

A Brief History of the U.S. Cent

The one-cent coin, commonly known as the penny, was the first currency of any type authorized by the United States. The design for the first one-cent coin was suggested by Benjamin Franklin. The original one-cent coin was over five times heavier and almost 50% larger than its contemporary counterpart. The word "penny" is derived from the British coin pence. Over 300 billion one-cent coins, with 11 different designs, have been minted since 1787.

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The first one-cent coin was struck in 1787 by a private mint. This coin, known as the Fugio cent, was 100% copper and this composition would continue until the mid-1800's. Paul Revere, a noted blacksmith, supplied some of the copper for one-cent coins minted during the early 1790's.

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No one-cent coins were minted in 1815 due to a copper shortage caused by the War of 1812 with Great Britain.

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The Flying Eagle cent was first produced in 1856. This coin was notable for its change in composition -- 88% copper and 12% nickel.

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The Indian cent was first introduced in 1859 and depicted an Indian princess on the obverse. A popular story about its design claims a visiting Indian chief lent the designer's daughter his headdress so she could pose as the Indian princess. Most Indian cents minted during the Civil War went primarily to pay Union soldiers. After the Civil War, in 1864, the composition of the one-cent coin was changed to 95% copper and 5% zinc.

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The one-cent coin was made legal tender by the Coinage Act of 1864.

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In 1909, Abraham Lincoln was the first historical figure to grace a U.S. coin when he was portrayed on the one-cent coin to commemorate his 100th birthday. The Lincoln penny was also the first U.S. cent to include the words "In God We Trust."

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During part of World War II, zinc-coated steel cents were struck due to a copper shortage.

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The Lincoln Memorial was added to the reverse of the one-cent coin by Mint engraver Frank Gasparro in 1959 to mark Lincoln's 150th birthday, making it the first and only coin to have the same person on both sides. If you inspect it carefully, you will see the statue of Lincoln inside the Memorial.

