

= Jefferson nickel =

The Jefferson nickel has been the five @-@ cent coin struck by the United States Mint since 1938 , when it replaced the Buffalo nickel . From 1938 until 2004 , the copper @-@ nickel coin 's obverse featured a profile depiction of founding father and third U.S. President Thomas Jefferson by artist Felix Schlag ; the obverse design used in 2005 was also in profile , though by Joe Fitzgerald . Since 2006 Jefferson 's portrayal , newly designed by Jamie Franki , faces forward . The coin 's reverse is still the Schlag original , although in 2004 and 2005 the piece bore commemorative designs .

First struck in 1913 , the Buffalo nickel had long been difficult to coin , and after it completed the 25 @-@ year term during which it could only be replaced by Congress , the Mint moved quickly to replace it with a new design . The Mint conducted a design competition in early 1938 , requiring that Jefferson be depicted on the obverse , and Jefferson 's house Monticello on the reverse . Schlag won the competition , but was required to submit an entirely new reverse and make other changes before the new piece went into production in October 1938 .

As nickel was a strategic war material during World War II , nickels coined from 1942 to 1945 were struck in a copper @-@ silver @-@ manganese alloy which would not require adjustment to vending machines . They bear a large mint mark above the depiction of Monticello on the reverse . In 2004 and 2005 , the nickel saw new designs as part of the Westward Journey nickel series , and since 2006 has borne Schlag 's reverse and Franki 's obverse .

= = Inception = =

The design for the Buffalo nickel is well regarded today , and has appeared both on a commemorative silver dollar and a bullion coin . However , during the time it was struck (1913 ? 1938) , it was less well liked , especially by Mint authorities , whose 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 becoming eligible to be replaced by action of the Secretary of the Treasury rather than by Congress . The Mint , which is part of the Department of the Treasury , moved quickly and without public protest to replace the coin .

In late January 1938 , the Mint announced an open competition for the new nickel design , with the winner to receive a prize of \$ 1 @,@ 000 . The deadline for submissions was April 15 ; Mint Director Nellie Tayloe Ross and three sculptors were to be the judges . That year saw the bicentennial of the birth of the third U.S. President , Thomas Jefferson ; competitors were to place a portrait of Jefferson on the obverse , and a depiction of his house , Monticello , on the reverse .

By mid @-@ March , few entries had been received . This seeming lack of response proved to be misleading , as many artists planned on entering the contest and would submit designs near the deadline . On April 20 , the judges viewed 390 entries ; four days later , Felix Schlag was announced as the winner . Schlag had been born in Germany and had come to the United States only nine years previously . Either through a misunderstanding or an oversight , Schlag did not include his initials in the design ; they would not be added until 1966 . The bust of Jefferson on the obverse closely resembles his bust by sculptor Jean @-@ Antoine Houdon , which is to be found in Boston 's Museum of Fine Arts .

In early May , it was reported that the Mint required some changes to Schlag 's 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 another source of official displeasure ; officials decided it was a palm tree and incorrectly believed Jefferson could not have been growing such a thing . A formal request for changes was sent to Schlag in late May . The sculptor was busy with other projects and did not work on the nickel until mid @-@ June . When he did , he changed the reverse to a plain view , or head @-@ on perspective , of Monticello . Art historian Cornelius Vermeule described the change :

Official taste eliminated this interesting , even exciting , view , and substituted the mausoleum of Roman profile and blurred forms that masquerades as the building on the finished coin . On the trial reverse the name " Monticello " seemed scarcely necessary and was therefore , logically , omitted .

On the coin as issued it seems essential lest one think the building portrayed is the vault at Fort Knox , a state archives building , or a public library somewhere .

The designs were submitted to the Commission of Fine Arts for their recommendation in mid @-@ July ; the version submitted included the new version of Monticello but may not have included the revised lettering . The Commission approved the designs . However , Commission chairman Charles Moore asked that the positions of the mottos on the reverse be switched , with the country name at the top ; this was not done . After the Fine Arts Commission recommendation , the Secretary of the Treasury , Henry Morgenthau , approved the design .

On August 21 , the Anderson (Indiana) Herald noted :

[T] he Federal Fine Arts Commission ... didn 't like the view of Thomas Jefferson 's home , Monticello , so they required the artist to do another picture of the front of the house . They did not like the lettering on the coin . It wasn 't in keeping , but they forgot to say what it wasn 't in keeping with ... There is no more reason for imitating the Romans in this respect [by using Roman @-@ style lettering on the coin] than there would be for modeling our automobiles after the chariot of Ben Hur 's day .

= = Production = =

= = = 1938 ? 1945 : Early minting ; World War II changes = = =

Production of the Jefferson nickel began at all three mints (Philadelphia , Denver , and San Francisco) , on October 3 , 1938 . By mid @-@ November , some twelve million had been coined , and they were officially released into circulation on November 15 ; more than thirty million would be struck in 1938 . According to contemporary accounts , the Jefferson nickel was initially hoarded , and it was not until 1940 that it was commonly seen in circulation .

In 1939 , the Mint recut the hub for the nickel , sharpening the steps on Monticello , which had been fuzzy in initial strikings . Since then , a test for whether a nickel is particularly well struck has been whether all six steps appear clearly , with " full step " nickels more collectable .

With the entry of the United States into World War II , nickel became a critical war material , and the Mint sought to reduce its use of the metal . On March 27 , 1942 , Congress authorized a nickel made of 50 % copper and 50 % silver , but gave the Mint the authority to vary the proportions , or add other metals , in the public interest . The Mint 's greatest concern was in finding an alloy which would use no nickel , but still satisfy counterfeit detectors 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 . In the hopes of making 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 (or no mint mark for Philadelphia) were resumed in 1946 . In a 2000 article in The Numismatist , Mark A. Benvenuto suggested that the amount of nickel saved by the switch was not significant to the war effort , but that the war nickel served as a ubiquitous reminder of the sacrifices that needed to be made for victory .

Within the war nickel series collectors recognize two additions , one official , the other counterfeit . Some 1943 @-@ P nickels are overdated . Here a die for the previous year was reused , allowing a " 2 " to be visible under the " 3 " . In addition , a number of 1944 nickels are known without the large " P " mintmark . These were produced in 1954 by Francis LeRoy Henning , who also made counterfeit nickels with at least four other dates .

= = = 1946 ? 2003 : Later production of original designs = = =

When it became known that the Denver Mint had struck only 2 @,@ 630 @,@ 030 nickels in 1950 , the coins (catalogued as 1950 @-@ D) began to be widely hoarded . Speculation in them increased in the early 1960s , but prices decreased sharply in 1964 . Because they were so widely

pulled from circulation , the 1950 @-@ D is readily available today . A number of reverse dies with an S mint mark , intended for the San Francisco Mint , were created in 1955 ; they were not used as that mint struck no nickels that year and subsequently closed , and the unused dies were sent for use at Denver , where the S mint mark was overpunched with a D. 1949 and 1954 are other years where one mintmark was punched over another .

Proof coins , struck at Philadelphia , had been minted for sale to collectors in 1938 and continued through 1942 . In the latter year proofs were struck in both the regular and " war nickel " compositions , after which they were discontinued . Sales of proof coins began again in 1950 and continued until 1964 , when their striking was discontinued during the coin shortage . In 1966 a small change was made to the design to add the initials of the designer (FS) to the obverse , underneath Jefferson 's portrait . In commemoration of that change , two proof 1966 nickels with the initials were struck and presented to him . Special mint sets , of lower quality than proof coins , were struck from 1965 to 1967 . Proof coin sales resumed in 1968 , with coins struck at the reopened San Francisco facility . Coins struck at any mint between 1965 and 1967 lack mint marks . Beginning in 1968 , mint marks were again used , but were moved to the lower part of the obverse , to the right of Jefferson 's bust . From 1971 , no nickels were struck for circulation in San Francisco ? the 1971 @-@ S was the first nickel struck in proof only since 1878 . In both 1994 and 1997 matte proof nickels , with distinctive grainy surfaces , were struck in small numbers at the Philadelphia mint for inclusion in commemorative coin sets .

During the late twentieth century the Mint repeatedly modified the design . In 1982 , the steps were sharpened in that year 's redesign . The 1987 modification saw the sharpening of Jefferson 's hair and the details of Monticello ? since 1987 , well @-@ struck nickels with six full steps on the reverse have been relatively common . In 1993 , Jefferson 's hair was again sharpened .

= = = 2003 ? present : Westward Journey nickel series ; redesign of obverse = = =

In June 2002 , Mint officials were interested in redesigning the nickel in honor of the upcoming bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition . They contacted the office of Representative Eric Cantor (Republican @-@ Virginia) . Cantor had concerns about moving Monticello , located in his home state , off the nickel , and sponsored legislation which would allow the Mint to strike different designs in 2003 , 2004 , and 2005 , and again depict Monticello beginning in 2006 . The resultant act , the " American 5 @-@ Cent Coin Design Continuity Act of 2003 " , was signed into law on April 23 , 2003 . Under its terms , the Treasury Secretary could vary the nickel 's designs in honor of the 200th anniversary of the Expedition and of the Louisiana Purchase , but the nickel would again feature Jefferson and Monticello beginning in 2006 . Under Cantor 's legislation , every future five @-@ cent coin will feature Jefferson and Monticello .

In November 2003 , the Mint announced the first two reverse designs , to be struck with Schlag 's obverse in 2004 . The first , designed by United States Mint sculptor @-@ engraver Norman E. Nemeth , depicts an adaptation of the Indian Peace Medals struck for Jefferson . The second , by Mint sculptor @-@ engraver Alfred Maletsky , depicts a keelboat like that used by the Expedition .

The 2005 nickels presented a new image of the former President , designed by Joe Fitzgerald based on Houdon 's bust of Jefferson . The word " Liberty " was taken from Jefferson 's handwritten draft for the Declaration of Independence , though to achieve a capital L , Fitzgerald had to obtain one from other documents written by Jefferson . The reverse for the first half of the year depicted an American bison , recalling the Buffalo nickel and designed by Jamie Franki . The reverse for the second half showed a coastline and the words " Ocean in view ! O ! The Joy ! " , from a journal entry by William Clark , co @-@ leader of the Expedition . Clark had actually written the word as " ocian " , but the Mint modernized the spelling .

The obverse design for the nickel debuting in 2006 was designed by Franki . It depicts a forward @-@ facing Jefferson based on an 1800 study by Rembrandt Peale , and includes " Liberty " in Jefferson 's script . According to Acting Mint Director David Lebryk , " The image of a forward @-@ facing Jefferson is a fitting tribute to [his] vision . " The reverse beginning in 2006 was again Schlag 's Monticello design , but newly sharpened by Mint engravers . As Schlag 's obverse design , on

which his initials were placed in 1966 , is no longer used , his initials were placed on the reverse to the right of Monticello .

In 2009 , a total of only 86 @,@ 640 @,@ 000 nickels were struck for circulation . The figure increased in 2010 to 490 @,@ 560 @,@ 000 . The unusually low 2009 figures were caused by a lack of demand for coins in commerce due to poor economic conditions .