

Collecting Barber Dimes

by Thomas Coulson



1892 Barber Dime

The Barber Dime (which shared a design with the quarter and half dollar) was introduced in 1892 as a replacement to the long running Liberty Seated series. The coin is named after its designer, Charles E. Barber, the chief engraver at the U.S. Mint. His simple design portrayed the head of Miss Liberty facing right. Though not so embellished, the obverse design resembles both the Morgan Dollar Liberty Portrait and the French 'Ceres' design used on that country's silver coinage from 1849 to 1851. Barber utilized Longacre's 'Cereal Wreath' design first featured on the Seated Dime in 1860 for the coin's reverse.



France 'Ceres' Design Series

Barber Dimes are appealing in higher grades despite the design's simplicity. Fresh uncirculated and lightly circulated specimens are often beautiful. A dime was small enough in value a century ago, that it was not a burden to save a few new shiny pieces. Some Barber Dimes were given as gifts to newborns as a memento of their birth year. As a result, many Barber Dimes are relatively available in high grades. Though there are several issues to collect (74 date/mintmark combinations), they are available in all grades and affordable in lower grades to even modest budgets. There are a few low mintage dates mostly as a result of economic turmoil of the 1890's. These include the 1895, 1895-O and 1895-S Barber Dimes and the 1896-O Barber Dime. The San Francisco Mint produced a few scarce issues such as the 1901-S, 1903-S, 1904-S, and 1913-S Barber Dimes. Even though some issues are scarce, Barber Dimes are the earliest U.S. Dime series that can be practically collected by date and mintmark. Because of this affordability, the Barber Dime series has been discovered by many collectors and has enjoyed new found popularity in recent years.

The series does feature one of the legendary rarities of United States Coinage: The 1894-S Dime. Only 24 1894-S Barber Dimes were minted for reasons not entirely clear. The most likely explanation is that there was a little extra silver on hand that that needed to be coined in order to balance the books for the Mint's fiscal year ending on June, 30, 1894. Five of the 24 pieces made were destroyed through the means of assay. Several were saved by mint employees; or in the case of three by a local (Ukiah, California) banker. These three coins account for one of the greatest numismatic legends of all time.



1905-S Barber Dime
Reverse

Two pristine 1894-S Barber Dimes surfaced in the early 1950's. They were sold to a California dealer by an older lady who related she was given three dimes by her father, the aforementioned banker. He told her to keep the coins until she was as old as he and they would be worth a large sum of money. She followed her father's instructions with one exception. Being a hot summer day, the girl could not resist the temptation of some refreshing ice cream on her way home, so she spent one of the dimes on a treat! She received a handsome sum for the two coins she kept; but she created a fantastic story with the one she spent! The story has changed over the years, and some doubt its verisimilitude, but it remains one of the great tales about coins. (You can read more about this in the July 29, 2013 issue of *Coin World*.) There is also an excellent summary of the history of the 1894-S Barber Dime in the Heritage 2016 FUN U.S. Coins Signature Auction; which offered the Clapp-Eliasberg-Richmond specimen.

The remaining coins that were not melted at assay or handed out as special pieces were supposedly released into circulation. Two of the known specimens are heavily circulated. The last circulated specimen was found in 1957. Could this have been the famous 'ice cream' coin?

Today, there are nine 1894-S Dimes known to the numismatic community. Perhaps one or two more were known in the past and are currently in seclusion. Ten or so coins are unaccounted for. They undoubtedly entered circulation where they spent a lifetime circulating amongst unwitting owners whose lives could have been changed if only they had realized what had passed through their hands! These specimens were probably lost to the melting pot or buried somewhere and are gone forever. Perhaps, there is a tiny chance that a few of these coins lay in obscure places waiting to be discovered. To find one of these would be the discovery of a lifetime!

Whether you are collecting Barber Dimes for the interesting history of the Barber Era or looking for one of the lost 1894-S Dimes, the series is bound to offer you some great entertainment as you strive to complete it.

Liberty Coin Service stocks a diverse selection of uncertified and PCGS and NGC certified Barber Dimes for sale.

View Our Inventory of Barber Dimes for Sale [Here](#).



1905-S Barber Dime

How to Collect Barber Dimes – Three Different Ways

1. The Basic Collection

A Barber Dime collection has appeal for any type of collector. A nice, good to very good collection will not cost a fortune and could probably be assembled in a day or two at any major coin show. This is an ideal set for a beginning collector. At this entry level, purchase coins as they come available. Look for uncleaned specimens with full rims on both sides and a little detail on the obverse. Try to find coins that match in appearance.

An Extremely Fine or About Uncirculated set would be considerably more difficult and expensive, but rewarding and impressive when finished. Many of the coins will be easy to find. Complete a date set first, then start adding scarcer dates and mintmarks to the mix. As with any collection, aspire to find a consistent look. Many of the key and semi key dates such as the 1895-O, 1903-S, and 1904-S will be tough to find, especially with matching appearance. Be patient when working on this set.



1914 Barber Dime AU

A Mint State set is a major project, but probably represents decent value if you have the resources to complete it. Consider some of these comparisons: an 1896-O Barber Dime in MS-64 grade has a population of 30 coins graded by PCGS and NGC combined. The last few that sold in auction realized right around \$4,000.00. An 1896-O Dollar in the same grade has a certified population of 40 coins and a price over \$30,000.00. The 1903-S Barber Dime has a certified population of 12 coins in MS-65! They rarely come to auction, but the last few that did realized around \$2,000.00. (The PCGS retail price for this coin is \$2,400.00). A 1903-S Morgan Dollar in MS-65 has a certified population of 171 coins and a retail price of \$11,500.00! (Though the last few auctioned at about \$9,000.00) By comparison, Mint State Barber Dimes are quite rare and inexpensive vis a vis Morgan Dollars. Though Barber Dimes are not nearly so popular as Morgan Dollars, their price/rarity dynamic is truly compelling. If you have the money and patience it takes to build a mint state set of Barber Dimes it is very worthy of your consideration.



1915 Barber Dime MS61

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2. Proof Set

At first glance, a proof Barber Dime set may seem like an impossible set to complete. After all, Proof coins from the late 1800's and early 1900's have low mintages and seem difficult to procure. Upon closer inspection, the Proof



1894 Barber Dime
PR65 PCGS

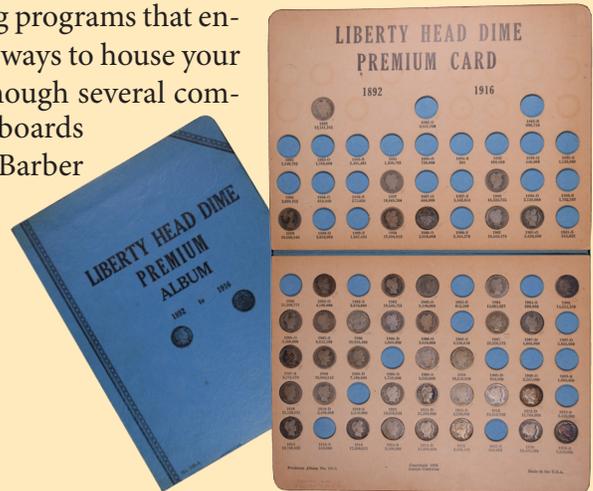
Barber Dime collection is quite manageable. There are only 24 coins in the series (25 if you include the 1894-S). Coins in Proof-64 and Proof-65 grades are available and very attractive. Proof-64s typically trade for a bit under \$1,000.00. Proof-65s usually trade for a little over \$1,000.00. While these are expensive by most collectors' standards, it is not unfathomable for an average collector to save money and purchase one of these coins on a periodic basis. The end result would be a beautiful and impressive collection.



1894 Barber Dime PR65
reverse

3. The Coin Board

One of the early 'golden eras' of coin collecting was the 1930's. Numismatics became much more popular among the mainstream population. Dealers like Wayte Raymond and B. Max Mehl publicized and sensationalized the hobby through keen advertising programs that engaged prospective collectors. One of the more popular ways to house your coins in the '30s was a 11" by 14" inch coin board. Though several companies made them, the most commonly encountered boards are those by the Whitman Publishing Company. The Barber Dime board would be a great way to remember those bygone days of collecting and display your collection.



*Vintage 1930's J. Oberwise & Co.
Barber Dimes Album*

Read more about Barber Dimes

Bowers, Q. David. [A Guide Book of Barber Silver Coins.](#) Whitman Publishing, LLC., Atlanta, 2015.

Flynn, Kevin. [The Authoritative Reference on Barber Dimes.](#) Brooklyn Gallery, New York, 2004

Lawrence, David. [The Complete Guide to Barber Dimes.](#) DLRC Press. Virginia Beach, VA, 1991.