

# Collecting Washington Quarters

by Thomas Coulson



1932 Washington Quarter

The Washington Quarter was initially intended to be a commemorative coin celebrating the bicentennial of the Nation's founding father and first president George Washington's birth. The coin was supposed to be a half dollar; presumably of the non-circulating commemorative series. However, plans were changed to produce it as a circulating commemorative quarter.

When the coin was introduced in 1932, the United States was at a cross-road. The extravagant 'twenties were gone in an instant on an October day in 1929. Three years of compounding financial calamity later, millions of citizens were out of work and most of those fortunate enough to have work were struggling to survive. These people needed a change.

Though it seems like a minor thing, the Washington Quarter was one element of that change. The beautiful Standing Liberty Quarter had become a symbol of a more decadent time. The Washington Quarter reminded Americans of a great hero of the early Republic. Washington was a symbol of the Nation's proud history and of its potential to be great again. The coin was well enough received by the public that many were saved (and still exist today) in uncirculated condition at a time when 25 cents could go a long way to putting food on the table. It is unsurprising that the design became a regular issue in 1934 as measure of comfort and pride to the United States' citizenry.

From 1934 onward, the Washington Quarter has been and still is the workhorse coin of its era. Most Washington Quarters circulated extensively. Many are worn nearly smooth. These coins that dutifully met the needs of American commerce have a unique beauty about them. The dirtiness in the coin's protected areas give it a beautiful contrast that signify a job well done in circulation.

If the Washington Quarter debuted half a century earlier, there would be undoubtedly fewer coins saved in uncirculated condition. By the 1930's, the hobby of numismatics had grown markedly in the United States. As a result, many coins were saved by collectors, speculators, and dealers in original mint condition. No Washington Quarter issue is rare. The 1932 D and S Quarters, the 1936-D Quarter, 1940-D quarter, and 1942-S are the scarcest in uncirculated condition. Yet, all of these are still readily available at a price.



1958-D Washington Quarter reverse

Starting in 1965, Washington Quarters were struck in a copper nickel composition. Most were made in large numbers. All copper nickel Washington Quarters are easily found. Even today, coins dated in the 'sixties can be picked out of change. No quarters were issued with a 1975 date. Instead, special commemorative quarters bearing the dual date 1776-1976 were issued. Some issues of the early 1980's are a bit scarcer in uncirculated condition due to smaller numbers of coins being saved. Proof issues starting in 1968 were made at the San Francisco Mint. Special issues of 40% Silver Composition were struck for the bicentennial. Starting in 1992, proof Washington Quarters were struck in copper nickel and 90% silver composition. The Washington Quarter series is one of the longest tenured runs of United States Coins. The original series lasted 66 years (1932-1998); almost exactly the life span of George Washington at 67 years (1732-1799). Only the Lincoln Cent and the \$2.50, \$5.00 and \$10.00 Liberty Gold coins were struck for a longer period. By including the Statehood and National Parks Quarters, the series extends to 85 years and counting; longer than any issue except the Lincoln Cent.

The Washington Quarter series is an excellent collection for beginners or intermediate numismatists. Most of the post-1964 issues can still be found in circulation. Uncirculated and Proof clad sets can be assembled for no more than a few hundred dollars. The late date silver proof Washington Quarters are all inexpensive as well. The 1932 to 1964 Silver set can also be assembled easily and inexpensively in circulated grades. Once complete, the collector also has a nice accumulation of silver bullion too. An uncirculated set of Washington Quarters is attractive and somewhat challenging. Though such a set is expensive, it is still well within the means of most dedicated collectors.

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*1937-D Washington Quarter MS66 PCGS*

## How to Collect Washington Quarters – Six Different Ways

### 1. The Basic Collection

The Washington Quarter series can be divided into three distinct collecting groups. Each of these groups can be assembled as separate collections or consolidated to produce a complete collection of Washington Quarters. Breaking the collection into groups will make collecting the series more manageable. The different groupings are as follows:

- **The Early Dates (1932-1940)** - The first eight years of the Washington Quarter series contain the scarcest and most expensive coins of the entire collection. The 1932-D and 1932-S Washington Quarters are the keys of the series and command a premium in all grades. The 1936-D and 1937-S Washington Quarters are the next scarcest coins in the collection. In circulated grades, all issues except for the above mentioned four coins trade at prices close to their silver value. The 1932-D and S Quarters trade at strong premiums over the other coins; though there is currently a surplus of lower grade 1932-D and S Quarters available to collectors. Be patient when acquiring one of these key date specimens. They can often be bought at significant discounts to guidebook prices. Overall, an appealing circulated set of the early date Washington Quarters can be assembled for little more than a couple hundred dollars. The entire set of 1932 to 1964 quarters in circulated condition is readily available for around



*1935-D Washington Quarter*

\$400.00 or so. This makes it affordable to almost all collectors. It is also a fun way to hold some silver bullion.

A slight word of caution: There are still some counterfeit 1932-D and 1932-S Washington Quarters with added mintmarks. Most of these were created long ago mainly in the 1960's when demand was much greater. The added mintmarks are usually detected by professionals with ease. The genuine mintmarks typically sit in a depression in the mintmark area. The counterfeit coins often appear to 'float' on the coin's surface. The shape of the D & S mintmarks are often inconsistent with the look of the genuine mintmarks. Fortunately, most of these counterfeit 1932-D and S Quarters were removed from the hobby decades ago. Unfortunately, there are still a few of them out there.



*1934-D Washington Quarter MS63 Heavy Motto PCGS*

There are a few varieties that some collectors consider to be part of the early date series. The 1934 Doubled Die Obverse is one that can be found in circulated grades. The doubling around the date is fairly prominent. The '34 Double Die Quarters can still be picked out of silver lots on occasion. The 1934 Quarters also have Heavy Motto and Light Motto varieties. There was also a less prominent doubled die obverse in 1937.

Collecting uncirculated early date Washington Quarters may be a challenge. Sets with truly choice uncirculated coins are fairly scarce. I have seen a great number of early sets represented as uncirculated that contained several lightly circulated coins. Choice uncirculated Washington Quarters are available for all dates, so do not settle for an almost uncirculated or low end uncirculated coin. Buy certified (PCGS and NGC) key dates for comfort if you feel it to be necessary. The 1932-D is the most expensive coin in the set and it will cost around \$1,500.00 to \$1,750.00 for a nice MS-63 or MS-64 example. The 1932-S in a similar grade is a bit more than \$1,000.00. The 1936-D is maybe a little under \$1,000.00 and the remainder of the better coins are a few hundred dollars or less. The Philadelphia issues can be found easily for under \$100.00. Try to pick out fresh looking lustrous specimens. Washington Quarters are generally very attractive in uncirculated grades, so there is no reason to settle for a less than lovely piece.

At the Gem level, MS-65 and above, the 1932-D Quarter will cost as much as the entire run of MS-63 and MS-64 coins through 1940. Other early dates in MS-65 can be very reasonable. The 1936-D is about \$725.00 in MS-63 but can be bought for under \$1,000.00 in MS-65. That is a good value for a coin so scarce. Collect coins with a consistent look, but recognize where the best values lie for each date and mintmark in the set.

➤ **The Middle Dates (1941-1964)** – All of the coins in this date range are easily found. They can often be purchased as a complete uncirculated set for around \$700.00. The most difficult regular issue to collect in the set is the 1942-S Quarter. Many uncirculated sets have a circulated 1942-S Quarter being passed off as uncirculated. Many of the truly uncirculated 1942-S Quarters are somewhat dull, hairlined, or spotty. Like the comments on the earlier coins, attractive '42-S Quarters exist. Do not settle for a substan-



*1943-S Washington Quarter*

dard coin. Every other date in the series is relatively easy to find in choice uncirculated condition. Most can be bought for \$15.00 or less! Dates in the mid-1940's are especially attractive. Some coins like the 1954-D and 1955-D Washington Quarters have a different, almost glassy look and are not so attractive. Others in the late 1950's can be a bit spotty. It may take a little more patience to find a nice example of those dates. A nice hand-picked set of the middle date Washington Quarters is beautiful and can be assembled on a relatively small budget!

Circulated quarters of the middle date era are all available and can often be bought as a complete set. All of the issues trade close to their silver value. Collecting them is a handy way to save a little silver bullion.

There are a few unusual varieties in the middle date run of Washington Quarters. The most notable is probably the 1943-S Double Die Obverse Washington Quarter. These exist in all grades including mint state. They are fairly expensive compared to the rest of the set. The other interesting varieties are the over-mintmarks of 1950. These are the Denver and San Francisco Mint issues of that year. Some of the coins exhibit a D mintmark punched over an S or an S mintmark punched over a D. In addition to these varieties, there are a few additional Doubled Die obverses in the middle date series.

➤ **The Late Date Quarters (1965-1998)** - The first non-silver Washington Quarters were released in 1965. This provides a natural break from the earlier coins in the series. All dates from 1965 to 1998 are common and inexpensive in uncirculated condition. However, quality varied dramatically during this era and it is a challenge to assemble a complete set in choice uncirculated condition.



*1966 D Washington  
Quarter*

The coins from the 1960's were hastily made and are not especially attractive. They are usually baggy and dull. Special Mint Set coins are frequently substituted for mint state coins in collections; but the SMS coins truly belong to the series of Proof coins. Starting in 1970, the Denver Mint coins are much more attractive. The Philadelphia Mint coins from 1970 to 1974 are still quite ugly on average.

More care was taken in production of the 1976 Bicentennial Issue. Also in 1976, there was a 40% Silver uncirculated coin issued for collectors in the special mint set from that year. This coin is interesting because it is the only quarter struck in the 40% silver composition.

The dies were modified in 1977 to give Washington's portrait lower relief and more hair detail. Coins of the late 1970's and early 1980's are all easier to find in nice uncirculated grades with the exception of the 1982 and 1983 issues, which were not sold in mint sets. (The 1982 and 1983 uncirculated Quarters sell for several dollars up to \$25.00 each). Quality control became a problem at the U.S. Mints again in the 1980's. Dates from 1983 to 1985 are often poorly struck. Many of the Philadelphia Mint issues from 1985 through 1989 have an unattractive, glassy appearance. These coins look like they were polished at first glance; but it is the way they came directly from the Mint! Use patience and hold out for nice looking specimens of these dates! By the 1990's quality control had improved; though some issues of that era are weakly struck too.

To summarize, the late date series is easy to complete and inexpensive. However, because the coins are common and cheap; many collectors overlook the quality issues associated with these coins. A careful and patient collector can assemble a superior set for little or no premium.

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## 2. Proof Coins

Like the circulating issues, proof Washington Quarters can be broken into three sub collections. Of all the denominations of modern proof coins, (excepting the dollar) Washington Quarters are the most affordable. There are no particularly rare varieties such as the 'no S' coins present in the cent, nickel, and dime series. The collecting groups can be broken down as follows:

- **The early dates (1936-1942)** – With the exception of the 1936 proof quarter, all the early dates are affordable in decent proof condition. Even the 1936 can be bought for under \$1,000.00 in a nice Proof-64 grade. The other dates can be obtained in gem proof condition for a few hundred dollars each of less. There are a few things to consider when collecting early proof Washington Quarters. The 1936 issue can often come with a less than brilliant mirror-like appearance. Since this was the first year in two decades that regular proof coins were struck, the Mint was reacquiring the knowledge to properly make coins. Most issues from 1936 to 1942 appear cloudy or a bit spotty if they are original. Even in gem condition, they typically appear this way. The coins were issued in cellophane sleeves that were not conducive for the preservation of pristine surfaces. A fully brilliant, non-clouded proof quarter has either been dipped or was incredible lucky during its lifetime of storage. Since most of these coins are somewhat cloudy, collecting them may be an 'acquired taste'; as most are not very pretty when fully original. (The other option is to hold out for brilliant, mirror-finish coins.) Finally, early Proof Washington Quarters do not exist in cameo states; do not expect to collect them with that look.



1936 Proof Washington  
Quarter

- **The middle dates (1950-1964)** - No Proof coinage was issued from 1943 through 1949, due to hardships caused by World War II. Proof sets again debuted in 1950 with modest production. The proof Washington Quarters of this era are easy to find and inexpensive. Collectors can frequently find complete sets of this run housed in nice Capitol Plastic holders for a few hundred dollars or less. Of course, the set can be assembled easily enough, too. The 1950 coins are often a little dull looking. (Like the 1936 issue, it took some time for Mint employees to remember how to produce



1952 Proof Washington  
Quarter

proof coins after an eight year hiatus.) The 1951 issue comes more often with frosty surfaces than mirror like finish. These are attractive, though they do not look like proof coins to those unfamiliar with the issue. Starting with the 1952 Proof Washington Quarter, all the other issues can be found with attractive, mirror-like surfaces. The 1952 Proof Washington Quarter issue also has a popular die variety with a S- shaped chip on the eagle's breast known as the 'superbird'.



1952 Proof Washington  
Quarter reverse

Cameo finish proof Washington Quarters are available for issues of the middle date era. Deep cameo coins are scarce, but obtainable. At least more so than their Franklin Half Dollar counterparts. The cameo proof issues can be had for modest to moderate premiums over the mirror-like issues.

➤ **The Late Dates (1965-1998)** – Proof coins were not offered from 1965 through 1967. Instead, the San Francisco Mint sold Special Mint Sets; which were a hybrid product. The coins often look like proofs, though finishes can vary. They are not so well struck as proofs. Proof Quarters were again produced commencing with 1968. None of these are expensive and all can be found at any time. Be discerning when selecting them, as there is no reason to settle for anything less than gem quality coins. (Unless you want the challenge of assembling a collection of impaired and circulated proof quarters.) There is a 40 % silver 1976 issue made to commemorate the United States' Bicentennial. Starting in 1992, the Mint struck both copper nickel and 90% Silver versions of the proof Washington Quarters.



1969-S Proof Washington  
Quarter

The Special Mint Set Coins are easily acquired as typical single coins for about a dollar a piece. However, the SMS issues are popular as grade rarities. In addition, there was a 1964 Special Mint Set issue that was struck in very limited numbers as a test for the 1965 sets. These are rare, expensive and generally not regarded as part of the Washington Quarter collection. The 1965, 1966 and 1967 SMS Quarters are all extremely rare with Deep Cameo finishes. The 1965 issue is uncollectable. A regular cameo finish is the best available for that date. Only a handful of the other dates are known. All sell for strong prices when available.

Near perfect deep cameo proof clad Washington Quarters from 1968 to 1971 (Proof-69 DCAM) are elusive and have a collector following. Proof 67DCAM and Proof 68DCAM coins of these dates are not very expensive. Proof 69DCAM coins can cost hundreds of dollars and the key is the 1971-S in proof 69DCAM, which can fetch over \$1,000.00. Coins with a Proof 70 designation on later dates can also sell for strong prices.

### 3. Toned Washington Quarters

The Washington Quarter series has some of the most spectacular toned coins in all of United States numismatics. In the middle of the run was the 'golden age' of Mint Sets (pun intended). From 1947 to 1958, United States Mint Sets were issued in cardboard holders that sometimes toned the coins contained within them with breathtaking colors. Greens and magentas, which are scarce on most toned coins show up with some regularity on the Mint Set coins. Blues and Purples are also seen, too. Some sets have pastel colors while other sets are vibrant. Many of the earlier sets tone darker around the periphery and highlight around the central design. It seems like the most vivid colors appear on the 1956 through 1958 sets; though no categorical statement can be made about all of them.

Washington Quarter toning also comes from numerous other sources. The earlier dates are not found so often with attractive toning. When these coins are toned, it might be the result of storage in the cardboard Wayne Raymond holders that were popular from the 1930's through the 1950's. Roll end toning from the original paper roll wrappers is another source of color. Coins with this appearance will usually have great color on one side and little or no color on the other. More recently, Dansco Albums have toned many Washington Quarters, too. These often display crescent toning on one section of the coin. The most attractive toning



on Washington Quarters is generally reserved to the silver issues. The copper nickel coins will tone attractively, but the colors are not so vivid as the silver coins. Occasionally, modern proof quarters can be found with lovely colors, too.

Collecting toned Washington Quarters is more like a freestyle exercise. The collector is more likely to focus on assembling a 'gallery' of numismatic 'colorpieces'. One may narrow the focus further to a particular type of toning such as the mint set coins.

### 4. Washington Related Coinage

The U.S. Mint has issued several coins depicting George Washington. These would make an interesting collection together. The coins in this set are as follows:

- **Lafayette Dollar (1900)** – This coin was issued for the Paris World's Exposition of that year in recognition of Lafayette's contribution to the American Revolution. It depicts both Washington and Lafayette on the coin's obverse.



1900 Lafayette Dollar

- **Sesquicentennial Half Dollar (1926)** - This coin commemorates the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The obverse features both Washington and Calvin Coolidge.



1926 Sesquicentennial Half Dollar

- **Washington Quarter (1932)** – First year of issue Washington Quarter was a circulating commemorative that observed the 200th anniversary of Washington's birth.



1932 Washington Quarter

- **Washington Quarter (1976)** – This is the same type as above with a different commemorative reverse struck for the U.S. Bicentennial.



1976 Washington Quarter - reverse

- **George Washington Half Dollar (1982)** - This coin was the first of the Modern Commemorative coins. It marked the 250th Anniversary of Washington's birth.



1982 George Washington Half Dollar

- **Mount Rushmore Half Dollar (1991)** – This coin commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the Mt Rushmore project. It depicts the Head of Washington as it appears on the monument.

- **Mount Rushmore Silver Dollar (1991)** – This coin is part of a three coin set issued with the above coin.



1991 Mount Rushmore Silver Dollar

- **Mount Rushmore Five Dollar Gold (1991)** – This is the 3rd coin of the Mt Rushmore Series.

- **George Washington Death Bicentennial Five Dollar Gold (1999)** – This was issued to mark the 200th anniversary of Washington's Death



1991 Mount Rushmore Five Dollar Gold

- **George Washington Statehood Quarters (1999-2008)** – This series is a continuation of the Washington Quarter Series. It has a different Washington obverse than the earlier issues.

- **George Washington Presidential Dollar (2007)** – Issued to commemorate Washington's presidency. There is one variety that does not have edge lettering.



Presidential Dollar



- **Mt Rushmore National Park America the Beautiful Quarter (2013)** – This coin commemorates the Mt. Rushmore National Park and once again features Washington's face in profile as it appears on the monument.



*Mt. Rushmore National Park  
America the Beautiful Quarter*

## 5. U.S. Coins Patterned after other World Coin Designs

Though many United States coins were unlike any other coins of the World in circulation at their time, some closely resembled foreign counterparts. The Washington Quarter's reverse was patterned after the Italy 5 Lire coins of the 1920's designed by the renowned artist Giuseppe Romagnoli. Some of the U.S. coins that resemble foreign coins are as follows:

- **Liberty Seated Design and Great Britain Half Penny, Penny, and 4 Pence Designs.**  
The Liberty Seated design matches the British designs featuring Britannia seated. These in turn, were derived from the Roman coinage



*1891 Great Britain  
Penny*



*Liberty Seated Half  
Dollar*

- **Barber Design and French Ceres Design on silver coins**



*French 'Ceres'  
Design*



*Barber Quarter*

➤ **Walking Liberty Half Dollar and French Franc design portraying Marianne**



*Walking Liberty Half Dollar*



*Marianne*

➤ **The Mercury Dime Obverse and the French 20 Franc Obverse**



*Mercury Dime obverse*



*French 20 Franc*

➤ **The Mercury Dime Reverse and the French First Republic 2 Sols**



*Mercury Dime reverse*



*French 2 Sols*

➤ **The Washington Quarter Reverse and the Italy 5 Lire Reverse**



*Washington Quarter reverse*



*Italy 5 Lire reverse*

➤ **Delaware Half Dollar (1936) and Sweden 2 Kronor (1938)**



*Delaware Half Dollar*



*Sweden 2 Kronor*

## 6. BU Rolls

The Washington Quarter was produced during a time of unprecedented growth in the U.S. numismatic market. Collectors and speculators of the day anticipated this growth to last indefinitely. As such,



some of the common wisdom of the time involved purchasing newly issued coins by the roll to profit by selling these rolls in the future to the masses of collectors that had yet to start the hobby. Beautiful, uncirculated rolls of Washington Quarters are still available for most dates after 1940. Many of these trade for only modest premiums over their silver value.

## Read More About Washington Quarters

Bowers, Q. David. [A Guide Book of Washington Quarters and State Quarters](#). Whitman Publishing, Atlanta.

