

Collecting Canadian Large Cents

by Dale Hallmark

If you have collected or currently collect US large cents no doubt you noticed there are more than a few that require a significant financial commitment to acquire in decent grades (or just any example for some years) and that is especially true of the early cents. Eliminate the earliest years and focus on the post-1801 cents and it will be less financially stressful but there are still quite a few that are beyond easy reach of many a hobby budget. On the other hand, assembling a date run of Canadian large cents (1858-1920) is challenging and fun, considerably less expensive, and provides a chance to explore a history that is every bit as complex and fascinating as is the history of the US large cents. Collecting Canadian large cents is a nice alternative and may be the achievable challenge you might want to consider!

Currently Canada consists of ten provinces and two territories. The history of how Canada became the Canada of today would and does fill encyclopedias and unfortunately we don't have space to go into it here. Skipping that fascinating history and getting on to the coins; let it suffice to say that the British Province of Canada (Canada East and Canada West) were divided into Ontario and Quebec, and along with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia joined in confederation

and became the Federal Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867. The other provinces and territories joined or were added later.

Prior to confederation coins were often in very short supply and what did circulate was a hodgepodge of coins including Spanish, French, English, and coins from the US, as well as a multitude of privately issued tokens and tokens with semi-official and even official sanction. At various times Great Britain was indifferent to her colonies' coinage needs and at others simply didn't possess the coinage capacity to furnish coins, as her own needs often surpassed the ability of the London Mint to supply.

The cents issued in 1858 and 1859, prior to Canadian Confederation (1867), can be considered British Colonial coins issued for the Province of Canada although the Krause Standard Catalog of World Coins lists them with the post-confederation issues (likely because they are also decimal coins). They were struck to a standard of 100 to a pound of bronze rather than the British standard of 80 per pound making them lighter than the public was familiar with and less than popular. The 421,000 cents minted in 1858 plus the large production of 9.579 million in 1859 combined with their lack of popularity proved sufficient to meet Canada's cent needs until 1876.

The small mintage of the 1858 cents makes it the key to the entire series and today a nicely preserved example can be a little costly. A nice looking example in mid-grades most likely will cost over \$100, but if you search diligently and have a little luck a pleasing example can likely be found for that or not much more. However, as a pre-confederation coin it, as well as the more common 1859, may easily be omitted if one decides to collect only the post-confederation issues. For the variety collector there are several 1859 varieties. There are cents with a narrow 9, a 59 over 58 that has a wide 9 and a couple different double-punched 9's. While varieties are certainly fun to collect and are often overlooked by many coin dealers; there are more varieties in the series than we can survey here in much de-

tail other than mentioning a few of the types most often encountered.

The 1858-59 designs are sometimes referred to as the "Young Head" and the 1876-1901 issues are known as the "Mature Head". The "Mature Head" cents were minted to an increased weight standard of 80 coins to a pound of bronze making them heavier and more popular with the public. The increase in weight brought the Canadian cent up to the standards used for the British halfpenny of that era. Both the "Young Head" and "Mature Head" are designs by Leonard C. Wyon.

In 1876, Canada placed an order for four million cents, but the Royal Mint in London was hard pressed to supply her own coin needs. The mint had experienced some equipment breakage which severely hampered

Location of the "H" mintmark below the date on the 1876, 81, 82, 90 and 1907 cents.



Location of the "H" mintmark below the maple leaf on the 1898 and 1900 cents.





Edward VII Cent design 1902-1910.

production for almost five months, consequently the production of the cents was undertaken by the private firm of Ralph Heaton of Birmingham, England, "The Heaton Mint". The London Mint had a professional relationship with the Heaton mint and had conducted business with them in the past. The Heaton mint cents bear a small "H" mintmark below the date on the coin's reverse. Heaton also minted cents for Canada in 1881, 1882, 1890, 1898, 1900 and 1907.

No cents were minted during 1877 through 1880, or in 1883, 1885, or 1889. The other years when cents were minted prior to 1908 saw the cents minted by the London Mint and bear no mintmark. The years 1900 and 1907 are the only years during which both types, the "H" and "no-H", were minted.

Other than that pesky 1858 cent, decent examples of most years between 1858 and 1901 often go for no more than a few dollars. The 1859 had

the largest mintage during that period and the other mintages range between one and four million pieces. There are at least three varieties for 1891; a large date with large leaves, a small date with large leaves, and a small date with small leaves. The small date varieties will cost considerably more than the large date if you choose to pursue them. Both "H" mintmarked coins and "no-H" coins were minted in 1900, and the mintmarked coin is easier to collect, but the "no-H" variety can be collected for under \$20 in fairly decent condition. Better example of the 1900 "no-H" can go up to \$40 or more.

The 1901 issue was the last cent depicting Queen Victoria. Beginning in 1902, Edward VII is the depicted monarch and the design is by G. W. DeSalles. The cents minted between 1901 and 1910 have mintages ranging from a low of 800,000 for the 1907-H up to a high of 5.146 million in 1910. Consequently the 1907-H is the more costly and may bring up to \$35-\$45

for a very nice example. Many consider the 1907-H one of the semi-key coins. The 1907 issue is significant for another reason: 1907 was the final year Canadian coins were minted in England. Beginning in 1908 the Ottawa branch of the Royal Canadian Mint opened and began producing coins.

Another interesting type was produced in 1911 and was only minted during that one year. King Edward VII died in May of 1910 necessitating that coin dies depicting the succeeding monarch, George V, be prepared for the 1911 cents. The George V bust was designed by Sir E. B. MacKenna, and the reverse by W. H. J. Blakemore, which is mostly a continuation of the previous reverse design of Leonard C. Wyon.

While Canada had considerable control of the reverse design of its coins, when it came to the obverse (the royal prerogative), the London Mint was the final authority. The ex-colonies could make design requests of the London Mint such as for a crowned or uncrowned bust but for convenience they often took what London had approved and prepared. At least in some cases, they did have a little more control over certain aspects of the inscriptions such as the type of font used, its layout, what was abbreviated and whether it was Latin or English.

At that time, the London Mint was still manufacturing all of Canada's master coin tools. The tools would then be shipped to Canada and used in the production of coin dies. Unfortunately the London Mint currently lacked a staff modeler who could create the large plaster models used in the production of those master tools. It wasn't until March of 1911

that the London Mint was prepared to add the inscription and Canada was asked to choose between the officially approved inscriptions. W.S. Fielding, Canada's minister of finance, selected the Latin version.

March was already months late and Canada was concerned that they might not have enough coins in reserve to supply demand, and they really didn't want to mint coins in the New Year retaining the design of the previous monarch, so there was a big rush to get things done. When the tools to make the dies finally arrived it was noticed that the inscription "GEORGIVS V REX ET IND IMP" was missing the traditional "DEI GRA" (Dei Gratia: by the grace of God). By this time it was becoming critical to mint coins, so reluctantly Canada used the design and thus the 1911 cent became a "Godless" cent. There was some public outcry over the matter but the omission wasn't to be corrected that year. The correct inscription, "GEORGIVS V DEI GRA REX ET IND IMP" (George the Fifth, by the Grace of God, King, and Emperor of India) was restored the following year, 1912.

In Canada the London Mint received credit for the omission but London countered by reminding Canada that they had chosen and officially approved the inscription. It was quite rare for the London Mint to make a mistake and even rarer to admit to one. Well preserved examples of the 1911 "Godless" cent can be collected for a few dollars.

The cents issued between 1912 and 1920 can also be acquired in better grades for a few dollars each. Mintages range between 3 and nearly 6 million per year during 1912-1915, but



Canada's 1911 "Godless" Cent.

due to an economic upsurge and the increased demand caused by WWI the 1916-1919 period saw mintages rise to between 11 and 12 million per year.

By 1920 the large size of the cent coupled with its dwindling purchasing power led to the cents once again becoming less popular with the public. Maybe more importantly, rising metal prices and production costs threatened the mint's profits which eventually prompted the mint to reduce the size of the cents making 1920 the final year of Canada's large cents. During the first part of 1920, 6.76 million large cents were produced. To round out the year an additional 15.4 million small cents were minted. Some of the large cents were subsequently melted, but it doesn't appear that enough were recycled to affect the supply as it is still relatively common and an inexpensive date to collect.

Many countries have produced large cents or their equivalents and all are fun to collect in their own

right. The Canadian large cents offer a fascinating and inexpensive alternative collecting opportunity to the US large cent series. I enjoy collecting and learning about them so much that I decided to expand my collection and pursue the newer Canadian small cents up through 2012. Sadly for cent collectors and aficionados, 2012 will be the last year for Canadian circulating cents, but that is a story for another time. Consider giving the Canadian large cents a try; their history is intriguing and I believe you will find their pursuit as rewarding and fulfilled as I have.

References:

Haxby, James A. 1986, The Royal Canadian Mint and Canadian Coinage, Striking Impressions.