The Lincoln Memorial Cent

Collectors looking for variety and availability will find a lot to like about this common coin.

HE LINCOLN Memorial cent truly is a common coin. More than 400 billion of these coins have been produced-that's approximately 1,300 cents for every person in the United States. However, most Americans are not particularly interested in their share: pennies routinely languish in drawers and jars, and often are given away freely at cash registers. But numismatists have not neglected the lowly cent. Collectors seeking a coin with an interesting story, considerable variety and wide availability will find a lot to like about the Lincoln Memorial cent.

When the original Lincoln cent was introduced in 1909, the Lincoln Memorial was barely in the planning stages. It was completed in 1922, built in the style of a Greek temple and located within sight of the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol. Daniel Chester French's 19-foot-tall statue of a contemplative Abraham Lincoln sits inside.

The Lincoln Memorial has been featured on the cent's reverse since 1959, when the original Wheat design was replaced on the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's birth. Victor David Brenner's portrait of Lincoln remained on the obverse, paired with Frank Gasparro's facing view of the Memorial. A tiny image of Lincoln's

Because of its tremendous mintage, the Lincoln Memorial cent offers hobbyists an inexpensive opportunity to assemble a collection. statue is visible, meaning that Lincoln actually appears on both sides of the coin.

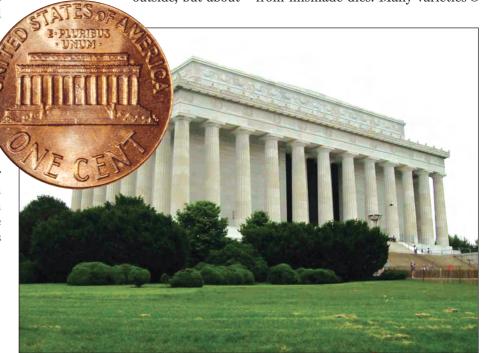
The piece has undergone some important changes over time. The obverse portrait was retouched in 1969, and subsequent modifications have facilitated production by lowering the coin's relief.

The cent's composition also has varied. Originally bronze, with 95-percent copper and 5-percent tin and zinc, the coin's alloy switched to brass when tin was removed in 1962. A more radical change was considered in 1973, when more than a million experimental aluminum cents (dated 1974) were coined. The idea was abandoned after copper prices dropped, and these cents were never officially released. By 1982, the concern with cost had returned, and a midyear switch was made to copper-plated zinc—identical on the outside, but about 20-percent lighter. Today, rising metal prices again are an issue, with the cent's intrinsic value exceeding its face value.

As a current coin with tremendous mintage, the Lincoln Memorial cent can be collected from circulation or bank rolls. Recently, I was able to find nice examples of nearly all date/mintmark combinations after looking through \$50 worth of pennies. I was pleased to discover early examples with original, red coloration, and locate several San Francisco Mint issues. Alternatively, inexpensive specimens are readily available from dealers.

Collecting options go beyond basic dates and mintmarks. Proof-only issues with "S" mintmarks have been made annually since 1975. And digit styles have changed periodically, with "large date" and "small date" cents made in 1960, 1970 and 1982.

Some collectors also pursue coins from mismade dies. Many varieties \odot



are subtle and inexpensive: some have repunched or phantom mintmarks, and others are made from proof dies. The most dramatic mistakes show doubled design images. The 1995 issue with doubled LIBERTY is relatively inexpensive, but other prominent doubled-die cents, like the 1983, 1972 and especially the 1969-S, are scarce. Another rare variety was struck in 1990, when the "S" mintmark accidentally was omitted from some proofs.

As generally is the case with numismatics, several useful references are available. Whitman's *Guide Book of United States Coins* (the "Red Book") presents values for all date-mintmark combinations and popular varieties, while David Lange's *Complete Guide to Lincoln Cents* has extensive details about the entire series. *The Cherrypickers' Guide to Rare Die Varieties* by Bill Fivaz and J.T. Stanton offers a multitude of listings.

Nearly 50 years after the Lincoln



Memorial cent was introduced, its days could be numbered. For Lincoln's bicentennial in 2009, four reverse designs will portray various aspects of his life, and afterward, the cent's reverse will honor his preservation of the Union.

Whatever the future holds, the appeal of the Lincoln Memorial cent will remain strong. For a beginning numismatist seeking an introduction to coin collecting, or for an established numismatist looking for a "back to basics" project, the common Lincoln Memorial cent is an uncommonly fine collectible.

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