

# LINCOLN LORE

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## TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LINCOLN PENNY

August 2, 1934, marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Lincoln one-cent piece. It replaced the Indian head penny and was the first coin to use a portrait of a President authorized by the Treasury Department of the United States.

During 1909, the Lincoln centennial year, Theodore Roosevelt laid the corner stone for the memorial at Hodgenville, Kentucky, and participated in other celebrations in honor of the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birth. A bronze profile of Lincoln was called to his attention which he admired very much, and this led to his approval of a pattern for a new Lincoln cent.

The designer of this study of Abraham Lincoln was Victor David Brenner, who was born in Shavely, Russia, in 1871. When he was nineteen years of age he came to America and began selling matches on the streets of New York City for a living. He studied art at Cooper Union in the evening and eventually succeeded in saving enough money to continue his studies in Paris.

In 1907 he made a profile in bronze of Abraham Lincoln using as a model an original portrait of Lincoln by Brady, taken in 1864. This photograph he found in the collection of Charles Elliot Norton. The profile was used on a medal which he prepared in 1909 in honor of the centennial of Lincoln's birth, and it was this model which was accepted with but little change as a design for the new cent. When finally ready for the mint it bore the following inscription:

Obverse side—Clothed, bearded bust of Lincoln facing right. Inscription above bust, "IN GOD WE TRUST"; to left of bust, "LIBERTY"; to right of bust, the date, beneath which appears the mint mark if any.

Reverse side—Two sprays of wheat in a conventional form enclosing inscription in five lines "E PLURIBUS UNUM ONE CENT UNITED STATE OF AMERICA."

Upon the reverse side of the coin Brenner had placed, near the rim between the two sprays of wheat, his initials "V. D. B." When these initials were discovered there was an outburst of disapproval against having the initials appear on the coin. Brenner did not anticipate the revolt as both the new twenty-dollar and ten-dollar gold pieces carried the initials of Augustus St. Gaudens, the designer. There also appeared on the five-dollar and two-dollar-and-a-half gold pieces the initials of Bella L. Pratt, the artist. The objection was sustained, however; shipments of pennies were stopped; and dies were immediately prepared to issue the cent without the initials.

This removal of the inscription aroused much public interest and thousands of prospective rare coin collectors secured the "V. D. B." coin as their first item. It was estimated that a total of more than 2,000,000 cents had been released, and vendors sold them on the streets at three pennies for a nickel. At one time the sub-treasury in Wall Street was so congested with people attempting to exchange currency for the new cents that twenty policemen were necessary to maintain order.

At Boston the demand was so urgent and the supply so limited that only 50 Lincoln cents were allowed each individual asking for the new coins. Business houses saw the publicity value of the new coins and had them attractively encased in aluminum for presentation. One collector has twenty-eight of these souvenirs distributed by different firms in 1909.

Both the Philadelphia and San Francisco mints issued the new Lincoln cent in 1909, and the following year the Denver mint joined the other two in producing these coins, and all three have continued to issue them from year to year to date. A complete collection of Lincoln cents would include the "V. D. B." 1909 cents from both the Philadelphia and San Francisco mints; also the 1909 cents from both mints, without the initials; and, beginning with 1910, one for each year from each of the three mints. Coins minted at Denver have a miniature "D" under the date; those minted in San Francisco a miniature "S" in the same location; and those issued from the Philadelphia mint have no mint mark.

In 1863 a design for a two-cent piece with a portrait of Washington was submitted, and in 1866 a bust of Lincoln was used on a pattern intended for a five-cent piece but both were rejected. At that time there was much prejudice against the use of portraits of individuals on the coins of the country. The sentiment created by the celebration of the Lincoln centennial in 1909 overcame this prejudice, however, and the one-cent piece as already mentioned had the honor of bearing the first likeness of a President on an American coin.

Some of the reactions towards this innovation in the designing of coins follow:

"The Republican institutions are toppling and our nation is about to become a monarchy. This new Lincoln cent may be said to mark the first visible and outward emblem of the transmutation of the republic with an empire."

New Orleans *Picayune*.

"If the Lincoln cent is a precedent then American money may acquire an historical value."

Rochester *Post Express*.

"No President, with the possible exception of Washington, occupies any such relation to the American people as justifies his being memorialized on their coins."

Richmond *Times*.

The negroes, however, thought that the new cent was made especially for them, and they called it "Emancipation Money." Many of the coins they had made into "good luck" charms.

The only other coin of the United States which bears the likeness of Abraham Lincoln is known as the centennial half dollar. It is a memorial coin issued in 1918 in memory of the centennial anniversary of the State of Illinois. On the obverse side is a bust portrait of Lincoln facing right and on the reverse a conventional eagle.

Although but nine years had intervened between its issue and the appearance of the Lincoln cent all prejudice against historical figures appearing on coins seems to have died out. There are now to be found many commemorative specie bearing not only the portraits of our own countrymen but Europeans as well.

Another feature of the Lincoln cent, which served as a climax to a wide controversy which started in 1907, was the use of the inscription "In God We Trust." During Lincoln's administration in 1863 James Pollock, Director of the Mint, submitted to Secretary Chase designs for the new one, two, and three-cent pieces on which he suggested the inscription "God Our Trust" be placed. Chase thought the expression "In God We Trust" more appropriate, and it first appeared in this form on the two-cent pieces.

On March 3, 1865, Congress passed an act providing that it would be lawful for the mint to place the motto "In God We Trust" on each coin as would permit of this inscription. Under this act the motto appeared on the ten dollar gold pieces, five dollar gold pieces, the dollar, half dollar, and quarter. At that time it did not appear on the one-cent piece, however.

Theodore Roosevelt, who had been largely responsible for the appearance of the Lincoln bust on the new penny, also led the controversies about having the motto "In God We Trust" appear for the first time on the one-cent pieces. The inscription is appropriately placed over the head of Lincoln, as it was during his administration that it was first used.