



LADY LIBERTY

This year's National Coin Week theme explores the genesis of the famed allegorical figure on currency.

THIS MONTH, I am focused on the ANA's upcoming National Coin Week (NCW), slated for April 17-23. This year's theme, "Portraits of Liberty: Icon of Freedom," provides a wonderful opportunity to explore the famed allegorical figure's depiction on coinage.

From the establishment of the U.S. Mint in 1792 until the introduction of the Franklin half dollar in 1948, images of Liberty were a fixture on American currency. After ratification of the Constitution in 1789, the United States began to consider a national coinage. The original proposal was for pieces to feature busts of the presidents with their names, plus numbers indicating the order in which they served. When President George Washington saw a pattern coin with a proposed design bearing his likeness, he immediately objected, and asked that the specimen and dies be destroyed. (He considered any coin displaying an individual portrait to be monarchical.)

► **PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON** felt that coins displaying portraits were reminiscent of a monarchy and wanted the nation's currency to represent a republic of the people.

European issues of the time depicted living kings and queens, and Washington was determined that America would be ruled by the people and not by a dictator or king (although both positions had been proposed to him). As such, the nation's coinage would reflect this ideal by featuring a female representation of Liberty, which had the advantage of being a symbol that everyone could support regardless of political affiliation. Thus, the allegorical figure graced U.S. coinage in many forms over the next 150 years.

The story of Liberty on circulating currency began long before 1792. The Founding Fathers adapted the idea from ancient history, specifically from the Roman Republic (509-27 B.C.), which provided inspiration for much of our new nation's structure. On coinage, the Romans were fond of personifying abstract concepts as goddesses. The earliest representation of Liberty on Roman issues was a *denarius* struck in 54 B.C. by Marcus Junius Brutus (85-42 B.C.), one of Julius Caesar's assassins in 44 B.C. The piece features a Liberty head and an image of a Roman senator with his *lictors*

◄ **THIS ROMAN DENARIUS** issued by Brutus in 54 B.C. features a depiction of Liberty and a Roman senator with his lictors. It is among the first coins to depict a personification of the allegorical figure.

Not Actual Size

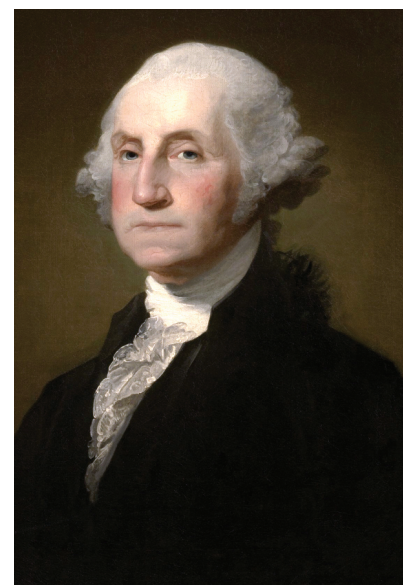


PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

(ceremonial bodyguards). Liberty also was used to represent the freedom of the Roman people under the Republic.

In the United States during the 18th century, the allegorical figure was closely linked with the *pileus* (or "liberty cap") worn by freed slaves in ancient Rome. In American iconography, the *pileus* represented the colonial struggle for liberation from the oppressive English monarchy. It was associated with Lady Liberty from her earliest U.S. numismatic depiction on the "Libertas Americana" medal produced by French engraver Augustin Dupré in 1782 (based on designs by inventor and statesman Benjamin Franklin).

Regular-issue American coins, from half cents to silver dollars, began featuring Liberty in 1792. (Coins without the allegorical figure included 3-cent "trimes" and 2-cent pieces.) Featured on 1792 and early 1793 issues was a "Wild Hair" design that generated quite



PHOTOS: ANA MUSEUM (COIN) & ISTOCKPHOTO/FMAJOR



PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO/TRIGGERPHOTO



a bit of negative publicity, resulting in the more coiffed Flowing Hair type in 1793.

After these initial issues, Liberty's rendering evolved to include the Draped Bust and Capped Bust designs. The addition of the Seated Liberty types in the 1830s began a new series of variations, including the Indian Princess, Walking Liberty, Standing Liberty and Winged Head Liberty (or "Mercury") versions.

Sadly, the Walking Liberty half dollar (replaced by the Franklin design in 1948) was the last regular U.S. issue to feature the allegorical figure as its primary obverse image (though the word "Liberty" has remained on our coins). The Presidential \$1 coin series, which began in 2007, reintroduced the

figure on the reverse in the form of the Statue of Liberty.

I hope this quick overview of Liberty on coinage has sparked your interest. There is a lot more to learn about the iconic figure that personifies the American pantheon. Visit www.nationalcoinweek.org for more articles about Liberty and to learn about this month's NCW activities.

museum@money.org



PHOTOS: ANA ARCHIVES

▲ **LIBERTY APPEARED** in a variety of 19th- and 20th-century coinage designs, including the Braided Hair (left) and Seated Liberty motifs.

Not Actual Size

**ANA FILLER
(Education?)**