

# **The Young United States Mint**

By Nicolas Conner

## **Introduction:**

At one time the United States Mint was as old as you and I. They were adapting to different denominations, designs and demands. Quarters and cents used to be noticeably larger, while the five-cent piece used to be smaller and made of silver. They tested and tried various compositions. Sometimes in spite of their efforts, they failed, but kept trying anyway. Over 200 years in the making are the coins we commonly see today. Most see the Mint as being old. While that is true, everything has to start at some point, even the United States Mint.

## **1791-1792 Preparation:**

Now no more would the American people have to rely on foreign coins to pay for goods. Instead, the United States Mint was established to provide currency for the new nation. This was decided by Congress on March 3, 1791. No quick action was made, but on April 2, 1792 it was determined that the U.S. dollar would represent 100 cents. A few months later, in July 1792, 15,000 half dismes (pronounced “deem”, according to “100 Greatest U.S. Coins” by Jeff Garrett, the current ANA

President) were struck during the construction of the Mint. It is rumored that President Washington donated his own silver for the making of these coins. Also, other pattern coins were made in 1792, including the Silver Center cent, the Birch cent, the disme, and the quarter dollar. All of these pattern coins are rare and deemed as legendary numismatic coins today.

### **1793-1796 First Coins:**

Preparation was completed and now it was time for the United States Mint to mass produce coinage for the citizens. Over 70,000 large cents and half cents were made in 1793; about 35,000 for each. Later in July 1794, the first mass amount of silver was deposited to the Mint; over \$80,000. This allowed for the minting of higher denomination coins, such as the half dime and the half dollar which were first minted in 1794. Soon dimes, quarters and dollars were made. The Mint was up and running and the hardest work was behind it, right? No, the hard work had just begun for the Mint in its early years.

One of the biggest problems in early United States Mint history was that its designs were considered boring and lacking in character. Many saw the Chain cent reverse as representative of slavery or the tyranny of Britain, and some at the time thought that Lady Liberty looked overweight. The United States Mint listened and began to make design changes. In a few years many thought Lady Liberty looked nicer and instead of a chain

reverse, there was a wreath. This all happened after the Mint had a few staff changes. The designs were more acceptable to most people, and that's why over time the designs stayed more consistent. The Lincoln cent, for example, has had the same obverse design for over a century because of its popularity. The United States Mint was getting better at designing coins such as the Seated Liberty and Capped Bust coins which were considered to be more acceptable than the earlier designs.

### **Conclusion:**

Certainly, a lot of changes have been made over the years to the coinage of our country, including composition, mintage, designs and denominations. Just think about it, if it had not been for the early Mint, we might not have coins in our pockets today.

### **Bibliography:**

Garrett, Jeff and Ron Guth. "100 Greatest U.S. Coins" 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Atlanta, GA: Whitman Publishing, 2008.

Yeoman, R.S. "A Guide Book of United States Coins". Atlanta, GA: Whitman Publishing, 2016.