

Collecting Mercury Dimes

by Thomas Coulson



1916-S Mercury Dime

The Winged Liberty Dime, popularly known as the 'Mercury Dime' was introduced late in 1916 as part of the ambitious and needed redesign of United States coinage. The new coin was the beautiful work of Adolph A. Weinman who was a renowned sculptor and also the designer of the Walking Liberty Half Dollar. His new obverse design portrayed a youthful miss Liberty in a winged cap along with modern looking design elements such as thin numerals and lettering, higher relief and wire rims. The new reverse broke with nearly sixty years of tradition by replacing the 'cereal wreath' with a fresh interpretation of Ancient Roman Fasces. The Fasces were symbolic of the authoritative power of the Nation flanked by a 'peaceful' olive branch that might be interpreted as the Nation's discretion to use that power. Such a design was a statement in its day on the eve of the United States' entrance into World War I and its eventual role as an arbiter of the conflict. The design was quite well received upon its debut; though it is interesting to note that its introduction was delayed a few months due to technical issues resulting from usage in early vending machines. Citizens appreciated the new dime's beauty and modernity in contrast to the plain and staid Barber coinage. The 'Mercury' Dime was a solid success as a circulating coin and it has become a treasured collectible. It was struck until 1945, when the national tragedy of President Roosevelt's death prompted a new memorial dime design to replace it.

Mercury Dimes were issued in large quantities for most years; especially later in the series. Since many were made and a dime's value was fairly small, enough specimens of all dates and grades were saved so that collectors have a great opportunity to collect them. The rarest coins of the series are the 1916-D Mercury Dime, 1921 and 1921-D Mercury Dimes, 1925-D Mercury Dime, 1926-S Mercury Dime, 1931-D Mercury Dime, and the 1942 over 41 and 1942 over 41-D Mercury Dime varieties. Though these coins are scarcer, all are readily available in low grades and are elusive but still available in high grades.



1916-S Mercury Dime - reverse

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

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Mercury Dime - obverse

How to Collect Mercury Dimes – Four Different Ways

1. The Basic Collection



*1916-D Mercury Dime
AG03 PCGS Certified*

A circulated Mercury Dime collection is an excellent one for a beginning to intermediate collector to pursue. In very good to fine condition, all coins are available and only the 1916-D and 1942 over 1941 overdates are expensive. Even these coins, though expensive, are not outside the reach of a collector that can save up for them over time. The best way to assemble this set is to complete a date set first by acquiring the more common Philadelphia mint coins first. Most of these will only be a few dollars each. After completing the date set, fill in the later date mintmarked coins and then the less expensive earlier coins. Look for coins that are uncleaned with matching appearance and full rims on the reverse. The last coins to complete the set will likely be the 1921-D Mercury Dime, the 1942/41 Mercury Dime, the 1916-D Mercury Dime, and the 1942 over 1941-D Mercury

Dime (if it is included in the collection) On these last coins, be sure to stick to the standards of the overall collection. A complete set will be much more impressive with a full rim reverse '16-D dime in very good condition than a well worn almost good or fair coin. It is worth it to save up for a \$1,000.00 to \$1,500.00 '16-D rather than settle for a cheaper version. A word of caution: the 1916-D Mercury Dime is one of the most extensively altered United States coins. Massive numbers of added mintmark coins were created over the years, particularly in the 1960's. Though many of these coins have been taken off the market, countless more still remain. The 1916-D Mercury Dime is also difficult to authenticate in low grades. Though there are a finite number of dies with distinct mintmark positions for the 1916-D issue, worn mintmarks on genuine coins often look a bit distorted and can be difficult to match to the correct positions. It is smart to purchase a PCGS or NGC certified 1916-D Mercury Dime to guarantee that you are receiving a genuine coin that is accurately graded. The 1942 over 1941 overdate may present a challenge. It is a prominent overdate, so most were found early on and as a result, there are few low grade pieces available to complete a low grade matching set. However, there are a few out there and with patience, one can be found.



*1942 over 41
Mercury Dime*

A high grade circulated set can be assembled in much the same way. Coins in the grade ranges of very fine 30 to choice almost uncirculated are fairly available for most dates and even the semi key dates are affordable in this range. All but the 1916-D, 1921, 1921-D, and the 1942 over 41 and 1942 over 41-D Mercury Dimes can be purchased in these high end circulated grades for \$100.00 each or less. (The '25-D and '26-S dimes in choice almost uncirculated grades can be bought for less than \$500.00 each.) Many of the semi key Mercury Dimes in high circulated grades are bargains considering how scarce they are. Nice ones are always purchased out of stock quickly by astute collectors and dealers. Be sure to look for nice original specimens, as many in these grades have been lightly to moderately cleaned.

The 1916-D Mercury Dime is elusive and expensive in this grade range. With all the altered and counterfeit specimens that have been released over the years, it is compulsory to acquire a coin certified by PCGS or NGC. (A nice extremely fine or about uncirculated specimen will cost \$6,000.00 to 10,000.00; so it is crucial to have the assurance of a genuine coin.) It is also worthwhile to purchase higher grade 1921 and 1921-D Mercury Dimes certified due to the potential for altered and cleaned coins of these dates.

An uncirculated complete set of Mercury Dimes is a major project. Collectors would most likely complete the short set starting from 1934 and work backwards from there. Many pre 1934 Mercury Dimes are rare in mint state, and due to their popularity, experience strong demand and commensurate price strength. At this grade level, serious collectors often want fully struck specimens when available and will seek coins with full bands designations.

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2. The Long and Short of it: The Short Set and the Long Short Set

Uncirculated pre-1934 Mercury Dimes can be expensive and hard to find. Commencing in 1934, Mercury Dime mintages are higher than earlier date coins. Also, as coin collecting was gaining popularity in the mid 1930's, more coins were saved in uncirculated grades than before. This makes the later date Mercuries more available and affordable in uncirculated grades.



Short Set of Mercury Dimes

The short set contains the run of 15 coins from 1941 P-D-S through 1945 P-D-S. It does generally not include the overdate coins or the 1945 Micro s variety. These sets can be assembled in uncirculated grades; though sets are frequently offered in extremely fine to about uncirculated condition (often these sets are misrepresented as uncirculated.) You can purchase the coins individually or as a complete set. The sets are often housed in specialized holders made specifically for the run. A set with nice, choice but not gem uncirculated coins can be assembled for around \$200.00 or less. A really nice set might be \$300.00. This is a

very reasonable price for a group of flashy beautiful coins now over 70 years old!

The long short set contains the Mercury Dime issues from 1934 through 1945 except for the 1942 over 1941 P and D overdate varieties and the 1945 micro s variety. These sets can also be housed in custom acrylic holders like the short sets above. They are sometimes available for sale as complete sets though not so often as the 1941 to 1945 sets. The mintmarked issues dated in the 1930's are harder to find than the later dates with the 1934-D and 1935-D Mercury Dimes being a bit harder than the other dates to locate. All the dates in the long short set can be bought in uncirculated grades for less than \$100 each. A nice uncirculated long short set can be purchased for less than \$1,000.00.

3. Battle of the Bands

The ultimate uncirculated Mercury Dime collection would include fully struck coins with completely separated bands on the coin's reverse fascies. The center fascies on the Mercury Dime's reverse are opposite the highest points of Miss Liberty's Head on the obverse. As a result, many Mercury Dimes that were not well struck lack full detail on these center bands.



1936 Mercury Dime
Reverse

Close up of full Bands

In order to be considered 'full bands' a Mercury Dime's two center bands must be completely separated from each other with no breaks, cuts or flaws that disrupt that separation. Some collectors also prefer the bands to be rounded as well, though PCGS and NGC will designate coins as full bands with uninterrupted separation but no rounding.

Caution should be exercised with the purchase of particularly scarce full band issues. Some of these issues have had the center bands carefully carved apart to make them resemble true 'full band' coins. Full band Mercury Dimes are best collected in PCGS or NGC certified holders to provide some assurance that the coins have not been manipulated.

The rarest full band Mercury Dimes are the 1918-D, 1919-D, 1919-S, 1942/41, 1942/41-D and 1945 issues. The 1918-S, 1920-D, 1926-S, and 1927-D are also quite scarce.

4. Just the Proofs

The seven coin run of proof Mercury Dimes from 1936 to 1942 is an interesting collection to consider. All seven coins have low mintages: the 1942 is the most common with 22,329 produced. Despite this, proof Mercury Dimes can be acquired in choice to gem condition for surprisingly inexpensive prices. At the high end, these coins are very attractive, too. The 'common' later dates can be had for only a few hundred dollars even in Proof-67 condition. The earlier dates (1937, 1938) aren't much more and can be had at reasonable prices in Proof-65 condition. The 1936 is the most expensive, but even this date can be acquired in proof-66 condition for less than \$2,000.00. This is hardly a prohibitive price to pay; it is well within reach for most collectors willing to save up gradually. A complete set in proof-65 to 67 grades could be assembled for less than \$5,000.00 and it would look very impressive.



1940 Mercury Dime
PR67 PCGS Certified

Purchasing cameo proof Mercury Dimes ups the ante considerably. Cameo specimens from 1936 to 1938 are almost unknown in cameo condition. Later dates exist, but are rare. Deep cameo specimens are almost unknown for any dates. If you can find them, cameo proof Mercury Dimes are probably good values, but assembling a collection of them could take a very long time if it is possible at all.

Read more about Mercury Dimes

Bowers, Q. David. [A Guide Book of Mercury Dimes, Standing Liberty Quarters, and Liberty Walking Half Dollars.](#) Whitman Publishing, 2015.

Burdette, Roger. [Renaissance of American Coinage: 1916-1921.](#) Seneca Mills Press, 2005.

Flynn, Kevin and Wexler, John. [Authoritative Reference on Mercury Dimes.](#) Kyle Vick, 2014.

Lange, David, and Fivaz, Bill. [The Complete Guide to Mercury Dimes.](#) DLRC Press, 1993.

