

# Collecting Coins from Circulation

*Oh, the anticipation! Patient hobbyists have been known to find treasures in loose or rolled change.*

NUMISMATISTS ARE fortunate to have a wide variety of options for acquiring collectable coins. One source is extraordinary in a number of ways: It is always accessible, constantly replenished, potentially surprising and doesn't require any expenditure beyond a coin's face value. Sound too good to be true? It isn't. All these benefits are possible when you collect coins from circulation.

Circulating coinage gives you the chance to witness the continuing evolution of America's metallic money. Five state quarters are issued annually, and over the next couple of years, new nickels will commemorate the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Every few years, interesting new varieties attract significant notice in the

numismatic world and sometimes beyond. Recent decades have seen 1982 dimes with omitted mintmarks, 1995 cents with doubling of the obverse design and 1998-2000 cents with proof-style lettering on the reverse. Although scarce, even at the time of issue, these "treasures" might be found through perseverance and a bit of luck.

Perhaps most important, circulating coins can be a prime source of date-mintmark sets. Though billions of new coins enter circulation each year, many older issues still are available. It's not uncommon to find coins dating back to the 1960s. You can even come across some pre-1959 Lincoln cents with wheat ears on the reverse or the occasional pre-1965 silver dime or quarter.

To accelerate your efforts, search through rolls of coins that banks sell for face value. To get an idea of what's in circulation, I recently looked through 100 rolls of cents—5,000 coins—that represent what one might find in circulation today. The oldest

cent was dated 1936. (It circulated for nearly seven decades before entering my collection!) Overall, my bounty included two dozen Wheat cents. Putting together a nearly complete date-mintmark set of Lincoln Memorial cents from 1959 to the present was particularly satisfying. I found all the Philadelphia and Denver issues, and three of the seven San Francisco issues as well. The opportunity was there, and the price was right.

When assembling this collection, I chose the best specimen of each date-mintmark combination. As a result, I usually was able to obtain coins with original red color and little wear, even among dates as early as the 1960s. Overall, the results of my rummaging indicate that, with careful scrutiny and an eye for quality, appealing sets can be assembled from pocket change or bank rolls.

For another perspective, I conducted an informal survey about recent circulation finds among some fellow numismatists, including members of my local coin club. Several reported coming across pre-1965 silver dimes and quarters in change or finding silver Kennedy half dollars in bank rolls. World coins also appeared regularly, primarily from Canada, but also from faraway places like the Dominican Republic and Australia. One collector assembled a nearly complete date-mintmark collection of Jefferson nickels after a few years of searching pocket change.

Collecting from circulation won't replace coin shops, shows, mail order or online shopping. However, it is exciting to know that your next handful of change might yield an interesting variety, new design type or a piece that fills a hole in your collection.

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You never know what treasures you might find in rolls of coins.