

The Flip of a Coin Changed Oregon Forever

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In the mid-19th century, the area that is now Portland, Oregon, wasn't much more than an endless stand of ancient evergreens rising around the banks of the Willamette River. One day in 1843 or 1844, while traveling from Fort Vancouver to Oregon City by canoe, a pioneer from Tennessee and a lawyer from Boston stopped to rest in a pleasant site that had been cleared of trees.

The Tennessean, William Overton, liked the look of the place, but he didn't have the required twenty-five cents to make a claim on the land. So, he sold half of the 640-acre site to Asa Lovejoy and the two men began to build roads and put up the first buildings on the site that was simply called "The Clearing."



Heads, it's "Portland"

Overton, however, was a traveling man, and when he was ready to move on, he sold his share of the land to Francis Pettygrove of Maine who built a log store that he operated with Lovejoy. In 1845, there were four streets in "The Clearing" and discussion began about what the new town would be named.

Lovejoy, who had been born in Massachusetts, suggested they name the settlement Boston, but Pettygrove, a Mainer, wanted to represent his home state by giving "The Clearing" the name of Portland. The two men couldn't come to an agreement, so they settled on one of the day's

customary methods of dispute resolution: they decided to flip a coin, best two out of

three gets to name the town. After three tosses of an 1835 Large Cent, Pettygrove emerged triumphant and Oregon's soon-to-be largest city was named.

First struck in 1793, the United States large cent was minted each year until 1857 by the Philadelphia Mint. The large cents, which were made of nearly pure copper, were bigger than modern-day quarters. The Portland Penny was one of the new run of "Matron Head" cents, which had been redesigned in 1835 to give Lady Liberty a slightly younger look.



Tails, it's "Boston"

Pettygrove, who made his money in real estate and by trading lumber and grain, went on to become one of the richest men in the Oregon Territory. He kept the lucky cent in his pocket for the rest of his life as a reminder of his good fortune. The so-called "Portland Penny" is on display in the Oregon Historical Society Museum in Portland, Oregon.

Lady Liberty Through the Years Part 1

by Patrick Carpenter

There are many different designs on our nation's coinage that have pleased and fascinated coin collectors for as long as there have been US coins. As to the subjects of those designs, most collectors will recall that the two most frequently used design elements on our coins are eagles and Lady Liberty. We looked at more than eighty different designs of US coins with eagles in our club's newsletters last year. Perhaps now is a good time for us to focus on coins that feature Lady Liberty.