

- [Section Contents](#)

# Washington Before Boston Medal

obverse

[500 dpi](#)

[250 dpi](#)



reverse

[500 dpi](#)

[250 dpi](#)



[1790]  
Boston

**Baker 48H**

**Stahl No. 22**

Paris restrike, post 1880

Washington Before

Obverse: COMITIA AMERICANA GEORGIO WASHINGTON SVPREMO DVCI EXERCITVVM ADSERTORI LIBERTATIS [at neck truncation] DU VIVIER / PARIS . F.

Reverse: HOSTIBUS PRIMO FUGATIS [in exergue] BOSTONIUM RECUPERATUM / XVII MARTII / MDCCCLXXVI [at bottom right of canon in the foreground] DU VIV

Edge: [a cornucopia] BRONZE. [Click here for image.](#) From the obverse this is on the edge at about 6:15-6:30 with the symbol to the left, at 6:15 and the bottom of the letters to the obverse.

Bronze Weight: [about 2,075 grains] (134.4 grams)  
alignment: 360°

Diameter: 68.3 mm

reverse die

Comments: One of the more encouraging early victories during the Revolutionary War was the British evacuation of Boston on March 17, 1776. During the harsh winter months the former proprietor of the London Book Store on Cornhill in Boston and now Army Colonel, Henry Knox, transported fifty-nine canons and mortars from the recently captured Forts at Crown Point and Ticonderoga in western New York to Boston. As soon as this heavy artillery arrived, Washington mounted the canons on Dorchester Heights overlooking the city. Under the threat of bombardment the British troops fled to Halifax, making Boston the first major city liberated from British occupation. Eight days later, on March 25, 1776, the Continental Congress authorized a gold medal to commemorate this event and appointed a committee of John Adams, John Jay and Samuel Hopkins to prepare a letter of thanks to Washington and to select an appropriate devise for the medal.

## The Early History of the Medal and the *Comitia Americana* Series

On August 14 John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that the previous day he had consulted with the artist Pierre DuSimiti<sup>er</sup> in Philadelphia, who had prepared sketches for the Washington medal (his design for the obverse survives in the Library Company of Philadelphia). On November 29 the Treasury Committee of the Congress authorized a payment to DuSimiti<sup>er</sup> of thirty-two dollars "for designing, making and drawing a medal for

George Washington." Unfortunately, there are no further surviving records regarding this project. Subsequently, Congress authorized several other medals to commemorate military successes over the next three years, but it seems nothing more happened regarding their production. Finally, on July 27, 1779, after three years of inactivity, the Continental Congress, frustrated with the delays, reassigned the task of striking the medals to the Treasury Board, resolving the medals "to be struck without delay." It seems the board quickly realized that due to the war effort it was impossible to obtain the talent and resources in Philadelphia required for the minting of the medals. On September 29, 1779, Robert Troup, Secretary of the Treasury Board wrote to Benjamin Franklin, who was an American Commissioner in Paris, empowering him to supervise and expedite the project. Troup explained, "The impracticability of executing the work in this part of the World obligates the Board to forward them to you with an earnest request to have the Medals voted [by Congress] struck as soon as possible" (quoted in Adams and Bentley, p. 232). By this time Congress had authorized six medals, one for Washington at Boston, another for Gates at Saratoga, three for valor during the assault on Stony Point, July 15, 1779 (Fleury, Wayne and Stewart) and one for Henry Lee at the Battle of Paulus Hook. Troup further explained to Franklin that Lieutenant Colonel François-Louis Teissière de Fleury would be arriving in France to present him with a duplicate copy of the commission and that Fleury may be useful in assisting Franklin with the medals. Fleury did indeed meet with Franklin and requested that his own medal be expedited so that he could receive it before his leave was over and he was required to return to the army. Indeed, on January 29, 1780 Franklin responded to a request from Fleury that his medal be struck with the next week, stating that he had not yet even identified an artist who could produce it! With Fleury asking for some immediate results, Franklin of necessity began by working on that medal, which was completed by August 1780. However, the cost was high, Franklin stated that each die cost 1,000 livres.

With an eye to frugality Franklin decided to save money on the two other Stony Point medals, for Anthony Wayne and John Stewart, by using the same design on all three. Franklin simply had some of the Fleury medals altered by simply changing the name on the medals. This solution was an attempt to accelerate medal production at minimal cost, but the result was not a satisfactory product to award to the American patriots, so new medals were commissioned at a later date. In his letter of August 10, 1780 to Troup, where Franklin mentioned the Stony Point medals were completed, he requested that the Treasury Board supply him with "the Devices proper for the Other medals, the Difficulty of pleasing myself with regard to them occasioning some Delay." Franklin never received a reply to this request and he soon lost interest in the Congressional medal series. He did not take up medal production again until August of 1782, when he undertook a personal venture, to produce the *Libertas Americana* medal commemorating the victories at York and Saratoga. The medal was completed by late March or early April 1783 and celebrated France's assistance to America on the reverse by depicting an allegory of Minerva wielding a spear and holding a shield decorated with the fleurs-de-lis (France), protecting the infant Hercules (America) from an attacking lion (Britain).

Since the Congressional medals were once again put on the back burner, Congress decided to reassign the responsibility for the *Comitia Americana* series to a new commissioner, David Humphreys, who arrived in Paris in September 1784. In 1787 Humphreys produced the Horatio Gates and Nathaniel Greene medals. Following Humphreys' departure from France in November 1785, Thomas Jefferson accepted responsibility for the medals on May 7, 1786. Work began in earnest in early 1789 on the medals for Daniel Morgan and John Paul Jones (by Augustin Dupré); Washington before Boston, William Washington and John Howard (by Duvivier) and then on original medals for Anthony Wayne and John Stewart (by Nicolas-Marie Gatteaux). Nine of the eleven *Comitia Americana* medals were produced by the time Jefferson departed Paris for America on September 27, 1789, with the John Paul Jones medal delivered to Jefferson, in America, by December 15, 1789. The Henry Lee medal was produced in Philadelphia, because Lee's name had been inadvertently dropped from the list that Franklin had forwarded to Humphreys.

Although it was not the first to be produced, the Washington before Boston medal was considered to be the most important and is the largest in the *Comitia Americana* series. A gold specimen was presented to Washington on March 21, 1790 at Mount Vernon, along with a collection of eleven silver medals (the Washington before Boston, Gates, Wayne, Fleury, Stewart, Morgan, William Washington, Howard and Greene medals authorized by congress as well as the 1783 *Libertas Americana* and the 1786 Franklin medals); the gold medal is now in the Boston Public Library, while Washington's collection of eleven silver medals now resides in the Massachusetts Historical

Society. The Washington before Boston medal is 68mm in diameter, far exceeding other varieties, which vary from about 45mm to about 55mm in diameter.

## The Washington before Boston Medal

The obverse of the Washington before Boston medal displays an undraped bust right of Washington based on a bust sculpted by Jean-Antoine Houdon at Mount Vernon in October of 1785 and then transported to Paris in January 1786. Below the bust is COMITIA AMERICANA, which is Latin for "The American Congress." Around the rim is GEORGIO WASHINGTON SVMPREMO DVCI EXERCITVVM ADSERTORI LIBERTATIS. This legend is a continuation of the phrase below the bust, together they translate as: "The American Congress to George Washington supreme commander of the army [and] defender of liberty" (EXERCITVVM refers to a trained and disciplined army, in this case the Continental Army). At the truncation is the signature of the engraver Pierre Simon Benjamin Du Vivier (or Duvivier), DV VIVIER / PARIS . F. (for the Latin FECIT meaning Duvivier made it). The reverse of the medal displays Washington on Dorchester Heights with four of his commanders, all on horseback; it has often been noted the horse hoofs do not align with the grouping of horses. To the far right, two cannon behind a parapet can be seen pointed at the city, while in the foreground two unmounted canon barrels along with some canon balls lay on the ground. Washington points below where we see the British fleet fleeing Boston. The Latin legend HOSTIBUS PRIMO FUGATIS translates as: "For the first time the enemies are put to flight." The Latin phrase in exergue BOSTONIUM RECUPERATUM / XVII MARTI / MDCCLXXVI translates as: "Boston retaken 17 March 1776." To the far right on the canon in the foreground is the engraver's signature DV VIV.

The specimen displayed above is too heavy to be measured on our grain scale so we used a gram scale and calculated the grain equivalent from the actual weight in grams. It is categorized in Stahl's taxonomy as die combination five, consisting of Fuld obverse 2 and Fuld reverse C, made at the Paris mint post-1880. Reverse C is distinguished from later issues in that there are only three hoofs in the background under the center of Washington's horse. There are six varieties in the fifth die combination restrike series. This particular variety, Stahl 22, is distinguished in that the edge stamp (consisting of a cornucopia and the word BRONZE) is at 6:00 o'clock. The example of this variety in Stahl's catalog of the ANS specimens is listed at 168.18 grams. There is a similar variety (Stahl 24) that differs primarily in that Stahl 24 has a die breaks above HO in the reverse legend.

## The Dies

Because of the several dies employed over the years it can be difficult for someone to identify a specific striking of a Washington before Boston medal. The following information is added to assist in understanding the general chronology and basic die combinations of this medal. It is based on Alan Stahl's 1996 essay, where one can obtain further details and numerous illustrations of specific varieties. Further, the following discussion also includes updated findings on early varieties from the 2007 monograph by John W. Adams and Anne E. Bentley. Alan Stahl, working on earlier pioneering research by George Fuld, described four obverse dies (1-4) and six reverse dies (A-F) joined in eight combinations. These combinations are found in 31 different varieties, based on strikings in different metals and reworking or deterioration of the dies.

## Original Issues

The initial obverse die created for the Washington before Boston medal was rejected because the lettering included a round U in the legend rather than the preferred epigraphic V. This obverse die is also the only variety to include an exergue line below the bust. A white metal proof specimen of this variety survives in the Boston Public Library. Along with this rejected obverse, the initial reverse die contained an engraving error, the Roman numeral date lacked a D, appearing as MCCLXXVI (1276) instead of MDCCLXXVI (1776). Since the white metal specimen in the Boston Public Library displays both error dies, while an early joined shell specimen at the ANS was produced from a new obverse die using the epigraphic V, along with the error date reverse, it is surmised that the U obverse was the initial obverse die but was abandoned before the error reverse. Thereafter, the error date was discovered and a new reverse die was produced. Thus, the first production striking of the Washington before Boston medal employed the second set of dies, but, since they were the first production dies, they are usually designated as obverse 1 and reverse A. Stahl refers to the marriage of these two dies as die

combination 1. These were the dies used for the unique gold specimen given to Washington and for silver and bronze issues of the medal.

The one surviving shell specimen with the epigraphic V obverse (obverse 1) paired with the date error reverse (reverse B), mentioned above, is designated by Stahl as die combination 2. The precise chronology of this specimen has not been resolved. It may have been a pre-production prototype or, as Stahl suggests, a later reuse of the date error reverse.

At some point the error date reverse (die B) was recut to correct the date. The recut corrected reverse of die B can be distinguished from the reverse die used in production (die A) by the alignment of the inscription in exergue. On the production reverse (die A) the final I in MARTII is aligned with the second R in RECUPERATUM in the previous line, while on the corrected die (recut die B) that same final I is aligned with the second E rather than the R in RECUPERATUM. There are at least three surviving bronze specimens joining obverse 1 with the recut reverse B, which is Stahl's combination 3. Specimens struck with the corrected reverse of die B exhibit areas where the die had rusted and show evidence that there was significant buckling of the die in the upper region of the reverse field. This deterioration of the die has caused some to suggest the striking of these specimens dates to the nineteenth century. Adams believes the evidence on the coins suggests the deterioration of the die was rapid and dates the striking of these specimens to within four years of the initial production.

In addition to his analysis of the medals, Adams also suggested that due to historical circumstances, it is likely all *Comitia Americana* medal production in France ceased within a few years. Jefferson became Secretary of State in 1790 and continued to be involved in the production of medals until the completion of the Diplomatic Medal in February 1792. This was the final medal commission he negotiated with France; thereafter Jefferson became preoccupied with other matters. During the summer of 1792 the French monarchy was suspended and in September the Convention held its first session as the new ruling body. Additionally, political instability in France made business agreements more problematic, particularly as America under Federalist leadership tried to remain neutral in France's war against Britain and Spain. In 1793 relations became further strained when Edmond-Charles Genet came to America promoting French interests with such fervor that he even lost the support of the pro-French Democratic-Republicans, including Jefferson. The situation deteriorated so much that John W. Adams surmises the first period of production for Washington before Boston medals concluded by 1792 and thus lasted only about four years. Adams suggests all varieties of the three combinations struck during this period should be considered original issues not restrikes.

### **Paris Restrikes: Post-1830 to the Present**

A fourth combination, dating to sometime after 1830, joined obverse 1 with a new reverse, called reverse C. This reverse is easily distinguished in that there are only three hoofs under the center of Washington's horse, rather than four as in the earlier reverses; also, there are no stops in the exergue inscription. The earlier, original issues, of combinations one through three read BOSTONIUM RECUPERATUM / XVII . MARTI / MDCCLXXVI . while combinations four through seven read BOSTONIUM RECUPERATUM / XVII MARTI / MDCCLXXVI (with no stops), although the current version, known as combination eight, once again includes the stops. Stahl mentions combination for issues in copper from 1845-1860, in copper and silver 1860-1879. The dating of examples can often be determined by the small symbol stamped on the edge of the medal: an antique lamp, 1832-1841; an anchor with the letter C, 1841-1842; a galley prow, 1842-1845; a pointing hand 1845-1860; a bee, 1860-1879 and a cornucopia 1880-present.

For the post-1880 period at Paris Stahl listed a fifth combination consisting of a new obverse die, obverse 2, which lacks the die breaks found in obverse 1; this was joined with reverse C.

Stahl's sixth die combination is the current Paris striking, which uses obverse 2 with a new reverse (reverse D). This reverse is similar to the early reverse dies A and B, in that it displays four hoofs under Washington's horse also, in the exergue inscription the second line ends in alignment with the R in the line above, but like the later reverse C, this inscription lacks any stops.

### **American Restrikes: 1863 to the Present**

As explained by R. W. Julian, in the year 1861 the U.S. Mint Director James Pollock attempted to obtain the dies for the Washington before Boston medal, along with dies for other American Congress medals that still resided in Paris (the Paris mint had dies for the George Washington, William Washington, John Howard and John Paul Jones medals). The Paris mint would not give up the dies, but Pollock was able to obtain twenty recently minted restrike bronze specimens of each variety of those four medals. The medals arrived in Philadelphia in March 1862. Pollock offered them for sale to collectors and within a year the supply of the popular Washington before Boston medal was almost depleted. By the spring of 1863 Pollock had ordered the mint's chief engraver, James B. Longacre, to create dies so additional examples of the medal could be produced. Longacre impressed a specimen of the bronze restrike medal obtained from Paris of obverse die 2 joined with reverse C, into gunmetal (a type of bronze) dies. This transferred the central design into the gunmetal but the lettering had to be hand cut into each die. In June 1863, Pollock ordered twenty-five medals struck from the new dies; from the surviving documents it appears production was underway by September 1863. Because the central images in these dies were produced by simply impressing the design into the gunmetal, rather than by engraving the design, the medals made from these dies lacked the clarity and fine lines of the Paris specimens. This is Stahl's combination seven; the 1863 Philadelphia dies continued in use until 1885. Although they had central images based on Paris obverse die 2 and reverse C, the newly cut letters easily identifies them as new dies, designated as obverse 3 and reverse E. The obverse is not only less distinct than the Paris strikes but further, does not display the same die breaks; this variety has a die crack at the end of the ponytail and several flaws at specific letters (Stahl mentions above the G at 7:00, at the D at 11:30, the T at 1:00 and the A at 2:00, among others). Reverse E has the three hoofs (as reverse C) but can be distinguished in that it shows a die crack through the REC in the first line of the exergue. This variety also displays flaws above most of the letters in the legend (all bracketed letters show flaws: [HOSTI]B[US P]RIM[O FUGATIS]).

By the mid-1880s the gunmetal dies had seriously deteriorated, thus mint engraver Charles E. Barber produced a new set of dies modeled on an electrotype of combination 3 (this is variety 1-B with the corrected date reverse, as is clear from a comparison of the punctuation and alignment of the reverse exergue). From a letter written by Barber we know the dies were completed by September 28, 1885. The Philadelphia medals minted from 1885 are Stahl's combination 8, which use these new dies designated as obverse 4 and reverse F. Again, although the central images were modeled on earlier dies the engraver used different letter punches. The obverse lettering is smaller and is aligned somewhat differently in relation to the bust when compared to the earlier dies, while on the reverse the letters are taller and narrowed than earlier dies. The reverse can be distinguished from other restrike varieties in that it displays four hoofs under Washington's horse rather than three and includes stops in the exergue (as are present in reverses A and B but not in the restrike reverses C-E).

**[latest revision March 10, 2010]**

Provenance: Acquired through the Robert H. Gore, Jr. Numismatic Endowment from the Colonial Coin dealer James D. King of Osterville, MA on Nov. 21, 1998.

References: Rulau and Fuld, pp. 46-52; Alan. M. Stahl, "Medals of the *Comitia Americana* Series in the Collections of the American Numismatic Society and Other Public Institutions," in *Coinage of the American Confederation Period*, ed. by Philip L. Mossman, Coinage of the Americas Conference, Proceedings no. 11, held at the American Numismatic Society, New York, October 28, 1995, New York: American Numismatic Society, 1996, pp. 261-346 with the Washington Before Boston medal varieties discussed and illustrated on pp. 264-289; George Fuld, "The Washington before Boston Medal," *TAMS Journal*, vol. 3 (1963) 111-127, (TAMS is the Token and Medal Society); Fuld, "Early Washington Medals," *American Journal of Numismatics*, Second Series, vol. 14 (2002) 105-163 with the Washington before Boston medals on pp. 109-113; R. W. Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint: The First Century 1792-1892*, The Token and Medal Society, 1977, pp. 111-115, especially 114-115; Stacks, *The John J. Fords, Jr. Collection: Part 2*, May 11, 2004, lots 49-53, pp. 42-55 and John W. Adams and Anne E. Bentley, *Comitia Americana and Related Medals: Underappreciated Monuments to our Heritage*, Crestline, CA: Kolbe, 2007, the entire text has bearing on the series and the interrelationship of the medals; on Washington before Boston see particularly, pp. 39-53 and 219-246.



[1783 Georgius Triumpho](#)



[Section Contents](#)



[1791 Washington Cents](#)

