

Public Law 109–247
109th Congress

An Act

July 27, 2006
[H.R. 2872]

To require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint coins in commemoration of Louis Braille.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Louis Braille
Bicentennial—
Braille Literacy
Commemorative
Coin Act.
31 USC 5112
note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Louis Braille Bicentennial—Braille Literacy Commemorative Coin Act”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds as follows:

(1) Louis Braille, who invented the Braille method for reading and writing by the blind that has allowed millions of blind people to be literate participants in their societies, was born in Coupvray, a small village near Paris, on January 4, 1809.

(2) Braille lost his sight at the age of three after injuring himself with an awl in the shop of his father Rene, a maker of harnesses and other objects of leather.

(3) A youth who was both intelligent and creative and was blessed with dedicated parents, a thoughtful local priest and an energetic local schoolteacher, Braille adapted to the situation and attended local school with other youths of his age, an unheard-of practice for a blind child of the period.

(4) At the age of 10, when his schooling otherwise would have stopped, Braille—with the aid of the priest and schoolteacher—was given a scholarship by a local nobleman and went to Paris to attend the Royal Institute for Blind Children where he became the youngest pupil.

(5) At the school, most instruction was oral but Braille found there were books for the blind—large, expensive-to-produce books in which the text was of large letters embossed upon the page.

(6) Soon Braille had read all 14 books in the school, but thirsted for more.

(7) A captain in Napoleon’s army, Charles Barbier de la Serre, had invented “night writing”, a method for communicating on the battlefield amidst the thick smoke of combat or at night without lighting a match—which would aid enemy gunners—that used dots and dashes that were felt and interpreted with the fingers, and later adapted the method for use by the blind, calling it Sonography because it represented words by sounds, rather than spelling.

(8) Braille adopted the Sonography method instantly but soon recognized that the basis in sound and the large number of dots—as many as 12—used to represent words was too cumbersome.

(9) By the age of 15, and using a blunt awl, the same sort of tool that had blinded him, Braille had developed what is essentially modern Braille, a code that uses no more than 6 dots in a “cell” of 2 columns of 3 dots each to represent each letter and contains a system of punctuation and of “contractions” to speed writing and reading.

(10) In contrast to the bulky books consisting of large embossed letters, Braille books can contain as many as 1000 characters or contractions on a standard 11-by-12-inch page of heavy paper, and to this day Braille can be punched with an awl-like “stylus” into paper held in a metal “slate” that is very similar to the ones that Louis Braille adapted from Barbier’s original “night writing” devices.

(11) Also a talented organist who supported himself by giving concerts, Braille went on to develop the Braille representation of music and in 1829 published the first-ever Braille book, a manual about how to read and write music.

(12) 8 years later, in 1837, Braille followed that publication with another book detailing a system of representation of mathematics.

(13) Braille’s talents were quickly recognized, and at 17 he was made the first blind apprentice teacher at the school, where he taught algebra, grammar, music, and geography.

(14) He and two blind classmates, his friends who probably were the first people to learn to read and write Braille, later became the first three blind full professors at the school.

(15) However, despite the fact that many blind people enthusiastically adopted the system of writing and reading, there was great skepticism among sighted people about the real usefulness of Braille’s code, and even at the Royal Institute, it was not taught until after his death on January 6, 1852.

(16) Braille did not start to spread widely until 1868 when a group of British men—later to become known as the Royal National Institute for the Blind—began publicizing and teaching the system.

(17) Braille did not become the official and sole method of reading and writing for blind United States citizens until the 20th Century.

(18) Helen Keller, a Braille reader of another generation, said: “Braille has been a most precious aid to me in many ways. It made my going to college possible—it was the only method by which I could take notes on lectures. All my examination papers were copied for me in this system. I use Braille as a spider uses its web—to catch thoughts that flit across my mind for speeches, messages and manuscripts.”

(19) While rapid technological advances in the 20th Century have greatly aided the blind in many ways by speeding access to information, each advance has seen a commensurate drop in the teaching of Braille, to the point that only about 10 percent of blind students today are taught the system.

(20) However, for the blind not to know Braille is in itself a handicap, because literacy is the ability to read and the ability to write and the ability to do the two interactively.

(21) The National Federation of the Blind, the Nation's oldest membership organization consisting of blind members, has been a champion of the Braille code, of Braille literacy for all blind people and of the memory of Louis Braille, and continues its Braille literacy efforts today through its divisions emphasizing Braille literacy, emphasizing education of blind children and emphasizing employment of the blind.

(22) Braille literacy aids the blind in taking responsible and self-sufficient roles in society, such as employment: while 70 percent of the blind are unemployed, 85 percent of the employed blind are Braille-literate.

SEC. 3. COIN SPECIFICATIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of the Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Secretary”) shall mint and issue not more than 400,000 \$1 coins bearing the designs specified in section 4(a), each of which shall—

- (1) weigh 26.73 grams;
- (2) have a diameter of 1.500 inches; and
- (3) contain 90 percent silver and 10 percent copper.

(b) LEGAL TENDER.—The coins minted under this Act shall be legal tender, as provided in section 5103 of title 31, United States Code.

(c) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all coins minted under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

SEC. 4. DESIGN OF COINS.

(a) DESIGN REQUIREMENTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The design of the coins minted under this Act shall be emblematic of the life and legacy of Louis Braille.

(2) OBVERSE.—The design on the obverse shall bear a representation of the image of Louis Braille.

(3) REVERSE.—The design on the reverse shall emphasize Braille literacy and shall specifically include the word for Braille in Braille code (the Braille capital sign and the letters Brl) represented in a way that substantially complies with section 3 of Specification 800 of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress specifications for Braille, and is tactilely indiscernible from printed or written Braille.

(4) DESIGNATION AND INSCRIPTIONS.—On each coin minted under this Act there shall be—

- (A) a designation of the value of the coin;
- (B) an inscription of the year “2009”; and
- (C) inscriptions of the words “Liberty”, “In God We Trust”, “United States of America”, and “E Pluribus Unum”.

(b) SELECTION.—The design for the coins minted under this Act shall be—

(1) selected by the Secretary after consultation with the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Federation of the Blind; and

(2) reviewed by the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee.

SEC. 5. ISSUANCE OF COINS.

(a) **QUALITY OF COINS.**—Coins minted under this Act shall be issued in uncirculated and proof qualities.

(b) **MINT FACILITY.**—Only 1 facility of the United States Mint may be used to strike any particular quality of the coins minted under this Act.

(c) **PERIOD FOR ISSUANCE.**—The Secretary may issue coins minted under this Act only during the 1-year period beginning on January 1, 2009.

SEC. 6. SALE OF COINS.

(a) **SALE PRICE.**—The coins issued under this Act shall be sold by the Secretary at a price equal to the sum of—

(1) the face value of the coins;

(2) the surcharge provided in section 7(a) with respect to such coins; and

(3) the cost of designing and issuing the coins (including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, overhead expenses, marketing, and shipping).

(b) **BULK SALES.**—The Secretary shall make bulk sales of the coins issued under this Act at a reasonable discount.

(c) **PREPAID ORDERS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall accept prepaid orders for the coins minted under this Act before the issuance of such coins.

(2) **DISCOUNT.**—Sale prices with respect to prepaid orders under paragraph (1) shall be at a reasonable discount.

SEC. 7. SURCHARGES.

(a) **SURCHARGE REQUIRED.**—All sales of coins under this Act shall include a surcharge of \$10 per coin.

(b) **DISTRIBUTION.**—Subject to section 5134(f) of title 31, United States Code, all surcharges which are received by the Secretary from the sale of coins issued under this Act shall be promptly paid by the Secretary to the National Federation of the Blind to further its programs to promote Braille literacy.

(c) **AUDITS.**—The National Federation of the Blind shall be subject to the audit requirements of section 5134(f)(2) of title 31, United States Code, with regard to the amounts received by the National Federation under subsection (b).

(d) **LIMITATION.**—Notwithstanding subsection (a), no surcharge may be included with respect to the issuance under this Act of any coin during a calendar year if, as of the time of such issuance, the issuance of such coin would result in the number of commemorative coin programs issued during such year to exceed the annual 2 commemorative coin program issuance limitation under section 5112(m)(1) of title 31, United States Code (as in effect on the

date of the enactment of this Act). The Secretary of the Treasury may issue guidance to carry out this subsection.

Approved July 27, 2006.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 2872 (S. 2321):
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 152 (2006):
Feb. 28, considered and passed House.
July 12, considered and passed Senate.