



# PANS Eaglet

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## The 1980 Lake Placid Commemorative Coins of Poland: The Official and Proba Issues Offered to the Collector Community

By Steven M. Bieda

This article will examine Poland's 1980 Lake Placid Olympic Games commemorative coins – including the patterns (PROBAs) that Poland marketed for the event. The excitement of the first Winter Olympics hosted in the United States since 1960 (held in Squaw Valley), and the subsequent win of the U.S. Olympic Men's 1980 Hockey Team, undoubtedly generated more lasting interest in the 1980 Winter Olympic Games. Coupled with the fact that there was no U.S. commemorative coinage issued, the Polish issues in effect filled a domestic void among U.S. coin collectors. On top of that, the 1980 Winter Games occurred just after silver had hit a historic high of over \$50 an ounce, something that

added some interest in the silver and gold Polish commemorative coins honoring the XIII Winter Olympics.

If you are over a certain age, you may have had a flashback moment recently – on February 19, 2026 the U.S. Women's Olympic Hockey Team won the gold medal at the Milano Cortina XXV Olympic Winter Games. Several days later, the U.S. Men's Olympic Hockey Team replicated that impressive feat by winning the gold on February 22th, like the women's team, defeating the highly-ranked Canadian team in overtime. While satisfying and exciting, the men's win, over our friendly Canadian neighbor (and great team) was not nearly as satisfying, exciting or memorable as the historic win over the USSR's Men's Olympic Team on February 22, 1980, forty-six years ago to the date of the Men's 2026 gold.

The 1980 games themselves were perhaps most notable for the U.S. Men's Ice Hockey Team's stunning "Miracle on Ice" gold medal win, as well as American speed skater Eric Heiden's remarkable five gold medals. The 1980 Winter Olympics would be the last time the United States and USSR would face off at the Olympics until the 1988 Winter games. The result of a United States leading a boycott the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics later that year; itself the fallout from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that occurred on December 24,

1979. The “Cold War” was still evident in the dynamic of West-East relations. The Games were also a major diversion of the national obsession and concern for the American embassy employees taken hostage by Iranian militants on November 4, 1979, that crisis extending through to January 20, 1981. Cable TV was still in its infancy, the INTERNET was largely unfamiliar to the general public, and if someone mentioned Tik Tok, one would probably respond “TOE.” Social media had not yet made its appearance. Print media was still a dominant force, as was network TV. In this much different world, the 1980 Men’s Olympic Hockey win was electrifying and to this day one of the most legendary in the annals of the American experience with the games.

While the United States did not issue commemorative coins for the 1980 Winter Olympics, several non-hosting countries issued commemorative coins for the event, with the Polish Peoples Republic’s (hereinafter Poland) arguably being some of the most popular. At the time, Poland had a population of roughly 22.6 million, so a fairly large country – there was also a significant Polish diaspora in the United States and Canada. Michigan of course has a significant population of Polish descent, and Chicago, Illinois can lay claim to being the city with the largest Polish diaspora, both factors undoubtedly contributing to the Polish coins’ popularity in North America.

For the 1980 Winter Olympics, Poland issued a pair of largely identical coins commemorating the XIII Winter Olympics Games. Two denominations were issued; a silver 200 Zlotych and a gold 2000 Zlotych both featuring an Olympic skier. The silver issue was issued with two varieties, one with

a small torch, and one without the torch. These coins were widely marketed in the United States and can be found with some searching of dealer stocks and most commonly found on on-line auction sites such as eBay.

The two 200 Zlotych commemorative silver coin varieties differ in one small detail. Some have a depiction of small torch below the downhill skier and some lack the torch. The torch variety is found in Krause as PR-409 and is composed of .750 fine silver, measuring 33 mm, and weighing 17.6 grams. It has a smooth edge and was designed by St. Watrobska and has a recorded mintage of 3,620. A second variety of this coin exists as PR-411 with nearly an identical design but does not have a torch, it also has a recorded mintage of 3,620 with the same specifics of the torch variety. Both coin types were issued in a blue plastic holder measuring 2.24 x 2.25 inches. Both coins were struck in proof.

Poland also issued a gold commemorative in the denomination of 2000 Zlotych. Found in Krause as PR-428, it measures 21 mm, weighs 8 grams, and has a smooth edge with the same design and designer as the 200 Zlotych commemorative silver coin. Poland struck and sold 1,500 of this attractive proof coin.

Both the silver and gold coins share a common design for the obverse, with the only differences being the denomination. The obverse design is of the Polish White Eagle.

All of these coins – both the regular issue non-circulating commemoratives and PROBA coins described later in this article – were struck in medal rotation and all depict the same obverse design, that of the Polish White Eagle, the inscription

“POLSKA RZECZPOSPOLITA LUDOWA” date and denomination. All of these coins were produced at the Polish Mint, which at that time was a government owned entity.



### PROBA or Pattern Issues

Poland also sold what are essentially pattern coins in both silver and gold. These coins bore the special inscription “PROBA,” which roughly translates to “attempted design.” There are many facets to coin production and design. Many nations produce pattern coins prior to the adoption of a chosen design. In some cases, patterns were sold to collectors, in other cases, the patterns slipped out of official channels and into the numismatic marketplace. In Poland, patterns that were rejected coin designs are often minted in larger numbers for sale to collectors. These coins have the word “PROBA” somewhere on the reverse design. Poland made these special pattern coins from 1929-1994, with the majority made during the 1960-1990s period. “PROBA,” incidentally, doesn’t exactly translate as “pattern,” but rather a more exact translation is “attempt” as in “attempted design.” Although they have denominations, these coins do not have legal tender status, as they were never monetized. Depending on the issue, PROBA coins were minted in silver, copper, cupro-nickel and gold. Starting in the 1960s Poland started selling examples struck in various metals to the collector community, however, examples struck in nickel, were produced exclusively for a

more “scholarly” purpose, and were strictly limited to 500 coins; of these 250 pieces were distributed among members of the Polish Numismatic Society and the other 250 pieces were distributed between branches of the Polish National Bank, which distributed the coins to museums, galleries and other institutions.



Like the regular issue silver commemoratives, Poland sold two nearly identical .750 fine silver 200 Zlotych coins dated 1980 and each having a reported mintage of 3,620. One is designated P-429A and has a small torch to the viewer’s right of the 1980 date, the other variety lacking the small torch. This design was by J. Markiewicz-Nieszcz and was marketed in North America in a red plastic case measuring 2.25 x 2.25 inches. The diameter and weight are identical to the regular issue silver coins. The design features a stylized depiction of a cross-country skier.

The same design by the same designer was also utilized on the .900 fine gold PROBA coin measuring 22 mm and weighing 8 grams. Like the coin as issued, the 1980 dated gold coin has a smooth edge and was struck in proof, it had a mintage of 1,502 and is designed as P-505A.

While I always liked the Polish designs, I can only imagine how popular those coins would have been in 1980 had they depicted hockey instead of skiing. But consider one forgotten tidbit of the time the coins were issued. Perhaps one of the inspirations for the theme of the Polish Winter Olympic

coins was the relatively young papacy of Pope John Paul II, himself known as a cross-country skiing enthusiast. In any event, it's fun to speculate.

As to the hockey team, I had an interesting tie-in to the 1980 Olympic Men's Hockey Team; the late Mark Wells, a center on the 1980 Men's Hockey Team, was at one time a resident of Saint Clair Shores, Michigan, and a former constituent who I met on a friendly basis a number of times over the years. Mark's 1980 Olympic gold medal was sold at auction through Heritage auction galleries for \$310,700 in November 2010. A photo of the medal regularly appears on Heritage's promotional material. Mark unfortunately passed away in 2024 at 66 years old.

The Polish coins commemorating the Lake Placid Winter Olympic Games, aka XIII Olympic Winter Games, offer some attractive and relatively low mintage coins for the collector to assemble. As we look back on the history of these games, these coins offer a tangible link to a memorable time in Olympic history.

***Selected Sources:***

1. [Monety Polskie](#), Janusz Parchimowicz, Szczecin, Poland, 2006. Note, the PROBA coins are designated by the Parchimowicz cataloging system.
2. [2007 Standard Catalog of World Coins 1901-2000](#), Colin Bruce Editor, Krause Publications, Iola, Wisconsin, 2006. Note, the regular issue coins are designated by the Krause Catalog Number.
3. Wikipedia, for historical background on the 1980 Olympic Games.

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**The Jewish-American Hall of Fame Honors Polish-American Patriot Haym Salomon**

By Mel Wacks, Director of the Jewish-American Hall of Fame

In August 1781, the Continental Army trapped Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis in the Virginia coastal town of Yorktown. George Washington and the main army, and Count de Rochambeau with his French army, decided to march from the Hudson Highlands to Yorktown and deliver the final blow. But Washington's war chest was completely empty, as was that of Congress. Without food, uniforms and supplies, Washington's troops were close to mutiny. Washington determined that he needed at least \$20,000 to finance the campaign. When he was told that no funds and no credit were available, Washington said: "Send for Haym Salomon." Salomon raised \$20,000, and with that money, Washington conducted the Yorktown campaign, which proved to be the final battle of the Revolution.

Those urgent words, along with George Washington riding his favorite horse Nelson, are on the reverse of the new Jewish-American Hall of Fame medal that features an imagined portrait of Haym Salomon, "Financer to the American Revolution," and his signature on the obverse. Between August 1781 and April 1784, Haym Salomon's name appears in Robert Morris's diary at least 75 times, often with entries saying "I sent for Haym Salomon."







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**Have you been able to join us on the web? Try: [www.pans-club.org](http://www.pans-club.org). Or, on Facebook? If not, please go to Facebook, find PANS, and see what events are coming up for our society.**

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**Once again, come to the meetings and win**

Your PANS meets once a month, except for July and August, and is generous in raffling off one Polish coin per meeting. Why not attend a meeting, and see if you can add something to your growing collection?

**Send in your finds.**

Have you found any Polish coins of note, perhaps squirreled away in some dealer's stock of foreign coins, or at an estate sale, or elsewhere? If you have found a hidden treasure, or one hiding in plain sight, e-mail Mark a photo and a brief write-up of how you came upon it. The PANS members will most likely be interested in hearing about it.

**Remember folks, please pay your dues for the year 2026! That's \$20 for the year – \$30 if you'd like the PANS Eaglet mailed quarterly.**

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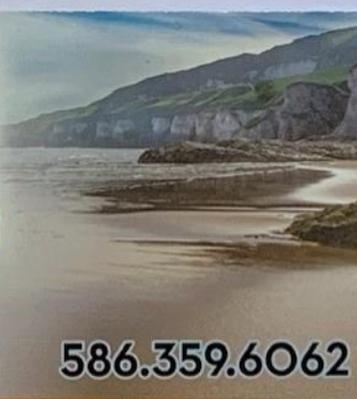


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### Join Our Club

We meet on the first Saturday of the month at 12:00 PM at the American Polish Cultural Center located at 2975 East Maple Road (15 Mile Road) at Dequindre Road in Troy, Michigan. Visit the PANS Club website at [www.pans-club.org](http://www.pans-club.org) for details. We currently have 10 meetings per year (August through May) with 2 months off during the summer. The Polish American Numismatic Society also plans a Christmas Oplatek Dinner during the Holiday Season. Meeting agendas include business matters and informative lectures from renowned guest speakers on topics including error and variety coins, significant coins in Polish history, Hamtramck scrip, coin photography. Open and lively member discussions about US and Polish numismatics are encouraged. Of course, the meeting would not be complete without coffee and delicious Polish pastries. The Polish American Numismatic Society hosts two very successful public coin show at the American Polish Cultural Center. Our primary show always takes place on the third Sunday of February. PANS also hosts a second show in August. Shows have been co-hosted with other clubs in the region. If you have any interest in numismatics, please attend a meeting and sign up as a member. PANS dues are only \$20.00 per year or \$30 per year if you would like the PANS Eaglet newsletter sent to your mail on a quarterly basis. PANS Club Membership is a great way to meet collectors with similar interests and knowledgeable dealers willing to share their experiences in a hobby that we all enjoy. To become a member-in-good-standing, plan to attend a minimum of 5 meetings per year and perform club-related duties at PANS Club sponsored Coin Shows.

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 Membership Application *I hereby make application for membership in the Polish American Numismatic Society, subject to the rules and regulations set forth in the Constitution and By-laws.*

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