

COLLECTIBLE AMERICAN COINS

A Numismatic Journey Through American Heritage

For over two centuries, American coins have served as more than mere instruments of commerce. They are miniature canvases of national identity — etched in gold, silver, and copper — telling the story of a young republic's ambitions, struggles, and triumphs. From the earliest Flowing Hair dollars of 1794 to the gleaming modern bullion coins of today, each piece carries history in its metal and artistry in its design.

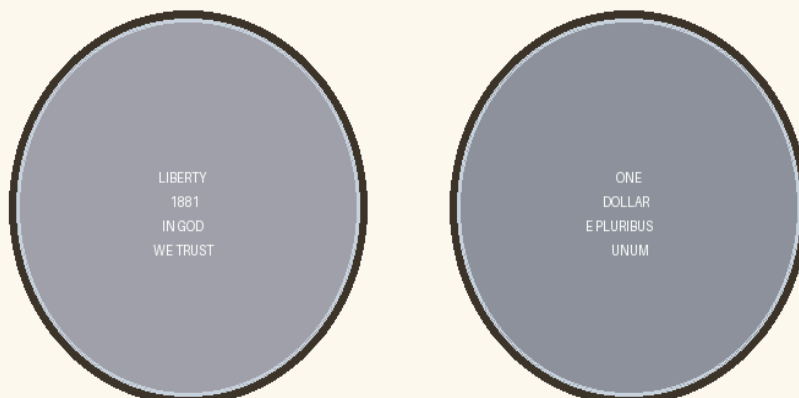
The Birth of American Coinage

The Coinage Act of 1792 established the United States Mint and created the first official American monetary system. The Act specified that the dollar would be the basic monetary unit, divisible into 100 cents — a decimal system that was revolutionary for its time. The first coins produced at the Philadelphia Mint in 1793 were copper half cents and large cents, bearing the iconic image of Liberty.

Early American coinage faced significant challenges. The country lacked sufficient silver and gold reserves, and counterfeit coins were rampant. Congress passed multiple coinage acts throughout the early 19th century to address these issues and standardize the currency. The Mint Act of 1837 introduced the 'closed collar' technique, giving coins uniform edges and making them far more difficult to counterfeit.

The Morgan Silver Dollar (1878–1921)

Few coins in American numismatic history command as much reverence as the Morgan Silver Dollar. Designed by George T. Morgan, a British-born engraver who joined the U.S. Mint in 1876, this magnificent coin is considered by many collectors to be the crown jewel of American coinage.



Morgan Silver Dollar — Obverse (Liberty) & Reverse (Eagle) | Minted 1878–1904, 1921

The obverse features a left-facing portrait of Liberty wearing a Phrygian cap inscribed with LIBERTY; the reverse displays a heraldic eagle with outstretched wings. Morgan used Anna Williard Williams, a Philadelphia schoolteacher, as his model for Liberty — one of many fascinating footnotes in American coinage history.

- **Composition:** 90% silver, 10% copper
- **Weight:** 26.73 grams | **Diameter:** 38.1 mm
- **Key Dates:** 1879-CC, 1889-CC, 1893-S (the rarest), 1895 (proof only)
- **Mints:** Philadelphia, New Orleans, San Francisco, Carson City, Denver

The Saint-Gaudens Double Eagle (1907–1933)

Widely regarded as the most beautiful coin ever produced by the United States Mint, the Saint-Gaudens Double Eagle was commissioned by President Theodore Roosevelt as part of a grand vision to elevate American coinage to the artistic heights of ancient Greek coins. Roosevelt personally recruited sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens for the task.



Saint-Gaudens Double Eagle (\$20 Gold Piece) — Minted 1907–1933 | High-relief version

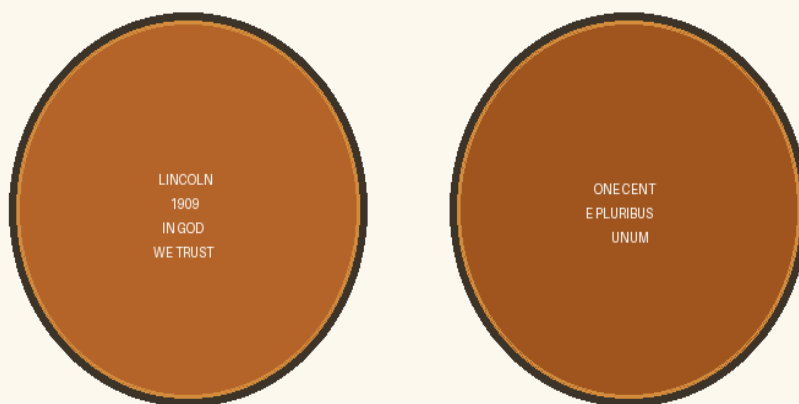
The obverse depicts a full-length striding Liberty holding a torch and olive branch against the backdrop of the U.S. Capitol, while the reverse shows a magnificent eagle in flight above the rising sun. The 1907 Ultra High Relief version required eight to twelve strikes to fully bring up the design, making mass production impossible.

- **Composition:** 90% gold, 10% copper
- **Weight:** 33.436 grams | **Face Value:** \$20.00
- **Most Valuable:** 1933 Double Eagle — sold for \$18.9 million at auction in 2021
- **Melted:** Most 1933 examples were melted after FDR ended the gold standard

The Lincoln Cent (1909–Present)

The Lincoln cent holds the distinction of being the longest-running design in U.S. coinage history. Introduced in 1909 to commemorate the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, it was the first regular-issue American coin to feature a real person — a break from the long tradition of allegorical

figures representing Liberty.



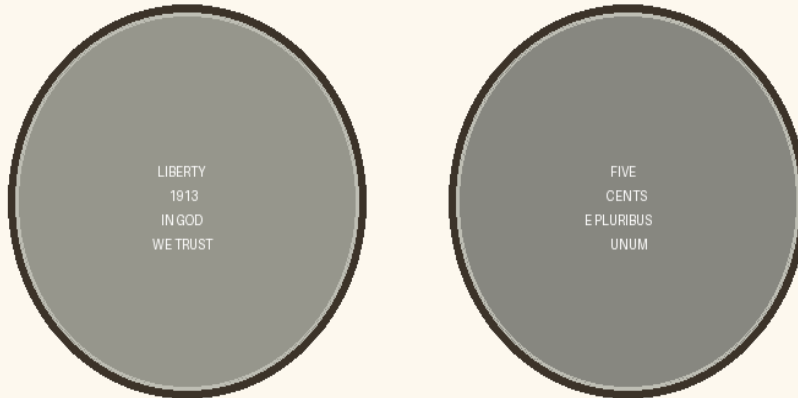
Lincoln Cent — Victor David Brenner's iconic portrait has appeared on the penny since 1909

Designed by Lithuanian-born sculptor Victor David Brenner, the Lincoln cent has undergone several reverse design changes over its long life: the Wheat Ears (1909–1958), the Lincoln Memorial (1959–2008), four commemorative reverses in 2009 for the Lincoln Bicentennial, and the Shield design from 2010 to the present day.

- **1909-S VDB:** Only 484,000 struck — one of the most sought-after pennies, worth \$1,000+
- **1943 Steel Cent:** Made of zinc-coated steel during WWII copper shortage
- **1944 Steel Cent:** Accidentally struck on steel — extremely rare error coin
- **Current Composition:** Copper-plated zinc (97.5% zinc / 2.5% copper since 1982)

The Buffalo Nickel / Indian Head Nickel (1913–1938)

Sculptor James Earle Fraser created what many consider the most distinctly American coin ever made. The Buffalo Nickel (officially the Indian Head nickel) features a composite portrait of three Native American chiefs — Iron Tail (Oglala Lakota), Two Moons (Cheyenne), and Big Tree (Kiowa) — on the obverse, and an American bison named Black Diamond from the Central Park Zoo on the reverse.



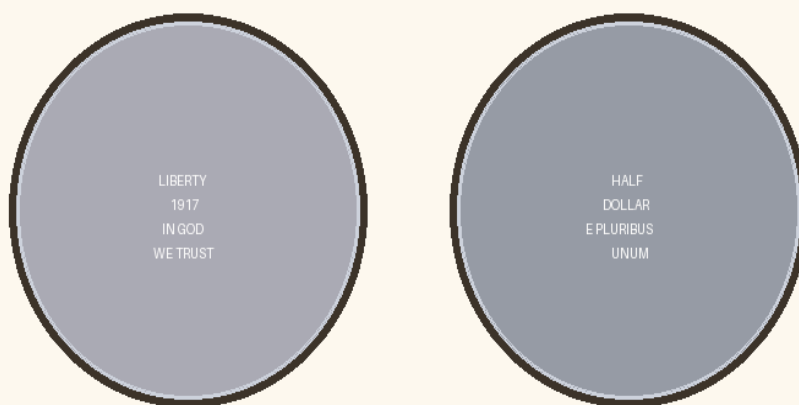
Buffalo Nickel (Indian Head Nickel) — Minted 1913–1938 | A uniquely American design

The design was immediately controversial — some felt depicting a Native American on currency was disrespectful; others celebrated it as a recognition of indigenous peoples' place in American heritage. Fraser himself said the coin represented 'the true American' and wanted it to embody the spirit of the untamed frontier.

- **Key Date:** 1913-S Type 2 — the rarest regular issue Buffalo nickel
- **1937-D 3-Legged:** A famous error coin — the bison's leg was accidentally polished away
- **Composition:** 75% copper, 25% nickel
- **Revival:** The design returned on the 2005 Jefferson Nickel and the American Buffalo gold bullion coin

The Walking Liberty Half Dollar (1916–1947)

The Walking Liberty Half Dollar is universally regarded as one of the most beautiful coins ever struck by the United States Mint. Designed by Adolph A. Weinman, the same sculptor responsible for the Mercury Dime, it depicts a full-length Lady Liberty striding toward the rising sun, draped in an American flag with branches of laurel and oak.



Walking Liberty Half Dollar — Adolph Weinman's masterpiece, minted 1916–1947

The reverse features a proud eagle perched on a mountain crag with a small pine sapling — symbolizing America's strength and potential for growth. The design was so beloved that it was revived in 1986 for the American Silver Eagle bullion coin, which continues to be minted to this day and is the best-selling silver bullion coin in the world.

The Art of Coin Collecting: A Beginner's Guide

Numismatics — the study and collection of coins — is one of America's oldest hobbies. Whether you're drawn to the artistry of the coins, the thrill of the hunt, or the potential investment value, coin collecting offers rewards that few other pursuits can match.

- **Grading Matters:** Coin condition is graded on the Sheldon scale from Poor (P-1) to Perfect Mint State (MS-70). A coin graded MS-65 can be worth ten times more than the same coin graded MS-60.
- **Professional Grading:** Services like PCGS (Professional Coin Grading Service) and NGC (Numismatic Guaranty Corporation) authenticate and grade coins, encasing them in tamper-evident holders called 'slabs.'
- **Storage:** Never clean a coin — it destroys value. Store coins in acid-free flips, albums, or airtight capsules away from humidity and direct sunlight.
- **Research:** The Red Book (A Guide Book of United States Coins by R.S. Yeoman) is the essential annual reference for American coin values and history.
- **Key Dates & Errors:** Low-mintage 'key date' coins and minting errors (doubled dies, off-center strikes, repunched mintmarks) command significant premiums and are highly sought after.

Approximate Market Values: Selected Key Date Coins

Coin	Year / Variety	Grade	Est. Value
Morgan Silver Dollar	1893-S	VF-20	\$30,000 – \$50,000
Saint-Gaudens \$20	1933 Double Eagle	MS-65	\$18,900,000

Lincoln Cent	1909-S VDB	MS-64 RB	\$3,000 – \$7,000
Buffalo Nickel	1913-S Type 2	VF-20	\$200,000+
Walking Liberty ½\$	1916-D	MS-63	\$15,000 – \$30,000
Mercury Dime	1916-D	MS-65 FB	\$50,000+

Note: Values are approximate and vary significantly by exact grade, eye appeal, and market conditions. Always consult a professional numismatist or current auction records before buying or selling.