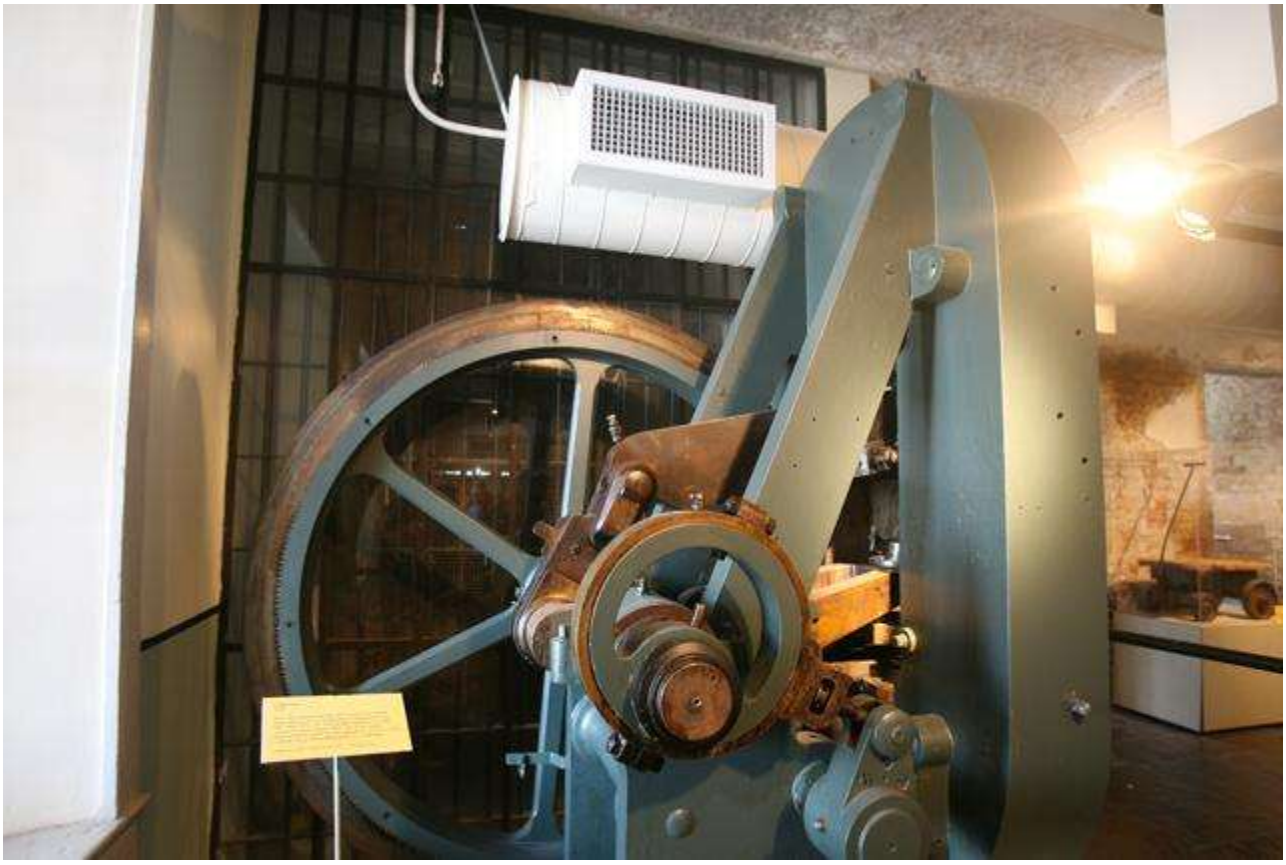
The New Orleans Mint: The Legendary Home of the "O" Mint Mark






E PLURIBU
1879

The New Orleans Mint is one of the most famous branch mints in American history. Its distinctive **"O" mint mark** appears on some of the most desirable U.S. coins ever struck. Located just outside the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Mint played a vital role in producing the nation's gold and silver coinage for more than 70 years.

Today, the building survives as a museum, making it the oldest surviving U.S. Mint building still standing.

Why Was the New Orleans Mint Built?

Congress authorized the New Orleans Mint in 1835, and construction was completed in 1838. Its location was carefully chosen because New Orleans was one of America's busiest ports.

The city handled enormous shipments of:

- Gold from Mexico
- Silver from the western territories
- Cotton and agricultural exports
- International trade arriving through the Gulf of Mexico

Rather than sending precious metals all the way to Philadelphia, they could be coined much closer to where they entered commerce.

The "O" Mint Mark

Every coin struck for the United States at the New Orleans Mint carries the famous **"O"** mint mark.

Collectors immediately recognize the letter "O" as representing one of America's classic branch mints. Because many New Orleans coins had relatively low mintages, they are especially popular today.

Coins Minted at New Orleans

The Mint produced a wide variety of gold, silver, and minor coinage, including:

- Half Dimes (5¢)
- Dimes
- Twenty-Cent Pieces
- Quarters
- Half Dollars
- Silver Dollars
- Gold Dollars

- Quarter Eagles ($2.50)
- Three-Dollar Gold Pieces
- Half Eagles ($5)
- Eagles ($10)
- Double Eagles ($20)

Some of the most famous New Orleans coins include:

- 1893-O Morgan Dollar
- 1901-O Barber Quarter
- 1854-O Three Dollar Gold Piece
- 1909-O Barber Half Dollar

The Mint became especially well known for striking Morgan Dollar coins between 1879 and 1904. Millions of these silver dollars entered circulation across the country.

The Civil War Years

The New Orleans Mint experienced one of the most unusual periods in American numismatic history.

In 1861, Louisiana seceded from the Union. During that year, the Mint operated under **three different governments**:

1. The United States
2. The State of Louisiana
3. The Confederate States of America

For a brief time, the same presses struck coins under different authorities. This makes 1861-O coinage especially fascinating to collectors and historians.

Reopening After the War

Following the Civil War, the Mint remained closed for years while the building underwent repairs.

It reopened first as an assay office in 1876, then resumed full coin production in 1879. During this second era, the Mint concentrated heavily on silver coinage, particularly Morgan dollars.

Why Did the Mint Close?

By the early 1900s, newer mints in Philadelphia, Denver, and San Francisco could easily meet the nation's demand for coinage.

Coin production ended in **1909**, largely because the Treasury no longer needed the New Orleans facility after silver dollar production declined. The Mint was officially decommissioned in **1911**, and its machinery was moved to Philadelphia.

The Building's Later Life

After coin production ended, the building served several purposes:

- U.S. Assay Office
- Federal prison
- Coast Guard facility
- Storage building

In the late 1970s, it was restored and converted into a museum. Today it houses exhibits on both coinage and the musical heritage of New Orleans.

Legacy

Collectors treasure New Orleans Mint coins because they represent a unique chapter in American history. The "O" mint mark tells the story of westward expansion, Southern commerce, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the growth of the United States.

Whether it appears on a tiny silver half dime, a gleaming gold eagle, or a classic Morgan dollar, the "O" mint mark remains one of the most recognizable symbols in U.S. numismatics.

Today, a visit to the historic New Orleans Mint offers collectors the chance to stand where millions of legendary American coins were once struck, preserving the legacy of one of the nation's most historic mints.