

= Adam Eckfeldt =

John Adam Eckfeldt (June 15 , 1769 ? February 6 , 1852 ; usually Adam Eckfeldt) was a worker and official in the early days of the United States Mint . A lifelong Philadelphian , Eckfeldt served as the second chief coiner of the Mint , from 1814 until 1839 .

Eckfeldt 's father owned a large smithy and involved himself in early attempts at American coinage . Adam Eckfeldt built early presses for the Mint , engraved some of its early dies , and was responsible for the designs of early American copper coinage , as well as the 1792 half dime which some authorities consider the first United States coin . He was appointed assistant coiner of the Mint in 1796 , and became chief coiner on his predecessor 's death in 1814 .

Eckfeldt served a quarter century as chief coiner , during which time the Philadelphia Mint moved to new premises . As he set aside unusual coins brought in as bullion , he started the Mint 's coin cabinet , which evolved into the National Numismatic Collection . Even after his 1839 retirement , Eckfeldt continued to perform the duties of chief coiner ; his death in 1852 caused his replacement , Franklin Peale , to seek an assistant .

= = Early life = =

John Adam Eckfeldt was born in Philadelphia on June 15 , 1769 , the son of John Jacob Eckfeldt , a large @-@ scale manufacturer of edge @-@ tools and implements . At the time , it was common for those of German descent to bear the name " John " but be referred to by middle name . The elder Eckfeldt and his wife Maria Magdalena had immigrated from Nuremberg , Bavaria , around 1764 . John Jacob Eckfeldt , in his large smithy , made dies for the 1783 coinage under the Articles of Confederation authorized by Philadelphia financier Robert Morris . Adam was his father 's apprentice , and was skilled in iron work and machinery .

= = Coin designer and Mint official = =

During Eckfeldt 's childhood , the thirteen British colonies along the Atlantic coast of what is now the United States revolted , and so the United States of America secured its independence . After the United States Constitution was ratified , Congress and many government offices came to be housed in Philadelphia , including the newborn Mint of the United States . Adam Eckfeldt built the first screw press for the new facility in 1792 , the same year that the Mint Act of 1792 was passed by Congress authorizing a mint , and cut the obverse die for the experimental Birch cent of that year . He also built other machinery for the Mint , and helped superintend the early coining .

In 1792 , the Mint acquired three balances from Eckfeldt , who also lent the Mint his lathe (used for turning dies) . Eckfeldt is believed to have made the die from which the 1792 half dime , considered by some the first official U.S. coin , was struck ? in 1829 , a visitor to the Mint met Eckfeldt and later described him as " an artist [who] made the first die used in it " . Other later accounts document Eckfeldt 's role in this striking : an 1863 auction sold a half dime supposedly given by Eckfeldt to demonstrate his work . Eckfeldt is given as the source for the tradition that the half dimes were struck at the request of President George Washington to be used as presents . Eckfeldt operated his screw press to strike these roughly 1 @,@ 500 pieces on July 13 , 1792 . Since the first Philadelphia Mint was still under construction at the time , these coins were produced in the cellar of John Harper , saw maker , at Sixth and Cherry Streets in Philadelphia . In his annual message to Congress late that year , Washington noted the ongoing construction of a mint building and stated : " There has also been a small beginning in the coinage of half dimes , the want of small coins in circulation calling the first attention to them . "

Eckfeldt also produced a pattern dime , of which only a few were struck . When the Mint 's first cents (produced in 1793) were found to be excessively crude and attracted public ridicule , Eckfeldt was called upon to design replacements . He placed a wreath on the back of the cent instead of the original chain , and placed a trefoil under Liberty 's head on the obverse . He also engraved the first half cent dies later the same year .

Eckfeldt continued to work intermittently for the Philadelphia Mint ; in 1793 , he built a device for automatically feeding planchets into the die collar and ejecting the struck coins , and the mint 's records reveal that he did piecework there in July 1795 . By October 1795 he was on the mint 's payroll , as a die forger and turner , at a salary of \$ 500 per year . On January 1 , 1796 , Mint Director Elias Boudinot appointed him as assistant coiner , with the consent of President Washington . His duties in that capacity were broad .

In 1805 , at Boudinot 's request , Eckfeldt eliminated a security problem for the Mint by renting two houses adjacent to its operations , allowing it to shut an internal alley to public access . The following year , new Mint Director Robert Patterson requested a pay increase of \$ 200 for Eckfeldt , writing to President Thomas Jefferson that Eckfeldt had " the management of the whole coining department " . When the dies used proved too brittle and cracked easily , Eckfeldt came up with the idea of spraying water on the face of the die so the steel would temper evenly .

As a boy , inventor George Escal Sellers knew Eckfeldt ; as Sellers 's father was partner in a firm which sold machinery to the Mint Bureau , Eckfeldt often dined at his house . In the final years both of the 19th century and of Sellers 's life , he published his memoirs , including memories of the first Philadelphia Mint . He recalled in 1812 peering through a window to see cents coined , and Eckfeldt coming into the room to stop the work at the end of the day . Seeing the young Sellers , he had the boy come in , had him place a cent planchet on the press , and struck it for him . Sellers nearly dropped it because it was so hot , and Eckfeldt reminded him it had been cold when placed in the press . Eckfeldt bade him keep the coin until he learned why the cent had become hot , and then he could spend it on candy .

= = Chief coiner = =

On the death of the first chief coiner , Henry Voigt , in early 1814 , Eckfeldt was appointed by President James Madison as successor . He served in that capacity for a quarter century . During his tenure , he continued to improve the machinery at the Philadelphia Mint .

Eckfeldt set aside " master coins " ? coins struck with extra care using new dies and polished planchets . He also put aside interesting foreign coins sent to the mint as bullion . These pieces became the Mint 's Cabinet , or coin collection . To fill gaps in this collection , he used old dies to strike postdated coins . Specialists have discovered that some dies he chose for this purpose had not been used together to strike coins for commerce , thus creating unique specimens . Among the pieces acquired for the Mint was a Brasher doubloon , of which only six are known today . Eckfeldt often spent from his own funds to acquire the coins for the Mint . The collection eventually evolved into the Smithsonian Institution 's National Numismatic Collection .

In 1828 , Eckfeldt again became involved in the real estate transactions to expand operations at the Philadelphia Mint . For \$ 1 @, @ 000 , he purchased one of the lots he had rented in 1805 . After the mint moved to new premises in the 1830s , Eckfeldt discovered that the lot he had purchased had a cloud , or irregularity , on its title ; he was able to clear it and sold it in 1837 for the same sum for which he had bought it . The new mint building was at Juniper and Chestnut Streets , only six blocks from Eckfeldt 's home at Juniper and Vine .

Sellers , in his memoirs , described Eckfeldt as " a man of staunch integrity , a cautious , careful , orderly and painstaking man ; he was not one of the dashing , pushing , inventive mechanics , though under his care many apparently slight improvements were gradually adopted that in the aggregate amounted to a great deal in the economy of working . He was by no means deficient in inventive ability . " Nevertheless , as Eckfeldt aged in the service of the Mint in the late 1820s and into the 1830s , he was reluctant to adopt the innovations being proposed by his fellow Mint officer , Melter and Refiner Franklin Peale . Peale , like Eckfeldt of a mechanical bent , had many suggestions for improvements to the coinage machinery , some of which Eckfeldt adopted . Eckfeldt stated to Sellers , " If Mr. Peale had full swing he would turn everything upside down " . According to Sellers , " the giving up of almost life @-@ long pets that had been Mr. Eckfeldt 's constant care would naturally go hard , and still harder coming from another department , but as improvements gradually crept in and proved their efficiency Mr. Eckfeldt gave full credit where it belonged , and I

remember him becoming quite enthusiastic over the labor saving [in the use of the Contamin portrait lathe] in duplicating working dies " .

In 1833 , Peale was sent on a tour of European mints and came home with ideas for new machines and innovations , including the introduction of steam power , used at Britain 's Royal Mint since 1810 on equipment purchased from the firm of Boulton & Watt . Although Eckfeldt would have preferred to apply steam to the existing coin presses , a new one was built for steam power , and commemorative medals were the first pieces struck by steam at the Philadelphia Mint , in early 1836 .

In 1839 , Eckfeldt retired after 25 years as chief coiner and over forty as a Mint employee . His fellow officers at the Mint presented him with a gold medal , with silver and bronze duplicates also struck . The obverse was designed by Philadelphia engraver Moritz Fuerst , who sometimes did work for the Mint ; the reverse may be by Fuerst or by Peale . Eckfeldt recommended Peale as his successor , and Peale was appointed . Nevertheless , Eckfeldt continued to perform the functions of chief coiner without pay until a few days before his death on February 6 , 1852 . After Eckfeldt 's death , Peale , wrote what Taxay terms a " frantic letter " to Mint Director George N. Eckert , seeking the appointment of an assistant . Peale had spent the freed @-@ up time designing and selling medals for private gain .

= = Private and family life = =

Eckfeldt married twice . No children were born of his brief first marriage in 1792 to Maria Hahn , which ended with her death ; his second marriage to Margaretta Bausch produced six children . Among them were his daughter Susanna , who married William Ewing DuBois , first curator of the Mint 's coin collection . Jacob Reese Eckfeldt , one of Adam 's sons , was for forty years (1832 ? 1872) Assayer of the United States Mint . Jacob 's son Jacob Branch Eckfeldt exceeded both forebears in time of service , working at the Mint for 64 years , from 1865 to 1929 .

Adam Eckfeldt had a taste for horticulture and owned rural property in Upper Darby , Pennsylvania , which was inherited by his two sons after his death . He was the first president of the Good Will Fire Company , holding that office for nearly all of his adult life , and designed a system of levers for use in fire engines . A member of Concordia Lodge No. 67 of the Masonic Order from 1795 to 1806 , he served as lodge master in 1803 ; a Chinese export porcelain punch bowl with his name and Masonic symbols survives in the Philadelphia Museum of Art . A biographical sketch of Eckfeldt , published in 1897 , describes him :

He was a man of large information on many subjects , possessed an inventive genius , and was enabled to introduce some excellent improvements in minting processes . He was singularly industrious and energetic , and for his social qualities and uprightness was universally respected , and , indeed , beloved by the officers associated with him and the extended circle of his acquaintance .