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**EXHIBITION EXTENDED THROUGH DECEMBER 2013**

**Exercising Ingenuity in Fitness and Health**

**Opened Friday October 14, 2011 and now running through December 2013**

**The National Inventors Hall of Fame and Museum**



**Four Vintage American Penny Scales Returning to Service**

**Christopher Steele**, nationally known collector of American penny scales and advocate for the return of the public weigh teams up with **The National Inventors Hall of Fame and Museum**.

Four “penny scales” from his collection will be placed back in public use in the exhibit ***Exercising Ingenuity in Fitness and Health*** at The National Inventors Hall of Fame and Museum opened **Friday, October 14, 2011** and will now run through **December 2013**.

Experience the allure of these “robots of trade” ... see what made these “silent salesmen” so successful in persuading people to get on to a scale in public.

**Overview:**

This exhibit highlights inventions, patents, and trademarks that have emerged from the fitness, nutrition, and exercise industries. Organized in a decade by decade timeline approach, it presents many of the leading health and fitness innovations of each period, from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to today’s modern fitness movement.

Click Exhibitions at [www.americanpennyscales.com](http://www.americanpennyscales.com) to see highlights of 100 yrs. of fitness innovation.

**Museum Info: FREE ADMISSION**

600 Dulany, Madison Building, Alexandria, VA

(571) 272-0095 The National Inventors Hall of Fame and Museum is easily accessible from the King Street and Eisenhower Avenue Metro stations (Blue Line and Yellow Line). **Hours:** Monday through Friday 9 am to 5pm Saturday Noon to 5:00 p.m. (closed on Sundays and federal holidays)



Christopher Steele with some of his favorite American penny scales

### **About Penny Scales:**

Historically penny scales were a positive force for maintaining health and happiness. For a half century, Americans relied on penny scales to watch their weight. At their peak, over 10 billion pennies were dropped annually into these colorful machines.

### **The American Weigh: Christopher Steele Collection**

Steele's top 100 penny scales span 100 years. It has taken Steele nearly 40 years to assemble this nationally recognized collection. The collection includes a cast-iron workhorse from 1891, penny scales from the colorful art deco period, novelty scales of the 1950s and 1960s, and the rarest mechanism-free computer scale of 1991. A national treasure, this collection eloquently chronicles 100 years of American ingenuity, technology and industrial design.

**More information** and pictures can be found on the web: [www.americanpennyscales.com](http://www.americanpennyscales.com)

Click on "Media" tab for press releases and to download pictures for publication.

<http://www.theamericanweigh.com/media.html>

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## Brief History of the American Penny Scale:

In the late 1880s, the first American penny scales made their way onto the scene, offering the public their first opportunity to monitor their weight and health without visiting a doctor's office. By the 1930s and 1940s, these mechanical wonders brought in over 10 billion pennies or \$100 million annually. This would be over 1.5 billion in today's dollars.

Inventors outdid one another by creating gimmicks that enticed people to drop in a penny. Some scales told fortunes, some dispensed pictures of movie stars, and some returned the coin when the correct weight was guessed. Sheer beauty and sophisticated design attracted people to these money-making machines. Penny scales by top designers John Gordon Rideout, Harold Van Doren and Joseph Sinel mirrored silhouettes of modern skyscrapers and discreetly delivered one's weight. Less modern scales relied heavily on larger round dials that could easily be seen by prying eyes.

As an artist and lifelong community volunteer, Steele has worked as a contract potter, performance artist, visual artist and architectural model builder. Steele is an inventor and is developing a new coin-operated weighing machine. He would love to see the return of public weighing in America.

Penny scales evoke nostalgia for simpler, healthier times and have all but vanished from the American landscape.

I am on a mission to spark a return of the public weigh, a century long tradition.

Penny Scales historically were a positive force for maintaining health and happiness.

Perhaps more importantly, they provide the perfect hook for bringing people to the discussion of the importance of maintaining healthy weight.



Christopher Steele with Mr. Peanut Scale

**Peerless Aristocrat De Luxe** circa 1926

Manufactured by Caille Brothers of Detroit for Peerless Weighing Machine Company Mechanism patent filed September 23, 1921; granted August 9, 1927

**Penny Scale feature:**

The mechanism of this scale is so sensitive the needle on the dial will pulsate with the beat of a heart.

**Penny Scale History**

Along with innovative engineering, real ingenuity was required of the scale designers to attract passers-by.

Horoscopes, mirrors, games of chance and other clever gimmicks were used to “turn pennies into gold.”

**A 1937 U.S. Commerce report stated:**

70 times the population weighed themselves annually by dropping over 10 billion pennies, or over \$100 million dollars into penny scales. This is equivalent to \$1.5 billion today.



## Watling Tom Thumb Fortune Telling Scale

Manufactured in 1939 by Watling Manufacturing Company, Chicago  
Coin Controlled Amusement Apparatus  
Patent filed February 15, 1932

### **Penny Scale Feature:**

In addition to seeing ones weight, one of 21 questions on such things as love, marriage and work could be chosen by turning a flexible metal band. After selecting the fortune of interest and dropping in a penny a door would open to reveal an answer.

### **Penny Scale History:**

In the late 1880s the first American penny scales make their way on to the scene and become our first vending service. This designation is earned at the dawn of the vending machine era simply because these mechanical wonders did not issue products.

It wasn't long before the scale designers and engineers added enticements such as tickets with pictures of Hollywood movie stars, cards and scrolls with horoscopes and even gum and candy to increase profits.



## **Navco**

Manufactured by Barnes Scale Company,  
Detroit  
Design patent granted to Nobel L. Fellows  
April 1, 1930

### **Penny Scale Feature:**

Exquisite design and one of the finest of the  
Art Deco scales

The design is reminiscent of an evening  
gown. Materials are cast iron, white black  
porcelain enamel and ceramic tile.

### **Penny Scale History:**

The colorful designs, intricate mechanisms,  
and fine craftsmanship stand tribute to the  
remarkable accomplishments of America's  
first vending service.



## Watling 200 Fortune Telling Scale

Manufactured by Watling Scale Company  
Chicago

Design Patent 1948; Mfg. 1965

This machine had a coated canvas roll with 200 different dreams and quiz questions with fortunes on love, marriage, finance and surprises. Fortunes are chosen by turning the chrome knob. After selecting the fortune of interest and dropping in a penny a door would open to reveal an answer.

### Penny Scale and President Gerald Ford

In Margaret Truman's book "The President's House"

Chapter 4, page 5, 3rd paragraph reads:

"My favorite White House media story comes from my friend President Gerald Ford. Gerry says he and veteran newswoman Helen Thomas were strolling on a street near the White House when he saw one of those old-fashioned scales that gave you your fortune and weight for a penny. Gerry read the little fortune card aloud: "You are a marvelous orator and leader of men. Your future in your chosen career could not be brighter." Helen, looking over his shoulder, said: "It's got your weight wrong, too."

