

The Third Side of the Coin: Your Public Library

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)
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When it comes to identifying coins and other forms of money, nothing beats a trip to the library. Being a library patron is important to anyone who hopes to be smarter than television. The internet and the worldwide web are second-rate resources at best. Most of what is on the net and the web is a summary of knowledge that is recorded completely in books.

Your local public library has two parallel collections: Reference and Circulating. Reference books cannot be checked out. Reference books tend to be nicer, more expensive, and more important. Sometimes, a library will have two copies of a book, one for reference and another for circulation. When looking for information, check both the circulating stacks and the reference stacks.

Libraries usually follow one of two common cataloguing methods: Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress. Generally, libraries prefer to assign the same catalog number to a book as recommended by a standard library cataloguer. However, every library is responsible for its own cataloguing.

In Dewey Decimal books are enumerated and books on coins start at 737, near books on fine china and silverware. The stacks begin with general, historical treatments, and continue to modern issues by country. You might find the Krause Standard Catalog of World Coins around number 790. Books on paper money are down the aisle a few steps near books on postage stamps.

According to Library of Congress, books get alphabetic codes with numeric subcodes. Coins are catalogued CJ and are between Calendars and Archaeological Inscriptions. Paper money is way, way over with the books on banking and business, near HB and HG. This is where you will find books on the history of money. You can find books about tokens either among the coin books or among the banking books.

Collectors of tokens know that identifying them is a challenge. Compendiums such as Russell Rulau's list only a minimum fraction, representative of the most common and most rare types. Few libraries have such specialty books, not even the Civil War Token books by the Fulds. However, token collectors do rely heavily on City Directories. Most libraries shelve a couple of older ones. Your state historical society, university, or museum library may also have them going back a century or more.

If your library does not have the books you need, your librarian might be able to arrange an InterLibrary Loan or "I.L.L." Usually a service reserved for card-carrying

patrons, the ILL has some restrictions. Libraries may or may not belong to associations or consortiums or councils that make ILL available. Sometimes colleges and universities will be unable to get a book from the city library, but can get one from a university library in another state. Borrowing times may be short and sometimes you cannot check the book out at all but must use it on the spot.

Public libraries are supported by tax dollars and most libraries are free to anyone who lives within their tax jurisdiction. There are some exceptions.

In Michigan, the Farmington Hills public library grants cards to anyone who works in the town on the theory that businesses fork over a lot of tax money. On the other hand, the State Library of Michigan grants library cards to anyone who lives in the state -- but with some restrictions since the primary purpose of the library is to serve the Legislature.

Some libraries will let you buy patronage. Living in the village of Fowlerville, I paid \$30 to join the Carnegie library at the county seat, Howell.

Libraries tend to discourage donations, except of books that they can sell at their "Friends of the Library" fairs. Librarians decide what to buy based on what gets good reviews in newsletters for librarians. However, if your local coin club is diplomatic, you can arrange to donate high-quality hard-cover editions of the standard references such as The Standard Catalog of World Coins and the Walter Breen Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins. In Livingston County, we did this as a Memorial to a late club member who was known and respected far beyond the collectors guild. Our local coin club donates new Red Books to the school libraries every couple of years.