (ANA). It is on display at the Association's Money Museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Gold, silver and copper medals, featuring designs similar to those used on the first pieces minted on the steam press in 1836, were struck on the 164th anniversary of its initial operation in Philadelphia. The Franklin Institute Science Museum in Philadelphia had displayed the press since 1927 and operated on it for many years.

"This is a wonderful piece of numismatic history coming to life," said ANA Education Director Gail Baker, who arranged for the striking and transfer of the press to the ANA. "Not only did this press strike coins for the Mint from 1836 to 1874, but it also struck medals and tokens at world's fairs and expositions for another 30 years."

Prior to the introduction of this steam-powered machine, the Mint produced coins on manually operated screw presses. The semi-automated lever steam press, utilized a toggle or knee joint to speed up the minting process. In one seamless motion, the press mechanically placed a coin blank in the collar atop the lower die, the toggle then turned to allow the hammer die to come down on the blank and strike it with great force before being pushed back up and allowing the coin to be ejected.

Technology improved, however, and by 1874, the Mint discontinued using its first steam-powered press. The following year, George B. Soley, a Philadelphia die sinker, bought the machine to strike commemorative medals and tokens at a variety of events, including the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876; Brooklyn Bridge opening in 1883; Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893; Pan American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901; and St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.

After his death, Soley's wife gave the machine to The Franklin Institute Science Museum, which electrified and operated it for many years, striking medals for visitors to its museum in Philadelphia. The Franklin Institute was founded in 1824 to teach the mechanical arts and celebrate Benjamin Franklin's scientific legacy, from meteorology and music to electricity, optics and aquatics. It also has served as a clearinghouse for inventors and as a repository of patent material, drawings and models. Today the institute is a world-renowned leader in hands-on science education.

The press was displayed at the World's Fair of Money in Philadelphia and then shipped to Colorado Springs, Co., where it is exhibited at the ANA Money Museum.

On behalf of the ANA, Joe Rust, of the Gallery Mint Museum, refurbished and refitted the press, saying, "It was a wonderful experience to work on this press that carries so much history with it. It's a fine machine and in wonderful working order."

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