

= Mercury dime =

The Mercury dime is a ten @-@ cent coin struck by the United States Mint from 1916 to 1945 . Designed by Adolph Weinman and also referred to as the Winged Liberty Head dime , it gained its common name as the obverse depiction of a young Liberty , identifiable by her winged Phrygian cap , was confused with the Roman god Mercury . Weinman is believed to have used Elsie Stevens , the wife of lawyer and poet Wallace Stevens , as a model . The coin 's reverse depicts a fasces , symbolizing unity and strength , and an olive branch , signifying peace .

By 1916 , the dime , quarter , and half dollar designed by Mint Chief Engraver Charles E. Barber had been struck for 25 years , and could be replaced by the Treasury , of which the Mint is a part , without Congressional authorization . Mint officials were under the misapprehension that the designs had to be changed , and held a competition among three sculptors , in which Barber , who had been in his position for 36 years , also took part . Weinman 's designs for the dime and half dollar were selected .

Although the new coin 's design was admired for its beauty , the Mint made modifications to it upon learning that vending machine manufacturers were having difficulties making the new dime work in their devices . The coin continued to be minted until 1945 , when the Treasury ordered that a new design , featuring recently deceased president Franklin Roosevelt , take its place . The Mercury dime was restruck in gold for its centenary in 2016 .

= = Inception = =

On September 26 , 1890 , the United States Congress passed an act providing :

The Director of the Mint shall have power , with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury , to cause new designs ... to be prepared and adopted ... But no change in the design or die of any coin shall be made oftener than once in twenty @-@ five years from and including the year of the first adoption of the design ... But the Director of the Mint shall nevertheless have power , with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury , to engage temporarily the services of one or more artists , distinguished in their respective departments of art , who shall be paid for such service from the contingent appropriation for the mint at Philadelphia .

The Barber coinage had been introduced in 1892 ; similar dimes , quarter dollars , and half dollars , all designed by Mint Chief Engraver Charles E. Barber . The introduction had followed a design competition to replace the Seated Liberty coinage , which had been struck since the 1830s . The Mint had offered only a small prize to the winner , and all invited artists refused to submit entries . The competition was open to the public , and the judging committee found no entry suitable . Mint Director Edward Leech responded to the failed competition by directing Barber to prepare new designs for the dime , quarter , and half dollar . The Barber coinage , after its release , attracted considerable public dissatisfaction .

Beginning in 1905 , successive presidential administrations had attempted to bring modern , beautiful designs to United States coins . Following the redesign of the double eagle , eagle , half eagle and quarter eagle in 1907 and 1908 , as well as the cent and nickel redesigns of 1909 and 1913 respectively , advocates of replacing the Barber coins began to push for the change when the coins ' minimum term expired in 1916 . As early as 1914 , Victor David Brenner , designer of the Lincoln cent , submitted unsolicited designs for the silver coins . He was told in response that Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo was completely occupied with other matters .

On January 2 , 1915 , an interview with Philadelphia Mint Superintendent Adam M. Joyce appeared in the Michigan Manufacturer and Financial Record :

So far as I know ... there is no thought of issuing new coins of the 50 @-@ cent , 25 @-@ cent , and 10 @-@ cent values . If , however , a change is made we all hope that more serviceable and satisfactory coins are produced than the recent Saint @-@ Gaudens double eagle and eagle and the Pratt half and quarter eagle . The buffalo nickel and the Lincoln penny are also faulty from a practical standpoint . All resulted from the desire by the government to mint coins to the satisfaction of artists and not practical coiners .

In January 1915 , Assistant Secretary of the Treasury William P. Malburn sent McAdoo a memorandum about the silver subsidiary coinage , noting that " the present silver half dollar , quarter , and dime were changed in 1892 , and a new design may , therefore , be adopted in 1916 . This can be done any time in the year . " In reply , McAdoo wrote " [I] et the mint submit designs before we try anyone else . " on the memorandum .

In April 1915 , Robert W. Woolley took office as Mint Director . On April 14 , he asked Superintendent Joyce to request Chief Engraver Barber , then in his 36th year in office , to prepare new designs . The same day , Malburn requested the opinion of the Treasury Department 's Solicitor concerning the Mint view that it could strike new designs for the three denominations in 1916 . On April 17 , the Solicitor 's Office responded that the Mint could change the designs . At the time , the Mint was intensely busy producing the Panama @-@ Pacific commemorative coin issue , and immediate action was not taken . In October , Barber was summoned to Washington to discuss coin designs with Woolley , though it is uncertain whether or not he had already prepared sketches for the new coinage .

On December 3 , Woolley met with the Commission of Fine Arts . Woolley asked the Commission to view sketches produced by the Mint 's engraving department . Barber was present to explain the coinage process to the Commission members . Woolley suggested to the members that if they did not like the Mint 's work , they should select sculptors to submit designs for the new pieces . It was Woolley 's intent to have distinct designs for the dime , quarter and half dollar ? previously , the three pieces had been near @-@ identical . The director informed the Commission that as the existing coinage had been in use for 25 years , it would have to be changed ? something which numismatic historian David Lange calls a " misinterpretation of the coinage laws " .

The Commission disliked the sketches from the Mint (submitted by Barber) and selected sculptors Adolph Weinman , Hermon MacNeil and Albin Polasek to submit proposals for the new coins . The sculptors could submit multiple sketches . Although the Mint could decide to use a design on a denomination not intended by its sculptor , the designs were not fully interchangeable ? by statute , an eagle had to appear on the reverse of the quarter and half dollar , but could not appear on the dime . Woolley hoped that each sculptor would be successful with one piece .

The three sculptors submitted design sketches in mid @-@ February , and on February 23 met with Woolley in New York so the artists could make presentations of the work to him and answer his questions . After discussions between Woolley and McAdoo , Weinman was notified on February 28 that five of his sketches had been selected ? for the dime and half dollar , and the reverse of the quarter . The same day , Woolley wrote to MacNeil to tell him he would sculpt the quarter 's obverse , and to Polasek to inform him of his lack of success . Members of the Commission persuaded Woolley that so much should not be entrusted to a single artist , and MacNeil was allowed to design both sides of the quarter , subject to his making modifications to his submission .

On March 3 , the new coins were publicly announced , with the Treasury noting , " [d] esigns of these coins must be changed by law every 25 years and the present 25 year period ends with 1916 . " The press release indicated that the Treasury hoped production of the new coins would begin in about two months , once the designs were finalized . The same day , Woolley wrote to Mint Engraver Barber , telling him that his sketches were rejected , and that models from Weinman and MacNeil would arrive at the Philadelphia Mint no later than May 1 . According to numismatic historian Walter Breen , Barber became " sullen and totally uncooperative " . Lange notes that " numerous delays were encountered as the artists fine @-@ tuned their models while simultaneously avoiding obstacles thrown in their path by Barber . While his observations regarding many aspects of practical coinage were quite accurate , they clearly could have been presented in a more constructive manner . " In his book on Mercury dimes , Lange notes that Barber , by then aged 75 , had been " compelled over the past ten years to participate in the systematic undoing of a lifetime 's achievements " ; he had to participate in the process which resulted in coins designed by others replacing ones designed by him .

With the new pieces , all American coins would have had a recent change of design (the Morgan dollar was not then being struck .) According to a column in The Art World magazine later in 1916 @, @

Since that day [the 19th century] much artistic progress has taken place in our coinage . Sculptors of reputation have been employed with admirable results ... And now we are to have a new half dollar and a new dime by Weinman and a new quarter by McNeill [sic] . Altogether , in the retrospect , it seems an incredible achievement .

= = Design = =

Weinman never disclosed the name of the model for the obverse , and no person ever claimed to have been her . The winged Liberty is widely believed , however , to have been based on a 1913 bust Weinman sculpted of Elsie Stevens , wife of Wallace Stevens . A lawyer and insurance executive , Wallace Stevens later became famous as a poet ; Wallace and Elsie Stevens rented an apartment from Weinman from 1909 to 1916 . In a draft of his unpublished autobiography , Woolley wrote that Weinman refused to name the model , but told him it was the wife of a lawyer who lived above his Manhattan apartment . (Woolley , in a later version , omitted the location , saying only that Weinman said it was the wife of a lawyer friend .) Woolley recorded that he was told that the model wore the top of an old pair of stockings to simulate the cap . In 1966 , Holly Stevens , Wallace and Elsie 's daughter , noted in her edition of her father 's letters that Elsie had been the model for Weinman 's dime and half dollar . Liberty 's features also bear a resemblance to the face of Victory in Weinman 's 1909 statuary group erected in Baltimore , the Union Soldiers and Sailors ' Monument .

Weinman 's dime depicts Liberty with a wreath of tight curls , and wearing a traditional pileus , or Liberty cap . His depiction of the pileus as a winged cap has provoked comparisons with Roman Republic denarii , which art historian Cornelius Vermeule considered superficial . Weinman wrote that he considered the winged cap to symbolize " liberty of thought " . Vermeule suggests that one reason for the use of wings was that Weinman , in common with many in the tradition of Augustus Saint @-@ Gaudens , under whom Weinman had studied , liked the effect of feathers done in relief . The reverse depicts a fasces , the object carried by lictors , who accompanied Roman magistrates ; on the coin it represents war and justice . It is contrasted with a large olive branch symbolizing peace . According to Breen , " Weinman 's symbolic message in this design ... was clearly an updated ' Don 't tread on me ' " . The fasces is bound both horizontally and diagonally by a leather strap , with the loose ends at the bottom . The lettering is in Roman style , and is made as discreet as possible . Weinman 's monogram , AW , appears on the obverse , midway between the date and the letter Y in " LIBERTY " . The mintmark is located on the reverse , to the right of the first E in " ONE DIME " .

Woolley described the design in his 1916 report to the Secretary of the Treasury :

The design of the dime , owing to the smallness of the coin , has been held quite simple . The obverse shows a head of Liberty with winged cap . The head is simple and firm in form , the profile forceful . The reverse shows a design of the bundle of rods , with battle @-@ ax , known as " Fasces " , and symbolical of unity , wherein lies the nation 's strength . Surrounding the fasces is a full @-@ foliated branch of olive , symbolical of peace .

= = Preparation = =

After Weinman 's success in the competition , he visited the Mint to discuss conversion of his models to finished dies . The first time , he found Barber absent , but had a productive talk with long @-@ time Assistant Engraver George T. Morgan . Other visits followed , and on March 29 , Woolley wrote to Superintendent Joyce , " confidentially , the sculptors designing the new coins felt that on their last trip Mr. Morgan was much more cordial and cooperative than Mr. Barber was . I realize I am dealing with artistic temperaments at both ends . " A severe case of tonsillitis delayed Weinman 's work , and caused him to request an extension of the May 1 deadline . On May 29 , Woolley wrote Weinman that the designs , both for the dime and half dollar , were accepted by the Mint .

As no Barber pieces of any of the three denominations had been struck in 1916 , the pent @-@ up demand was high . On June 24 , Woolley wrote to Joyce :

The dime is all right . Please see that working dies for the three mints are made as rapidly as possible , in order that the coinage of the new dimes may be begun quickly . The demand for these coins is exceedingly great . Everyone to whom the coins have been shown here thinks they are beautiful . I beg to enjoin you not to pay out any of the new dimes until you have received special instructions from this office .

Two days later , work on dies was stopped when it was decided that the lettering was insufficiently distinct . The delay , however , did not prevent the Mint from authorizing payment to Weinman for his designs . On July 15 , Woolley resigned as Mint director to work as publicity chairman of the Wilson reelection campaign . As the new director , Friedrich Johannes Hugo von Engelken , did not take office until September 1 , 1916 , Fred H. Chaffin became acting director . With none of the new designs ready for production , and small change in great demand , the Mint had no alternative other than to strike Barber dimes and quarters by the million .

After the lettering problems were addressed , Acting Director Chafflin halted production of Barber dimes on August 29 , and ordered production of the Mercury dime to begin the following day at the Philadelphia Mint . Barber had prepared dies for the Denver and San Francisco mints , but they were still in transit . Small quantities of the new dime had been sent to vending machine and pay phone manufacturers ; on September 6 , two companies reported problems with the coins . AT & T complained that the new dimes were too thick and would not work in their phones . American Sales Machines (owned by Clarence W. Hobbs , whose complaints had delayed the Buffalo nickel) requested design changes so that its counterfeit detector could work . Von Engelken ordered production of the dimes halted . In reality , the dime was not too thick , but the rim of the coin struck too high , a defect known as a " fin " . This had been an ongoing problem as Weinman 's design was produced , but was thought to have been corrected . No dimes had yet been struck at the two western mints . Minting of Barber dimes resumed . After an article quoting Joyce appeared in the press , Von Engelken instructed his staff not to speak to reporters .

The problems with the dime were a potential embarrassment with a presidential campaign underway . McAdoo enquired how much time would be required for another design to be struck ; he was informed it would take months . Instead , Weinman prepared modified designs , separating the letters of " LIBERTY " slightly from the rim , and lowering the relief . McAdoo approved the revised design on September 28 . These changes assuaged the concerns of both firms . Von Engelken authorized Joyce to produce coinage dies on October 6 , and the new coins were put into production . The earlier strikes , including those reclaimed from the testing companies , were melted , though one specimen is currently known to exist .

= = Release and production ; name controversy = =

The Mercury dime was released into circulation on October 30 , 1916 , the same day that production of the Barber dime ceased . Several newspapers complained that Weinman 's monogram was too prominent on the obverse ; according to The New York Times , the Treasury was considering removal . On November 4 , Weinman enquired of Joyce whether any removal was contemplated ; he received in reply compliments on his design and Joyce 's statement that the Mint was not responsible for what appeared in print . Weinman wrote again , hoping to make changes to the dime , but was told that only an act of Congress could change the design .

Of the three circulating coins first struck in 1916 , the Mercury dime was particularly praised . On the first day of circulation , quantities sold were limited at banks . One Minneapolis newspaper dubbed it the " battle ax " or " golf " dime , reflecting a lack of knowledge concerning the fasces . A letter to the editor in the January 1917 The Numismatist appears to be the first numismatic reference to the coin by the nickname " Mercury " . Lange traced the history of this misnomer ,

This misattribution appeared almost immediately in the popular press , as writers imagined that the obviously female Liberty was actually a representation of Mercury , messenger to the Roman gods of mythology and quite certainly a male . It is popularly known as the Mercury Dime even today , despite noble but ill @-@ fated attempts by some publications to reverse this error .

Chief Engraver Barber died on February 18 , 1917 , having served 37 years in office . His

successor was the 72 ¢ year ¢ old Morgan , who had served under Barber for his entire tenure .

The dime was struck in substantial numbers until 1930 , with the notable exception of the 1916 ¢ D issue and from 1921 to 1923 , when an economic downturn caused the need for coins to diminish . No dimes were struck for 1922 , the first time since 1826 that this had occurred . With the onset of the Great Depression , mintages dropped again in 1930 and 1931 ; coinage of dimes was suspended entirely in 1932 and 1933 . The low ¢ mintage dates are not rare today as many were hoarded , and 1930- and 1931 ¢ dated dimes proved readily available from the banks once the economy improved . With the economy beginning to pick up again , coinage resumed in 1934 , and the dime was struck in large numbers each year through the end of the series .

The death of President Franklin Roosevelt in April 1945 brought immediate calls for a coin to be issued with his image . As Roosevelt had been closely associated with the March of Dimes , and as the dime 's design could be replaced without the need for congressional action as it had been struck for more than 25 years , the Treasury chose that denomination to honor Roosevelt . Mint Chief Engraver John R. Sinnock , Morgan 's successor , executed the design featuring Roosevelt , which replaced the Mercury dime in 1946 , making 1945 the last year in which it was produced . According to Mint Director Nellie Tayloe Ross , a total of 2 ¢, ¢ 677 ¢, ¢ 232 ¢, ¢ 488 Mercury dimes were struck .

= = Collecting = =

The 1916 ¢ D Mercury dime , struck at the Denver Mint , is the key date of the series , with a mintage of 264 ¢, ¢ 000 pieces . The low mintage is because in November 1916 , von Engelken informed the three mint superintendents of a large order for quarters , and instructed that Denver strike only quarters until it was filled . Striking of dimes at Denver did not resume until well into 1917 , making the 1917 ¢ D relatively rare as well .

Few varieties are known in the Mercury dime series . The 1942 / 41 is generally termed an overdate ; it is actually a doubled ¢ die error ? the obverse die from which the coins were struck took one impression from a 1942 ¢ dated hub and one from a 1941 ¢ dated hub (until the 1990s , dies required two strikes from a hub for the design to be fully impressed) . Sinnock stated that the pieces were most likely struck in late 1941 , when preparation of the 1942 dies was under way . Also produced at that time , though less apparent to the naked eye , was the 1942 / 1 ¢ D. 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 puncheon (used to impress mintmarks on dies and hubs) which had been made for use with early 20th century Philippine coinage struck at San Francisco , which had only a small space for the mintmark . Beginning in 1928 , coin albums were issued by private publishers , mostly in folder form , which were widely used to collect the pieces . This led to a great increase in interest in collecting current coinage by date and mintmark .

Many Mercury dimes were not fully struck , meaning that design detail was lost even before the coins entered circulation . Exceptionally well ¢ struck dimes display " full bands " , that is , the horizontal bands on the fasces show full detail . In circulation , the reverse tended to more readily display wear due to a lower rim in relation to the relief of the design . Most well ¢ circulated dimes show more wear to the reverse .

Although no 1923 or 1930 dimes were struck at Denver , specimens appearing to be 1923 ¢ D or 1930 ¢ D dimes may be encountered . These counterfeits are struck in good silver , allowing the coiner to profit on the difference between the cost of production and the face value . They did not appear until after World War II , are invariably found in worn condition , and are believed to have been struck in the Soviet Union , a country known to have counterfeited US coins during World War II .

= = 2016 centennial gold version = =

The Mint released a centennial version , in gold , of the Mercury dime on April 21 , 2016 , sold

through the Mint 's official website . Demand was so high , that orders were no longer able to placed within 45 minutes of the coin becoming available . On April 26 , the Mint reported that it has sold 122 @ , @ 510 units , just 2 @ , @ 490 pieces away from the item 's maximum allowable mintage .