

Mercury Dimes

Since the advent of the 20th century, US Presidents had tried to replace all coin denominations with more inspiring designs. Teddy Roosevelt successfully introduced new designs for gold coins in 1907-09. The Lincoln cent went into production in 1909; four years later the Buffalo nickel became reality.

This left the rather stodgy Barber design on the dime, quarter and half dollar introduced in 1892. Because Congress mandated that a coin design could not be changed for 25 years without its approval, Barber coinage designs could not be replaced until 1916.

The Mint Director mistakenly believed existing coinage MUST be changed every 25 years. In early 1915, he asked Chief Engraver Barber, then in his 36th year in office, to prepare new designs. Barber's response was tepid (as the new designs would replace his design), and he did not submit anything until December 1915 to the Commission of Fine Arts. The Commission so disliked Barber's sketches that it selected sculptors Adolph Weinman, Hermon MacNeil and Albin Polasek to submit proposals for the new coins. The sculptors could submit multiple sketches, with hope that the 3 sculptors would each be awarded a coin. However, 5 of Weinman's designs were selected (dime and half obverses, all 3 reverses); MacNeil had one design selected for the quarter obverse, and Polasek was shut out. MacNeil was then asked to resubmit a quarter reverse.

The obverse shows a head of Liberty with wearing a traditional pileus, or Liberty cap, symbolizing "liberty of thought". The head is simple and firm in form, the profile forceful (believed to be Elsie Stevens, who with her husband, rented an apartment from Weinman). The reverse shows a bundle of rods, with battle-ax, known as "Fasces", and symbolizing unity and strength. Around the fasces are foliated branches of olive, symbolic of peace.



Because of difficulties experiencing in reducing the design to working dies, the new dime was not produced until the end of October 1916. Continued production of the Barber quarter at Denver caused the 1916-D Mercury production to be delayed until the end of December, thereby causing the great series rarity.

Upon release, the Mercury dime met with universal praise for its design by the public and press. One newspaper dubbed it the "battle ax" or "golf" dime, reflecting a lack of knowledge concerning the fasces. The nickname "Mercury" appeared almost immediately in the popular press, as writers thought the obviously female Liberty was actually a representation of Mercury, male messenger to the Roman gods. The name stuck, despite complaints by purists.

The dime was struck in substantial numbers, with the notable exception of the 1916-D issue, and cessation during economic downturn years of 1922, 1932 and 1933. While no 1923-D or 1930-D dimes were struck by the Mint, examples are frequently encountered, believed to come from the Soviet Union, a country known for counterfeiting US coins during World War II.

Few varieties are known in the Mercury dime series. The 1942/41 and 1942/1-D are generally termed overdates, but are actually doubled-die errors—the obverse die from which the coins were struck took one impression from a 1942-dated hub and one from a 1941-dated hub. Another popular variety is the 1945-S "Micro S", with a smaller-than-normal mintmark. This variety was caused by the Mint's wartime use of a mintmark punch last used with early 20th century Philippine coinage struck at San Francisco.

Apart from the 1916-D, most dates are obtained with little difficulty. However, several of the dates are extremely rare in high grade. Mercury dimes with "full split bands", completely visible lines in the bands around the fasces, command higher premiums.

The death of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1945 brought an end to the series. As Roosevelt had been closely associated with polio's March of Dimes, the dime was selected to honor him.

In 2016 the Mint released a centennial version in gold of the Mercury dime. Demand was so high, that it sold out within 45 minutes of release.

Special Meeting Activity Calendar

- June** – Youth Night
- July** – Weenie Roast
- September** – Show n' Tell night
- November** – Veteran's night,
Officer/Director elections
- December** – Christmas party

We need volunteers to give programs in 2016. Contact Kevin Kell if you have an interest.

Upcoming Local Coin Shows

- June 4** – Texoma Coin Show, US 75, Exit 65, Denison. Free.
- June 10-11** – Five State Currency and Coin Show, Lone Star Event Center, Tyler. Free.
- June 17-19** – Texas Coin Show, Grapevine Convention Center. \$3 or free with NETCC membership.
- June 24-26** – Cowtown Coin Show, Forest Hill Civic/Convention Center. \$3.

May New Members: Jim Waggoneer.

May First Time Visitors: Mimi Harris.