



Images by Bob Krajewski.

Satirical political campaign medal issued by Isaac F. Wood pokes fun at Democratic presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden who lost the presidency in 1876 to Rutherford B. Hayes pursuant to a tainted Electoral Commission vote.

Still trust in the people In death, Tilden backs populace

The fiercely contested presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2000 seemed unprecedented to living Americans.

Numismatists' collections, however, hold political medals that document the most violently fought election of all time, the 1876 campaign that pitted reform Democrat Samuel J. Tilden, the governor of New York, against Republican Rutherford B. Hayes.

Hailed as "the Aggressive Leader of Reform," bachelor jurist Tilden successfully fought New York City's corrupt William Marcy Tweed and the statewide Canal Ring, gaining fame while making powerful enemies.

Running with vice presidential hopeful Thomas A. Hendricks, Tilden swept toward victory and the restoration of Democratic hopes, but a peculiar situation in the South brought an unexpected reverse.

The Republicans ruled the three Southern states of Florida, South Carolina and Louisiana in the shadow of the Federal army of occupation that alone kept these "carpetbagger" Republican regimes in office. The national popular vote count showed Tilden and Hayes in a virtual dead heat, the Democrat assured of 184 electoral votes while needing only 185 to win. Even the electoral vote of a single state would assure his victory.

The three Republican-controlled Southern states were the key and a 15-member Electoral Commission was created consisting of five members from the Senate and House plus five appointed by the Supreme Court to resolve the issue. When

independent Justice David Davis of Illinois resigned and was replaced by a Republican, the commission proceeded to vote on party lines and declared Hayes the winner.

Tilden refused the vigorous fight his supporters demanded, counseling them to go home and accept the tainted outcome.

New York engraver George Hampden Lovett created several Tilden campaign medals.

After the disputed outcome, Isaac F. Wood ordered three 31-millimeter, viciously satirical anti-Tilden medals from Lovett that were struck in silver, copper, brass and white metal.

The one illustrated above notes that Tilden was, according to the reverse inscription, SNUFFED OUT and GONE TO THE OLD "WORLD" TO FIND A MOTHER-IN-LAW. In fact, he died single, telling a close friend that he had never been romantically involved with any woman.

The additional charge, leveled on the obverse, that THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY DIED OF TILDENOPATHY IN THE 60TH YEAR OF ITS AGE proved premature as Grover Cleveland proved by his election as a Democrat in 1884.

Tilden is buried in a vast tomb in New Lebanon, N.Y. The tomb bears a final Tilden quote, "I still trust in the People."

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