

**A Selection of
George Washington
Pieces from the Early
American Period**

Introduction

Popular with American collectors to varying degrees since at least the 1850's, the mostly copper coins and tokens depicting George Washington dated 1783-1796 (or undated) are among the most interesting issues in early American numismatics. As noted in the Red Book, "The likenesses in most instances were faithfully reproduced and were designed to honor Washington. Many of these pieces were of English origin and made later than the dates indicate [up to about 1820]." These pieces tell an interesting story because of their multiple uses — as a circulating medium of exchange, as patterns for proposed coinage, and as collectors' items (mostly for British numismatists at that time!)

The selection of Washington pieces in this exhibit is incomplete, but represents most of the major design types reasonable available to the average collector. In most cases no more than a few thousand of each type were minted, and all are scarce today.

George Washington

Pater Patriae — Father of His Country

Born Feb. 22, 1732; First job as land surveyor, 1749; French and Indian War, 1754-1763 (Washington as commander of Virginia militia, 1755-1758); Married to Martha Dandridge Custis, 1759; Revolutionary War, 1776-1783 (Washington as General of the American Armies); Treaty of Paris, Sept. 3, 1783; Leader of Constitutional Convention, 1787; First President of the United States, 1789-1797; Farewell Address, Sept. 19, 1796; Died at home in Mount Vernon, Virginia on Dec. 14, 1799.

References

1. *Walter Breen's Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins*, pp. 133-145.
2. R.S. Yeoman, *A Guide Book of United States Coins* ("Red Book"), 58th Edition, 2005, pp. 64-68.
3. Russell Rulau and George Fuld, *Medallic Portraits of Washington*, Krause Publications, Centennial Edition, 1985. Revision of W.S. Baker's 1885 catalog of Washington coins, tokens, and medals.
4. Q. David Bowers, "Tokens and Medals of George Washington," *Coins & Collectors* column, *The Numismatist*, Oct. 1988, pp. 1777-1781.
5. R. Dalton and S. H. Hamer, *The Provincial Token Coinage of the 18th Century*.



1783 Georgivs (Georgius) Triumpho Copper

Catalog: Breen 1184, Baker 7.

Although the portrait resembles King George III more than George Washington, it is believed that these coppers were made in the 1780's to commemorate the victory (triumph) of Washington's army. Probably the designer did not have a portrait of Washington to copy. The confusion may have resulted in many pieces being destroyed, contributing to scarcity today. Most of these coppers did circulate, justifying their designation as tokens.



Obverse: portrait of Washington facing right, legend "GEORGIVS TRIUMPHO."

Reverse: weaving frame with 13 vertical stripes, fleurs de lys at corners (a reference to French aid in defeating the British), legend "VOCE POPOLI," meaning "By the voice of the people."

Edge: Plain.

Size: 27.5 mm.

Weight Standard: 60 to the pound; possibly some at Irish standard of 52 per pound.



1791 Large/Small Eagle Cents

Catalog: Breen 1206, 1217, Baker 15, 16.

The 1791 small and large eagle cents were made as samples for a proposed federal coinage contract. Washington rejected the use of his portrait, and rejected contract coinage. The pieces were struck in Birmingham, England by Obadiah Westwood, a private token manufacturer. The dies were engraved by John Gregory Hancock, Sr. (1775-1815), "one of the finest artists in the history of 18th-century British diemaking" (Breen).



Obverse: Bust of Washington in military uniform facing left, legend "WASHINGTON PRESIDENT," date 1791 (on large eagle type). Note quality of Hancock's engraving.

Reverse: Heraldic eagles, legends "ONE CENT" above eagle, "UNUM E PLURIBUS" on scroll (large eagle type), date 1791 below (small eagle type).

Edge: "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA."

Size: 30 mm.

Weight Standard: approx. 36 to the pound.



1793 Ship Halfpenny

Catalog: Breen 1225, Baker 18.

This piece is also the work of John Gregory Hancock and Westwood's mint in Birmingham, but was intended mostly for sale to British collectors, although some circulated as tokens in England and possibly in America. (Note halfpenny rather than cent denomination. This piece, along with some of the others, are also part of the British provincial or "Conder" token series cataloged by Dalton and Hamer.)



Obverse: Bust of Washington in military uniform facing left, legend "WASHINGTON PRESIDENT." Very similar to the 1791 Large Eagle Cent.

Reverse: Sailing ship, denomination legend "HALFPENNY," date 1793. The "3" was punched over a "2" which is barely visible.

Edge: Legend "PAYABLE IN ANGLESEY LONDON OR LIVERPOOL."

Size: 30 mm.

Weight Standard: approx. 42 to the pound.



1795 Liberty & Security Halfpenny

Catalog: Breen 1260, Baker 31.

This is among a series of pieces commissioned between 1795 and 1800 by Kempson & Sons in England as samples for a possible Federal coinage contract following rumors of the demise of the Philadelphia Mint. The piece was actually struck by William Lutwyche's mint in Birmingham. Many were exported to America and circulated as tokens, but Kempson was no more successful than Westwood in obtaining a coinage contract with the United States!



Obverse: Bust of Washington in military uniform facing right, legend "GEORGE WASHINGTON."

Reverse: Heraldic eagle atop shield, legend "LIBERTY AND SECURITY," date 1795.

Edge: Legend "PAYABLE AT LONDON LIVERPOOL OR BRISTOL."

Size: 29.4 mm.

Weight Standard: 46 to the pound.



1795 Grate Halfpenny

Catalog: Breen 1271, Baker 29B.

This piece by Kempson & Sons is actually a tradesmen's token for the London company Clark & Harris, a dealer in fireplace grates and stoves. It may have served double duty as one of Kempson's coinage samples, and some of the mintage circulated in the U.S. The piece was designed by Thomas Wyon, another famous name in British diemaking. Once again, this piece is also part of the now-popular "Conder" token series.



Obverse: Bust of Washington in uniform facing right, legend "G. WASHINGTON THE FIRM FRIEND TO PEACE & HUMANITY." Large coat buttons variety.

Reverse: Open fireplace with grate, legends "PAYABLE BY CLARK & HARRIS 13. WORMWOOD ST. BISHOPSGATE," and "LONDON 1795."

Edge: Engrailed (diagonally reeded).

Size: 28.6 mm.

Weight Standard: 50 to the pound.



Repub. Ameri. Funeral Penny (c. 1800)

Catalog: Breen 1281, Baker 69A. (Tin or white metal; the copper variety is Breen 1278.)

The Reput. Ameri. Pennies (named after the abbreviation appearing on the reverse scroll) were first made by Kempson & Sons with the date 1796 on the obverse, which was revised after Washington's death to create the funeral penny shown here. The 1796 pieces circulated as tokens, whereas the funeral pennies in copper and white metal are rare commemoratives.



Obverse: portrait of Washington facing right, legends “GEORGE WASHINGTON” with birth and death dates below. (Birth date Feb. 11, 1732 in old Julian calendar; death date incorrectly given as Dec. 21 instead of Dec. 11.)

Reverse: scroll, staff, fasces and cannon butt, surrounding legends pertaining to dates that Washington was General of the American Armies and President of the United States.

Edge: Plain. **Size:** 33 mm.

Weight Standard: uncertain.



North Wales Halfpenny (undated c. 1795)

Catalog: Breen 1295, Baker 34.

These somewhat enigmatic pieces were probably made in Birmingham about 1795 by token maker William Lutwyche as “evasion” halfpence (i.e., to evade counterfeit laws). The reverse is similar to other evasion halfpence made by Lutwyche, but unlike the others this piece depicting Washington was intended to circulate in America. The dies were banged up to simulate wear, and most of the surviving specimens are also well-worn from circulation.



Obverse: portrait of Washington facing left, legend “GEORGEIVS WASHINGTON.”

Reverse: harp and crown, legend “NORTH WALES.”

Edge: Plain (thin flan variety).

Size: 27 mm.

Weight Standard: approx. 72 to the pound for the thin flan variety, 66 to the pound for the medium flan variety (Breen 1294). It is not unusual for “evasion” pieces to be lightweight!



1783 Unity States Cent

Catalog: Breen 1188, Baker 1.

It is believed that these pieces were struck in the early 1800's at Boulton & Watt's famous Soho Mint in Birmingham, England, with the 1783 date commemorating the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolution. The word "UNITY" is an "evasion" to avoid exactly duplicating the large cent reverse mentioned, although there was no law forbidding the import or circulation of private copper tokens. James Kean of Philadelphia distributed the pieces in America.



Obverse: Draped bust of Washington with laurel wreath facing left, legend "WASHINGTON & INDEPENDENCE," date 1783.

Reverse: Wreath copied from the U.S. draped bust large cents (1796-1807), legends "UNITY STATES OF AMERICA," "ONE CENT," and "1 / 100."

Edge: Plain.

Size: 28.6 mm.

Weight Standard: 60 to the pound.



1783 Large Military Bust Cent

Catalog: Breen 1203, Baker 4.

Once again, the 1783 date commemorates the Treaty of Paris. These pieces were struck 1815-1820 at the Soho Mint and imported by New York and Philadelphia merchants for profit and to alleviate a shortage of small change during the coin shortage of 1815-1817. (No U.S. large cents were struck in 1815.) They are therefore properly considered commercial tokens with a one cent denomination, even though they are lighter and slightly smaller than a large cent.



Obverse: Bust of Washington in military uniform facing left, legend “WASHINGTON & INDEPENDENCE,” date 1783.

Reverse: Seated figure of Liberty, legend “UNITED STATES.” Initials T.W.I. for Thomas Wells Ingram, engraver.

Edge: Plain.

Size: 27.8 mm.

Weight Standard: 60 to the pound, compared to only 42 to the pound for U.S. large cents.



Double Head Cent (undated)

Catalog: Breen 1204, Baker 6.

This unusual piece features what the U.S. Mint won't allow as the design of the Washington State Quarter — Washington on both sides! It was most likely also made in Birmingham during the 1815-1820 period, and has been found in accumulations with the Large Military Bust Cents. It is a one cent token as marked on the reverse, although it may have been intended as a commemorative piece in addition to a circulating token.



Obverse: Bust of Washington in military uniform facing left, similar to Military Bust Cent, legend "WASHINGTON."

Reverse: Nearly identical bust of Washington, legend "ONE CENT."

Edge: Plain.

Size: 27.8 mm.

Weight Standard: 56 to the pound.

This marks the end of my selection of Washington pieces from the early American period. I hope you've enjoyed this exhibit!