

Jefferson Nickels

From the very beginning the Buffalo nickel was difficult to produce. Attempts to bring out the full design increased an already high rate of die breakage. By 1938, it had been struck for 25 years, thus enabling the Mint to replace it without Congressional approval.

By coincidence, 1938 was also the bicentennial of Thomas Jefferson's birth. Hence, in early 1938 the Mint announced a competition for a new nickel design, mandating that Jefferson be depicted on the obverse and Jefferson's house Monticello on the reverse. After receiving 390 entries, the Mint selected the design from Felix Schlag, a recent German immigrant.



The Mint required some changes to Schlag's reverse design prior to coining. Schlag's original design showed a three-quarters view of Monticello, including a tree. Officials disliked the lettering Schlag had used, a more modernistic style than that used on the eventual coin. The tree was removed after Mint officials decided it was a palm tree and incorrectly believed Jefferson could not have grown such a thing. Also the wording "Monticello" was removed, and then restored, fearing the public would take it to be a library or some other public building. Production began in October.

The Mint recut the hub for the nickel in 1939, sharpening the steps on Monticello, which had been fuzzy in initial coinage. This change also created two varieties for all three mints and proof strikings that year

When the US entered World War II, nickel became a critical war material, and the Mint sought to reduce its use of the metal. Congress authorized a copper and silver alloy, but gave the Mint the authority to vary the proportions, or add other metals. The Mint's greatest concern was in finding an alloy which would use no nickel, but still work in vending machines. An alloy of 56% copper, 35% silver and 9% manganese proved suitable, and this alloy began to be coined into nickels from October 1942. To make them easy to sort out and withdraw after the war, the Mint struck all "war nickels" with a large mint mark appearing above Monticello. The mint mark P for Philadelphia was the first time that mint's mark had appeared on a US coin. The prewar composition and smaller mint mark resumed in 1946.



Within the war nickel series some 1943-P nickels are overdated, due to use of a die from the previous year. In addition, a number of 1944 nickels are known without the large "P" mintmark, being counterfeits produced in 1954 by Francis LeRoy Henning.

Although no significant rarities exist for the series on the basis of mintage, there are many notable conditional rarities for the series, particularly for those pursuing collections of Full Steps Jefferson Nickels. "Full Steps" is a grading designation used for regular

strike Jefferson Nickels which have at least five steps visible at the base of Monticello on the reverse. There must also be no disturbance of the steps due to strike weakness, contact marks, or planchet problems. Full Steps Jefferson Nickels are valued at a premium to comparable grades without the designation. For certain issues, coins exhibiting full steps can be extremely rare and carry enormous premiums. For coins after 1986, full steps are generally easier to find.



This same design remained in use without any significant changes for more than six decades. Then, a series of design changes took place from 2004 to 2006 to commemorate the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase and Lewis and Clark's expedition through the vast territory. Over the course of three years, the Westward Journey Nickels would feature four different reverse designs before reverting to the original image of Monticello. The obverse would feature two new portraits of Jefferson, with the second serving as the replacement going forward.



Despite its lengthy duration, the series remains an approachable one for beginning collectors. It is entirely possible to find the earlier dates of the series in circulation and even an uncirculated set does not include any expensive key date coins.

Special Meeting Activity Calendar

- April** – Donation auction
- May** – Quiz Night
- June** – Youth Night
- July** – Weenie Roast

We need volunteers to give programs in 2018. Contact Kenny Smith if you have an interest.

Upcoming Local Coin Shows

February 2-4 – Texas Coin Show, Grapevine Convention Center. \$3 or free with NETCC membership.

February 16-17 – Cowtown Coin Show, White Settlement Convention Center. \$3.

March 8-10 – ANA National Money Show, Irving Convention Center, Irving. \$8, free on Saturday, to ANA members or kids under 12.

June 1-3 – TNA Coin and Currency Show, Arlington Convention Center. \$3 or free with TNA membership.

January New Members: Drew and Gil Hernandez, David Menery, Chase Russell.

January First Time Visitors: Gil Hernandez, David Menery.