

DIE VARIETIES

Photos courtesy of HA.com



1955 Lincoln cent, doubled die obverse. When a coin die is created, it is made from a working hub, which places the incuse image onto the die. This can take multiple blows. In 1955, a working obverse die at the Philadelphia Mint was misaligned on the second blow from the hub, resulting in a doubled image. About 40,000 of these coins were minted during one night shift at the Philadelphia Mint and some 20,000 were put into circulation. This coin exhibits some of the strongest doubling found on any US coin; magnification is not necessary to see the strong separation between the two impressions. The 1955 DDO is quite valuable because of its history and rarity, and numerous counterfeits exist.



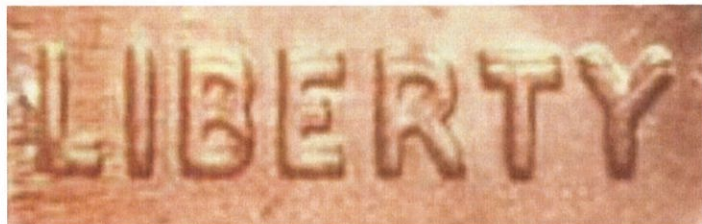
1972 Lincoln cent, doubled die obverse. Not as strong as the 1955 DDO, but there is a better chance of finding one of these in your change.



1983 Lincoln cent, doubled die reverse.



1984 Lincoln cent, doubled die obverse (notice the strong doubling below the ear and beard).



1995 Lincoln cent, doubled die obverse. This is a moderately doubled die, but still desired by many collectors. This is a great "first DDO" variety to search for.

(DIE) VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE!

A **die variety** is a variation in the normal design of a coin, usually caused by the preparation or maintenance of dies. Typical die varieties include doubled dies, repunched mintmarks or dates, and changes to die surface from over-polishing or die clashes. Perhaps the most famous die variety is the 1955 doubled die obverse (DDO) Lincoln cent. The chance of finding one in your change is slim, but there are many other varieties in circulation.

Pictures of DDO's and other varieties can be found online at the Combined Organizations of Numismatic Error Collectors of America's (CONECA) Variety Vista website, www.varietyvista.com, or in a book like the *Cherrypickers' Guide to Rare Die Varieties of US Coins*, a must-read for die variety collectors.

Understanding the modern coin minting process is a vital step to successfully identifying error and variety (E-V) coins. *Strike It Rich* is a great book for beginning die variety collectors who want to focus on current circulating US coins. *The Error Coin Encyclopedia* is a great resource to aid your study of coin production mishaps.

Collecting coins by die variety, or “cherrypicking,” is quite popular. Some problematic dies go unnoticed by Mint employees and strike numerous specimens. In other instances, the Mint will quickly catch and fix or remove the dies, and sometimes these dies only strike a few coins that get released—creating a new die variety and kicking off a nationwide coin hunting frenzy! Don't believe it? Look through a recent edition of the *Cherrypickers' Guide* and compare some of the normal prices to the variety prices. Who wouldn't be excited to pay \$10 for a quarter, only to discover that it's a tougher die variety worth a few hundred dollars?

DEALING WITH DIE VARIETIES

Not all coin dealers have an interest in distinguishing between die varieties, even though many of these variants can fetch prices over \$100 each. As a basic rule, the more valuable the “normal” version of a coin, the less of a premium another variety of that coin will have. For example, a Lincoln cent from 1917 in Very Good condition has a retail value of less than one dollar, but a 1917 Lincoln cent with a DDO in the same grade has a retail value of around \$150. However, a doubled die on a \$20 gold piece will not command as much of a premium above the price of the “normal” version, as it's already a high value coin. Demand is another factor. There are thousands of different die varieties, but many are not significant enough to grab much attention—let alone fetch a high price. Read the “Factors Affecting Value” section in the front of the *Cherrypickers' Guide* for more information.

Lesser-known die varieties that appeal to collecting specialists may not be a top priority to dealers who are concerned with the profitability of their inventory overall. In the aforementioned *Cherrypickers' Guide*, there is an appendix that reviews guidelines for collectors to consider when purchasing coins from a dealer. This is recommended reading for the aspiring numismatic treasure hunter.

Most of the following images include pictures of die varieties you may find in your change today. There are also some pictures of die varieties on relatively common, older coins that you might be able to find at low prices in coin dealers' coin “junk bins.” The pictures may only show one side, as the other side of each coin is considered “normal” in almost every case. Many of these coins can be seen in the *Cherrypickers' Guide* and may be accompanied by their individual Fivaz-Stanton (FS) catalog number.



(2000)-P double-denomination "mule" or mismatched dies error on a golden dollar planchet, struck by a Washington quarter obverse die and a Sacagawea dollar reverse die. This is one of the most popular and heavily counterfeited errors. Just over about a dozen are known to exist, and they usually sell for tens of thousands of dollars.



1922-No D (or plain) Lincoln cent and a 1937-D "3-legged" Buffalo nickel. Both coins were struck with an over-polished die (the unintentional result of an effort to remove die clash marks). Coins like this blur the lines between what may be considered an error coin or a die variety. Because these mistakes were "repeated," most specialists classify them as die varieties. (In 1922, Lincoln cents were only made at the Denver Mint.)



1859 Indian Head cent die cap error. A planchet became affixed to the obverse die face after being struck. Repeated strikes molded the stuck coin onto the obverse die to the point where it formed over the sides of the die neck creating a "bottle cap" appearance. Any coins struck by this die cap would have a normal reverse with an obverse looking like a distorted mirrored image of the reverse design. The reverse of this stuck coin functioned as an obverse coin die.



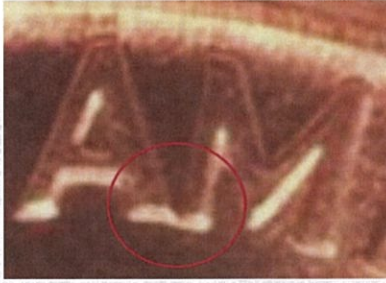
1874 \$1 gold piece, full brockage error. This coin was struck by a normal reverse die, but the obverse was struck by a die cap that got stuck to the obverse die just before striking this piece. As gold is a soft metal, the details of the obverse die cap transferred wonderfully with nearly full details.



1999 Lincoln cent, three-piece bonded die cap. Three separate planchets became stuck in the coining chamber and were fused or bonded together due to the intense heat and pressure.



1981 Lincoln cent struck on a 1981-P Roosevelt dime. This is technically a double-denomination error, but it's much more fun to call it an 11-cent piece!



1998-2000 Lincoln cents with "Wide AM" reverse. For these three years, circulation-strike cents were mistakenly struck with dies usually prepared for proof coins, based on the separation between the bases of both letters. The middle photo is the common, Close AM. Wide AM coins are much harder to find, especially for 1999.



1982-P Roosevelt dime (left) and 1982 Roosevelt dime without the "P" mintmark (right). All 1982 dimes issued from Philadelphia were intended to have a mintmark. The die variety *without* the "P" is more valuable.



2004-D Wisconsin statehood quarters, normal reverse die (top), Extra Leaf-low (left), and Extra Leaf-high (right). Some Wisconsin quarters from the Denver Mint were struck with a strong die gouge on the reverse, under the left leaf on the ear of corn. This is a mysterious variety, as no one knows how or why this happened. Die gauges show up as raised marks on struck coins.



2009-D District of Columbia quarter, doubled die reverse. Look for strong doubling at the bottom of "ELL." This is an elusive variety that can pay off handsomely! Look near the central design features on other 21st century coins for more doubled dies!



2000-P Sacagawea dollar, "Wounded Eagle" Reverse. Note the huge die gouge running through the eagle's belly. Some varieties earn clever nicknames; these "Wounded Eagles" can still be found in circulation.



2000-P Sacagawea Dollar, normal reverse (left) and "Cheerios" reverse (right). In 2000 the U.S. Mint partnered with the General Mills Corporation and 1 in 2,000 specially marked boxes of Cheerios contained one of the new golden dollar coins. In 2005 researchers noticed a minor design difference—the specimens from the Cheerios boxes had slightly bolder, more detailed tail feathers—and thus concluded it was an early pattern design. It is still worth searching for, as some are likely still in circulation.

TRUSTWORTHY SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Our technological growth is occurring at an alarmingly fast rate, and it effects everything in our world—including coin collecting. Just as you would keep your guard up when it comes to anything online, treat your numismatic sources in much the same way. There is a wealth of information available, but it is not all good. Always consider the trustworthiness of your sources. This can save you time, money and aggravation.

Do your best to explore trustworthy coin websites—the ones provided by great numismatic clubs like the [American Numismatic Association](#), the [American Numismatic Society](#), [Florida United Numismatists](#), the [Greater Houston Coin Club](#), the [Pennsylvania Association of Numismatists](#), the [Texas Numismatic Association](#), and many others. The websites of publications like *Coin World* or *Numismatic News* also provide a wealth of information, and a subscription to either one or both of these magazines will keep you up to date with the current trends in the hobby. Membership in CONECA also includes a subscription to their bi-monthly magazine, *ErrorScope*, which contains great photos and articles about recent happenings in errors and varieties. Prominent coin grading companies have key numismatic information available online, including data about certain coins.

The following list contains some of the best websites available to numismatists. Use these websites in conjunction with the recommended books listed on page 25. Reading only a couple of books or relying only on internet sources will not provide sufficient knowledge to do well as a coin treasure hunter. And while there are other helpful, educational numismatic websites to assist you, the sites listed here will start you out in the right direction.

- www.money.org (ANA—American Numismatic Association)
- www.numismatics.org (ANS—American Numismatic Society)
- www.whitman.com (Numismatic book company, publisher of the Red Book and CPG)
- www.coinworld.com (*Coin World* magazine)
- www.shopnumismaster.com/shop-by-product/magazines (Various periodicals, including *Numismatic News* and *Coins*, as well as others about banknotes and world coins)
- www.coinagemag.com (*COINage* magazine)
- www.usmint.gov (The United States Mint)
- www.usmint.gov/circulating_coins/index.cfm?action=coins (U.S. Mint: How coins are made.)
- www.moneyfactory.gov (The BEP—The United States Bureau of Engraving and Printing—for paper money)
- www.conecaonline.org (CONECA—Combined Organizations of Numismatic Error Collectors of America)
- www.varietyvista.com (Variety Vista—home of the CONECA Master Listing of Die Varieties)
- www.lincolncentresource.com (Lincoln Cent Resource—reference specifically for Lincoln Cent die varieties)
- www.ngccoin.com/coin-explorer (Reference of US Coins from Numismatic Guaranty Corporation)
- www.pcgscoinfacts.com (Encyclopedia of US Coins from Professional Coin Grading Service)
- www.wildwinds.com (Information about Ancient Coins)
- www.forums.collectors.com (PCGS online collector forum/social media exchange)
- www.cointalk.com (CoinTalk—an online social media forum for numismatists)

There are numerous websites where coins are bought and sold, and these can be helpful in that they provide fair market valuations. (These are prices resulting from recent auctions and are often the most accurate representations of current coin values because they reflect the prices people *actually paid* for certain items.) For more information regarding reputable dealers and local coin clubs, use www.money.org and go to “find a dealer” through the Dealer Directory or “find a club” in the Club Directory. Links appear at the top of the homepage.

Some of the books mentioned throughout this work are listed here for your convenience.

- *A Guide Book of United States Coins* (the Red Book) by R.S. Yeoman; Ken Bressett, Senior Editor.
- *A Guide Book of United States Coins: Mega Red, Expanded Deluxe Edition* by R.S. Yeoman; Ken Bressett, Senior Editor; Q. David Bowers, Research Editor; Jeff Garrett, Valuations Editor.
- *The Error Coin Encyclopedia* by Arnold Margolis and Fred Weinberg.
- *Cherrypickers’ Guide to Rare Varieties of United States Coins* (6th Ed., Vol. I and II) by Bill Fivaz and J.T. Stanton.
- *Strike It Rich with Pocket Change* (4th Edition) by Ken Potter and Brian Allen.
- *The Coin Collector’s Survival Manual* (Revised 7th Edition) by Scott A. Travers.

THE SAD REALITY OF PRICE GUIDES

Keep in mind that a price guide is only that—a guide to help navigate your way through the challenging process of arriving at realistic coin prices. The figures in a price guide like the Red Book are *retail* prices. A dealer cannot pay full retail price; they pay *wholesale* prices to earn some profit. Dealers also have business expenses (overhead), such as traveling to shows and table fees. The guy at your local flea market may have some great deals,

but can you be certain of his knowledge? Chances are that he is not obliged to follow a code of ethics like an ANA member. Dealing with reputable dealers may cost a little more but will pay off in the long run.

Selling coins to dealers is more difficult than buying them and is something you probably won't feel comfortable doing until you are knowledgeable. Coins don't always go up in value; you might buy certain die varieties cheaply but may have to sell them cheaply! Die variety collectors learn this hard lesson because even the figures listed in the *Cherrypickers' Guide* are retail prices, and many dealers are not concerned with most die varieties. It is important to know relative rarity, collector demand and basic pricing. The saying *caveat emptor* (Latin for "let the buyer beware") also applies to sellers—know your values so you don't sell too cheaply.

Checking auction records is a fantastic way to help establish fair market valuations for collectible coins. Use this information in conjunction with retail price guides. By doing this, you can become savvy enough to know when a coin is priced too high and should be avoided or priced too low and should be picked up immediately. This is another form of coin treasure hunting that can take years of dedication to reach.

CONCLUSION

This resource provides information to anyone embarking on a numismatic treasure hunt, regardless of age. You may experience highs and lows, but don't give up! Study every coin that crosses your path. Prices for collectible coins rise and fall like the tides, and there is no numismatic crystal ball that will foretell the future, so no one can say with perfect accuracy what something might be worth years from now. Remember to use *all* of the resources you have—especially this one, *Treasures in Your Pocket*. Balance information online with research from trusted sources, books, and periodicals. Take advantage of the vast wealth of knowledge accumulated by our fellow collectors, researchers, and specialists with years of experience who have paved the way. Share your newfound knowledge with other collectors to help them broaden their experiences. Above all else, please enjoy our hobby. Happy treasure hunting!