

Quartergate: the story of the Missouri State Commemorative Quarter



In March of 2001, Missouri's First Lady, Lori Holden announced a contest to design Missouri's State Quarter. 3300 designs were submitted. Decided through a series of votes, the overwhelming favorite design was that of Columbia, Missouri artist, Paul Jackson.

The winning design was sent to the US Mint in May of 2001, but it wasn't until April of 2002 that the Mint engraver's interpretation of the design was revealed. Jackson's original design had been "dumbed down" considerably and even misspelled the word "bicentennial".



Public criticism and embarrassment compelled the Mint to try again...and again. Why did they not just use the original design?

The Mint claimed that Jackson's design was "uncoinable". 32 private mints said this was not true. The National Collector's Mint did ultimately mint Jackson's design.

The US Mint claimed that Jackson's design was "historically inaccurate". Jackson responded that his design was "symbolic" of Lewis & Clark and the spirit of exploration. Critics also pointed out that none of the Mint's attempts were any more historically accurate and that they couldn't seem to get the shape of the Gateway Arch right.

The US Mint claimed that Jackson's design did not survive the review process. In fact, the two committees charged with reviewing coin

designs never saw the original Jackson design, only those of Mint engraver, James Ferrell.

When Jackson asked Missouri's Governor Holden to resubmit his original winning design for review, the Governor refused. He claimed there "never was a contest", despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The first lady said she "never asked for designs, only ideas". But a circular "design template" was included with the official entry form. Jackson led a small public protest at the Missouri state capitol that caught media attention.

Jackson wanted a straight answer to why his original design couldn't be used. The artist continued his protest in Washington D.C, rolling a 4' quarter down Pennsylvania Ave, from the White House to the US Mint. The Mint refused to meet with Jackson to answer his questions.

Frustrated with the government's stonewalling, the artist created stickers of his original design and affixed them to the tail-side of 250,000 quarters. He spent the quarters, gave them away and left a trail of them across America.

When word of Jackson's creative protest reached the US Mint, spokesperson, Doug Hecox called the Associated Press, claiming Jackson was under Secret Service investigation for the Federal crime of defacing money. Apparently more familiar with the law than the US Mint, Jackson returned to Washington to turn himself in to the Secret Service, who was unaware of any such investigation.

US Mint officials did finally agree to meet with the artist, but still refused to answer any direct questions about why the design chosen by the state of Missouri could not be minted. It was however revealed by one Mint spokesperson "to have your initials on a circulating US coin would be worth millions". He said to the artist, "Why would we give you that honor?"

It became painfully clear that the five engravers at the US Mint were claiming the honor of designing all the state quarters for themselves. State artists were only being used to do the research and legwork, and to create publicity for the State Quarters Program, while the US Mint engravers profited from their government service.

In August of 2003, the US Mint released their own version of Jackson's design for the Missouri State quarter. It is a pale comparison to the original. Governor Holden assured Missourians that the Mint would at least fix the shape of the Arch. Sadly, they never did. The Arch is lopsided, and clearly planted on both sides of the river.

Although the US Mint snubbed Paul Jackson, his efforts helped other state quarter artists receive recognition from their states for their work, although not from the US Mint. The official record at the US Mint credits only the engraver with the quarter design.

Following Jackson's protest, the Mint immediately changed the program, eliminating the words "design contest" and the design template. For future state quarters, only written descriptions are accepted. The greedy Mint engravers all resigned, signing lucrative licensing agreements for use of their signature as the official designers of our state quarters.

Governor Holden, who was unpopular for lots of reasons, lost his bid for re-election in the primary, making him the first incumbent governor in Missouri history to lose his party's support for a second term.

Paul Jackson continues to create astounding art for himself and many private entities. He somehow lost the desire for any further government service, stating, "That's what you get when you cast pearls before swine". His stickered quarters continue to surface. Whenever the artist gets a Missouri quarter in change he is reminded of the time he stuck it to the US Mint.

