The History of the Denver Mint

From the Colorado Gold Rush to the World's Largest Coin-Producing Mint




019186. U.S. MINT, DENVER, COLORADO.



4

The Denver Mint is one of the most important coin-producing facilities in American history. Since 1906, it has struck billions of coins for circulation and has become the largest producer of coins in the world. Coins bearing the famous **"D" mint mark** are found in nearly every coin collection and cash register across the United States.

Its story began long before the first coin was struck. It is closely tied to the discovery of gold in Colorado, the settlement of Denver, and the rapid expansion of the American West.

Gold Brings People to Colorado

In July 1858, gold was discovered along the South Platte River in what is now Colorado. News spread quickly across the country, beginning the famous **Pikes Peak Gold Rush**. Thousands of miners headed west hoping to strike it rich.

The growing mining camps produced enormous amounts of gold dust and nuggets, but there was a major problem: there was no nearby federal mint. Miners had to ship their gold hundreds of miles to be refined or coined, an expensive and dangerous journey.

Private companies stepped in to fill the need.

The most successful was **Clark, Gruber & Company**, which began producing privately minted $2.50, $5, $10, and $20 gold coins in Denver beginning in 1860. These coins circulated throughout the Rocky Mountain region and are highly prized collectibles today.

Congress Creates a Branch Mint

Recognizing the need for an official government facility, Congress authorized a branch mint in Denver on **April 21, 1862**.

Rather than constructing an entirely new building immediately, the federal government purchased the Clark, Gruber & Company building and equipment for $25,000.

Unfortunately, the Civil War and other financial concerns delayed full coin production.

Instead of striking coins, the new federal facility opened in 1863 as an **Assay Office**.

Its job was to:

- Receive miners' gold
- Test its purity
- Melt and refine bullion
- Cast gold into bars
- Return the bars to depositors

No circulating coins were produced during this period.

From Assay Office to Mint

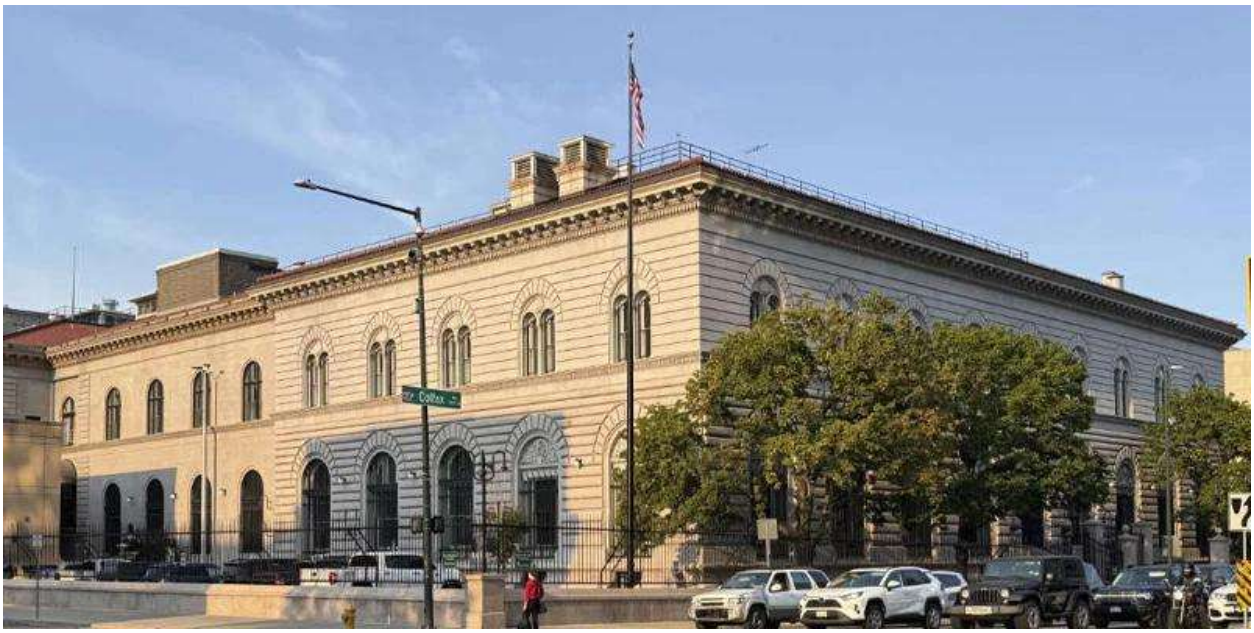
By the 1890s, Colorado had become one of America's richest mining regions.

Congress again authorized Denver to become a full branch mint in 1895.

Construction began on an impressive new building along West Colfax Avenue.

Designed in the style of the Italian Renaissance, the structure was inspired by the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Florence, Italy. Built from Colorado granite, it remains one of Denver's architectural landmarks today.

Location of the Denver Mint







6

The Denver Mint is located at:

320 West Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado

It sits beside Denver's Civic Center and has occupied this location since 1904.

Today, it remains an active United States Mint facility and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

First Coins Struck

On **February 1, 1906**, the Denver Mint officially began striking United States coins.

During its first year it produced more than **2 million gold and silver coins**.

The mint struck:

- Gold Eagles ($10)
- Half Eagles ($5)
- Double Eagles ($20)
- Silver dollars
- Half dollars
- Quarters
- Dimes
- Minor coinage

Every coin carried the **"D" mint mark**, identifying Denver as the place of manufacture.

Coins Produced at Denver

Throughout its history, Denver has struck nearly every denomination of United States coin.

Among them are:

- Indian Head Eagles
- Saint-Gaudens Double Eagles
- Liberty Head gold coins
- Morgan Dollars
- Peace Dollars
- Mercury Dimes
- Standing Liberty Quarters
- Walking Liberty Half Dollars
- Franklin Half Dollars
- Kennedy Half Dollars
- Lincoln Cents
- Jefferson Nickels
- Roosevelt Dimes

- Washington Quarters
- Eisenhower Dollars
- Susan B. Anthony Dollars
- Sacagawea Dollars
- Presidential Dollars
- American Women Quarters
- Commemorative coins
- Annual Uncirculated Mint Sets

The Meaning of the "D" Mint Mark

Collectors often assume every coin with a "D" mint mark is rare.

That is not true.

The Denver Mint has produced billions of coins, making many dates extremely common.

Instead, collectors focus on:

- Low-mintage years
- High-grade examples
- Major die varieties
- Error coins
- Historic issues

Some Denver coins are among the rarest U.S. coins, while others are among the most common.

The Great Mint Robbery

One of the Denver Mint's most famous stories occurred in **1922**.

Bandits stole approximately **$200,000 in $5 bills** from a Federal Reserve truck outside the Mint.

The crime became known as the **Great Mint Robbery** and remains one of Colorado's legendary criminal cases.

Gold Storage

Although best known for producing coins, the Denver Mint has also served as a secure gold storage facility.

During the 1930s, millions of ounces of gold were transferred to Denver for safekeeping.

Today, the Mint continues to store a significant portion of the nation's precious metal reserves.

Record Coin Production

As America's population grew, demand for coins exploded.

The Denver Mint continually expanded production.

In fiscal year 2000, it produced **15.4 billion coins**, a record for a single U.S. Mint facility, cementing its reputation as the world's largest coin producer.

Tours

The Denver Mint remains one of the few operating U.S. Mint facilities that offers guided public tours (availability varies).

Visitors can observe:

- Coin blanks
- Annealing furnaces
- Coin presses
- Quality inspections
- Packaging operations

Photography is generally prohibited inside the production areas for security reasons.

Why the Denver Mint Matters to Collectors

For numismatists, the Denver Mint represents:

- The legacy of the Colorado Gold Rush.
- More than a century of continuous coin production.
- The famous "D" mint mark found on countless U.S. coins.
- Numerous key-date and high-grade collectible issues.
- One of the most productive minting facilities ever built.

Conclusion

The Denver Mint began as a response to the Colorado Gold Rush and evolved from a modest assay office into one of the world's premier minting facilities. Since striking its first coins in 1906, it has produced billions of pieces that circulate through American commerce every day. Whether you're searching pocket change for a "D" mint mark or building a collection of classic U.S. coins, the Denver Mint remains a cornerstone of American numismatic history.