

Isabella Quarter

Commemorating: The Board of Lady Managers at the World's Columbian Exposition
The 400th Anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in the New World
The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition

Creation: In 1893, (well after the Columbian half was reality) Mrs. Potter Palmer, well known Chicago Socialite, Patron of the Arts, and Grande Dame of the Exposition, suggested to the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives that \$10,000 of the money earmarked for the Board of Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Exposition be given in the form of a special "souvenir" quarter dollar. This request was enacted into a law, passed on March 3rd, 1893, stating the quantity was not to exceed 40,000 quarters of standard weight and fineness.

Controversy: The Board of Lady Managers took complete control of the project and commissioned Kenyon Cox (a well known illustrator) to prepare sketches, which were submitted to the Mint and eventually modified by Charles E. Barber, Chief Engraver at the Mint. The Board was very displeased with the finished quarters, which were minted before the Board had a chance to review a sample strike. The American Journal of Numismatics reviewed the design in October 1893, and stated, "The contrast, between the spirited and admirable sketches submitted and the numismatic art of the coin, was painful". The reverse was also criticized as being mournfully suggestive of the old anti-slavery token stating, "Am I not a woman and a sister".

Distribution: By the Spring of 1893, the newspapers had criticized the Columbian half dollar so severely that little public or journalistic curiosity or interest remained for the Isabella Quarter. At the World's Fair itself, relatively few were purchased because the price was not as good a value as buying the Columbian half for the same \$1.00 and receiving a coin of twice the face value. Another factor affecting the sales of the quarter was that the Isabella quarter was only available at the Woman's Building, while the Columbian half was being displayed and sold at several places at the World's Fair.

Interesting Facts:

1. The first and only US commemorative quarter dollar (although the Washington quarter was intended to be a one year commemorative until the decision to replace the Standing Liberty quarter)
2. The first legal tender United States coin depicting a foreign Monarch.
3. All made from older silver coins being held at the Treasury Department.
4. Never released for public circulation. (unlike the Columbian half dollar)

Other details: Obverse--- Portrait of Queen Isabella

Reverse--- Kneeling woman (supposedly depicting a servant girl from the East Pediment of the Temple of Zeus of Olympia)

Date on coin--- 1893, minted in 1893 at Philadelphia, Pa.

Maximum authorized--- 40,000

Total minted--- 40,023 (includes 23 assay coins)

Total melted--- 15,809

Total distributed--- 24,214 (including the assay coins)

Official sale price--- \$1.00 (between 1920-1930, was selling as low as 65 cents)

Denomination--- Columbian quarter dollar

In 1896, an Isabella quarter had appreciated to \$1.50, prompting an article in the Numismatist to relate "The Columbian quarter dollar is already worth \$1.50. A decade hence a specimen of this coin is likely to fetch \$10.00". It actually took half a century before the Isabella quarter reached the \$10.00 mark. However, in the next half-century, some Isabella quarters rose to a \$1,000. value and beyond.