

Lincoln Cents

Lincoln Cent Facts Every Collector Should Know



Designed by: Victor David Brenner, Frank Gasparo, Lyndall Bass

Edge Style: Plain

Mints: Philadelphia, Denver, San Francisco

Diameter: 19mm

Weight: 3.11g

Metallic Content: 95% Copper, 5% Tin and Zinc

*These details are unique to only the dates from 1909-1982.



Lincoln Cents

The humble Lincoln Cent is our longest-lived obverse design, dating back over 100 years to 1909, when it replaced the Indian Head Cent. Designed by Victor D. Brenner, it was popular upon its release, and for the next half century or so, the coin served regular service in circulation. Though inflation has since eroded its buying power, many collectors can trace the beginning of their collecting days back to this coin.

How Are Lincoln Cents Collected?

Lincoln Cents are typically collected by date and mintmark, and over the years, three major reverse designs were used.

For the first 50 years (1909-1958), the reverse featured the large words “ONE CENT” surrounded by two wheat ears. These are the “Wheaties” and have long since disappeared from circulation.



In 1959, the reverse was changed to feature the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC, and this design served through 2008.

In 2009, to mark the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth (and the centennial of the cent), a series of four commemorative reverse designs marking milestones in Lincoln’s life appeared on the cent.

In 2010, a third major reverse design featuring a shield made its debut, and is currently minted today.



Metal Composition Throughout the Years

The other major events in the history of the Lincoln Cent concerned its metallic composition. In 1943, during the critical WWII period, zinc-coated steel was used to strike the cents, and in 1982, the usual bronze alloy (95% copper and 5% tin and zinc) used since 1909 was replaced with a zinc core coated with a thin layer of copper.

What Are the Lincoln Cent Key Dates?

Traditionally, the “big three” dates of Lincoln Cents are the 1909-S VDB, the 1914-D and the 1931-S.

The first date of the big three came about because the earliest coins struck displayed Brenner's initials at the bottom of the reverse. They were quite visible (previously, designers had either not signed their work, or concealed their initial(s) within the design), and public criticism resulted in the initials being removed a short time later that year. (They were returned in 1918 at the base of Lincoln's bust in very tiny letters.) Just under half a million coins were struck in San Francisco with “VDB” initials on the reverse, and while that mintage may not sound low for a \$10 gold piece, it is quite low for a 1 cent coin.

The second coin, the 1914-D, had a mintage of just over 1 million pieces, also low by cent standards. Unlike the 1909-S VDB, which was hoarded somewhat, most 1914-Ds went into circulation, and today, one of the finest known survivors recently brought just over \$80,000 in an auction.

Finally, the 1931-S was just another low mintage date (struck at the depth of the depression), and with only 866,000 made, it was recognized early as a date to save. As a result, while infrequently found in pocket change during the 1940s and 1950s, a number were saved in uncirculated condition, and today it is not particularly rare in that grade.

There is, however, a fourth tough date worth mentioning: the 1909-S without the “VDB” initials. This date has always been overshadowed by coins with “VDB” on the reverse and really never enjoyed the popularity and notoriety that came with those initials.



1909-S VDB



1914-D



1931-S



Valuable Dates Due to Mintage Errors

Some of the most valuable Lincoln Cents are actually error coins struck by the various mints. The most valuable is the 1922 cent, struck in Denver but with no "D" mintmark visible. The Philadelphia Mint struck no 1 cent coins that year, and the Denver Mint, under pressure to supply cents, used worn obverse dies, which had been further damaged to remove clash marks. As a result, a few coins were struck with no trace of the "D" mintmark.



Another famous error occurred in 1955, when improperly prepared dies resulted in coins being struck with boldly doubled lettering on the date and legend. These coins were not struck twice as you might suspect, but were the result of a defective die. It is estimated around 20,000-24,000 were made, and many turned up as change from cigarette vending machines in Massachusetts and upstate New York.



Doubling is also found on some cents dated 1917, 1936, 1958, 1969-S, 1971, 1971-S, 1972 and 1995, but none are as dramatic or well known as the famous 1955 Double Die.

The kings of all Lincoln Cent errors, though, are the incorrect metal strikings of 1943 and 1944. While all cents for 1943 were supposed to be struck in zinc-coated steel, a VERY few were struck (by mistake?) in bronze. Examples from all three mints (Philadelphia, Denver and San Francisco) are known. Similarly, while the bronze alloy was resumed for 1944, a few 1944s struck in zinc-coated steel have turned up. Again, all examples from all three mints are known, leading one to doubt how "accidental" all this might have been. Regardless of their origin, all six of these "off metal" strikes of 1943-1944 are extremely valuable, with prices in the five to six-figure range.



How Much Are Lincoln Cents Worth?

Well, that all depends on WHICH Lincoln Cent you're talking about.



Some are worth exactly 1 cent. Pretty much everything dated 1983 and later is just a penny. During the 1990s, some variations in the spacing of the letters "AM" in "AMERICA" are worth a premium, but you'd need to consult a reference book for the details.

Cents made from 1959 through 1982 are struck of almost 100% copper, and with the current price of copper (about \$2.20 per pound) they are worth about 1.5 cents each. In recent years though, copper has been as high as \$4.50 per lb., which would put the value of these cents as high as 3 cents each. Keep in mind though, export and melting of cents is against the law, so your potential for easy money is rather limited, to say the least.

Wheaties (made prior to 1959) generally bring about \$2 to \$3 per roll now on eBay, but take note of the shipping charges, which often are nearly as much as the roll is worth. It's safe to say, however, Wheat Cents are worth about 4 or 5 cents each now.

As far as earlier dates go, most of the mintmarked dates in the teens and twenties are worth a premium. All of the "S" mints from 1909 through 1915 are good dates, as well as the 1924-D and 1926-S.

How Are Lincoln Cents Graded?

Because Lincoln Cents circulated heavily for their first 20 years or so, it is not unusual to see dates in the 1910s and 1920s worn down to fairly low grades. By the 1930s and 1940s, you usually don't see these much less than a grade of VG or Fine. In the 1950s and 1960s, the cent was used less and less, and most survivors are at least VF or XF. Cents saw relatively little circulation starting in the 1970s, and most have spent their lives in jars or cans. It is not unusual to see coins dated in the 1970s and 1980s in circulation, in XF or AU condition, even though they are 30 or 40 years old.



A Lincoln Cent in **Good (G)**
Typical wear for a date in the 1910s



A Lincoln Cent in **Very Good (VG)**
Typical wear for a date in the 1920s



A Lincoln Cent in **Fine (F)**
Typical wear for a date in the 1930s



A Lincoln Cent in **Very Fine (VF)**
Typical wear for a date in the 1940s



A Lincoln Cent in **Extremely Fine (EF)**
Typical wear for a date in the 1950s



How Are Lincoln Cents Graded? (continued)

All copper coins in uncirculated condition are very sensitive to how much original color remains on the coin. New copper coins are typically “red” in color, displaying full luster. As the coin ages, the color darkens. Coins with some brown color are referred to as “red and brown,” and coins that have dulled to a full brown color are called “brown,” even though they may still be uncirculated.



A full red Lincoln Cent will display 95% or more of its original color.



A Lincoln Cent with Red and Brown color will display 25% - 75% of its original mint red color.



A Lincoln Cent, even though uncirculated, with Brown color displays less than 5% of its original color.

1909 - 1933 Copper Lincoln Cents

Mintage and Collectible Value

Year	Mintage	Good	Fine	Extra Fine	Uncirculated
1909	72,700,000	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$3.00 - \$3.50	\$3.50 - \$4.00	\$12.00 and up
1909 VDB	27,995,000	\$8.00 - \$10.00	\$11.00 - \$13.00	\$13.00 - \$14.00	\$18.00 and up
1909 S	1,825,000	\$65.00 - \$75.00	\$90.00 - \$105.00	\$125.00 - \$140.00	\$250.00 and up
1909-S VDB	484,000	\$475.00 - \$550.00	\$575.00 - \$650.00	\$800.00 - \$900.00	\$1200.00 and up
1910	146,798,813	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$1.50 - \$2.00	\$2.50 - \$3.00	\$18.00 and up
1910 S	6,045,000	\$12.00 - \$14.00	\$16.00 - \$18.00	\$24.00 - \$27.00	\$85.00 and up
1911	101,176,054	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$4.00 - \$4.50	\$22.00 and up
1911 D	12,672,000	\$3.00 - \$4.00	\$8.00 - \$10.00	\$27.00 - \$30.00	\$95.00 and up
1911 S	4,026,000	\$28.00 - \$32.00	\$35.00 - \$40.00	\$60.00 - \$65.00	\$160.00 and up
1912	68,150,915	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$7.50 - \$8.50	\$30.00 and up
1912 D	10,411,000	\$5.00 - \$6.00	\$9.00 - \$11.00	\$45.00 - \$50.00	\$110.00 and up
1912 S	4,431,000	\$15.00 - \$17.00	\$23.00 - \$26.00	\$55.00 - \$60.00	\$160.00 and up
1913	76,529,504	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$11.00 - \$12.00	\$25.00 and up
1913 D	15,804,000	\$1.50 - \$2.00	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$27.00 - \$30.00	\$80.00 and up
1913 S	6,101,000	\$8.00 - \$10.00	\$17.50 - \$20.00	\$40.00 - \$45.00	\$165.00 and up
1914	75,237,067	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$12.00 - \$13.00	\$40.00 and up
1914 D	1,193,000	\$125.00 - \$140.00	\$175.00 - \$200.00	\$600.00 - \$650.00	\$1700.00 and up
1914 S	4,137,000	\$17.00 - \$19.00	\$23.00 - \$26.00	\$60.00 - \$65.00	\$250.00 and up
1915	29,090,970	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$4.00 - \$4.50	\$35.00 - \$38.00	\$75.00 and up
1915 D	22,050,000	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$3.00 - \$3.50	\$14.00 - \$15.00	\$65.00 and up
1915 S	4,833,000	\$16.00 - \$18.00	\$22.00 - \$25.00	\$50.00 - \$55.00	\$225.00 and up
1916	131,832,627	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$5.00 - \$5.50	\$18.00 and up
1916 D	35,956,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$9.00 - \$11.00	\$50.00 and up
1916 S	22,510,000	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$3.00 - \$3.50	\$15.00 - \$17.00	\$75.00 and up
1917	196,429,785	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$3.00 - \$3.50	\$15.00 and up
1917 D	55,120,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$20.00 - \$22.00	\$55.00 and up
1917 S	32,620,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$7.00 - \$8.00	\$65.00 and up

1909 - 1933 Copper Lincoln Cents

Mintage and Collectible Value (continued)

Year	Mintage	Good	Fine	Extra Fine	Uncirculated
1917 D	55,120,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$20.00 - \$22.00	\$55.00 and up
1917 S	32,620,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$7.00 - \$8.00	\$65.00 and up
1918	288,104,634	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$2.50 - \$3.00	\$10.00 and up
1918 D	47,830,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$7.00 - \$8.00	\$60.00 and up
1918 S	34,680,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$7.00 - \$8.00	\$80.00 and up
1919	392,021,000	\$0.10 - .25	\$0.25 - .50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$8.00 and up
1919 D	57,154,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$6.50 - \$7.00	\$55.00 and up
1919 S	139,760,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$3.50 - \$4.00	\$45.00 and up
1920	310,165,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.50 - \$2.00	\$10.00 and up
1920 D	49,280,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$12.00 - \$13.00	\$60.00 and up
1920 S	46,220,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$7.00 - \$8.00	\$85.00 and up
1921	39,157,000	\$1.50 - \$2.00	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$6.00 - \$6.50	\$25.00 and up
1921 S	15,274,000	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$20.00 - \$22.00	\$100.00 and up
1922 D	7,160,000	\$11.00 - \$13.00	\$17.50 - \$20.00	\$22.00 - \$25.00	\$70.00 and up
1923	74,723,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$4.00 - \$4.50	\$10.00 and up
1923 S	8,700,000	\$3.50 - \$4.50	\$6.50 - \$7.50	\$22.00 - \$25.00	\$160.00 and up
1924	75,178,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$3.50 - \$4.00	\$13.00 and up
1924 D	2,520,000	\$24.00 - \$27.00	\$35.00 - \$40.00	\$75.00 - \$85.00	\$200.00 and up
1924 S	11,696,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$12.00 - \$13.00	\$115.00 and up
1925	139,949,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$8.00 and up
1925 D	22,580,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$7.50 - \$8.50	\$55.00 and up
1925 S	26,380,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$7.00 - \$8.00	\$95.00 and up
1926	157,088,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$7.00 and up
1926 D	28,020,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$9.00 - \$11.00	\$60.00 and up
1926 S	4,550,000	\$6.50 - \$7.50	\$8.00 - \$10.00	\$20.00 - \$22.00	\$200.00 and up
1927	144,440,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$7.00 and up
1927 D	27,170,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$4.00 - \$4.50	\$40.00 and up

1909 - 1933 Copper Lincoln Cents

Mintage and Collectible Value

Year	Mintage	Good	Fine	Extra Fine	Uncirculated
1927 S	14,276,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$9.00 - \$11.00	\$85.00 and up
1928	134,116,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$5.00 and up
1928 D	31,170,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$4.00 - \$4.50	\$25.00 and up
1928 S	17,266,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$6.00 - \$6.50	\$50.00 and up
1929	185,262,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$5.00 and up
1929 D	41,730,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$3.50 - \$4.00	\$15.00 and up
1929 S	50,148,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$4.00 - \$4.50	\$15.00 and up
1930	157,415,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$4.00 and up
1930 D	40,100,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$7.00 and up
1930 S	24,286,000	\$0.10 - \$0.25	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$7.00 and up
1931	19,396,000	\$0.25 - \$0.50	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$2.50 - \$3.00	\$14.00 and up
1931 D	4,480,000	\$2.50 - \$3.00	\$5.00 - \$6.00	\$7.50 - \$8.50	\$45.00 and up
1931 S	866,000	\$70.00 - \$80.00	\$80.00 - \$90.00	\$85.00 - \$95.00	\$120.00 and up
1932	9,062,000	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$3.00 - \$3.50	\$10.00 and up
1932 D	10,500,000	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$2.50 - \$3.00	\$8.00 and up
1933	14,360,000	\$0.50 - \$1.00	\$1.00 - \$1.50	\$3.00 - \$3.50	\$10.00 and up
1933 D	6,200,000	\$2.00 - \$2.50	\$4.00 - \$4.50	\$5.00 - \$5.50	\$8.00 and up

