An introduction to the circulating money of Colonial America: the primary coins used by colonists. There is an interesting story behind each type in this fascinating period of North American history. All of these coins are collectible. Many of the coins pictured on these pages can be found on eBay or from dealers that specialize in colonials and can be purchased for under a $100 in lower grades, exceptions being the Massachusetts silver.

**Spanish Cobs and Milled Dollars**, were the principal coins of the American colonists. Mexico City (oM) and Santo Domingo (SP) were the first mints in North America. When the Mexico mint began operation in 1535, Hernán Cortés was still living in Mexico though no longer the Governor of New Spain -- conquerors rarely follow orders well. Cortes' palace was seized by the new Viceroy (Antonio de Mendoza) for the mint location! The primary denomination was eight (8) reales and its fractions (4,2,1,½). For the first two hundred years the struck coins tended to be very crude and became known as cobs (macuquina). Large numbers have been recovered from wrecks of the Spanish treasure fleet. Milled coinage began in Mexico City in 1734. Sometimes a Spanish milled dollar was cut into smaller pieces or bits. Two reales, another common fraction, was also known as two bits. Copper was also struck early on for local circulation but gold coins were not struck until about 1700. These cobs and milled Spanish coins were in wide use throughout the Colonial period and up to 1850s.

**Massachusetts Oak and Pine Tree** shilling, sixpence, threepence were all dated 1652 and the oak twopence, 1662. John Hull and Robert Sanderson, the first American Silversmiths, authorized by the Bay Colony struck these coins in Boston from 1652 till the early 1680s. While never authorized by England, they circulated widely until end of 18th century. The Oak and Pine tree shillings were also known as Bay Colony or Boston money.

**Dutch Lion Dollars (Leeuwendaalder)**, an important Dutch trade coin first minted in Holland in 1575. Thought to have circulated in New Amsterdam during the Dutch period but lately shown to have circulated primarily from New York south to the Carolinas from the 1690s to 1730s; after the British took New Amsterdam from the Dutch (1664) and renamed it New York after the Duke of York, later King James II of England.

**French coinage** for New (Nouvelle) France, at its peak early in 18th century the territory, extended from Newfoundland to the Rocky Mountains and from Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. France, unlike England, on occasion tried to supply colonists with small change from the 1640 counter-stamping of old douzains to the French Colonies coppers of 1767. Ceded to England and Spain in 1763.

**American Plantations (10)**, 1/24 real, 100% tin. First authorized coinage for the American colonies struck in 1688. British made but denominated in a Spanish unit because Spanish coins were the standard in use. Tin crumbles in freezing temperatures and these are rarely found without tin pest. Probably had only modest circulation as many are well worn.

For more information contact Colonial Coin Collectors Club at [www.colonialcoins.org](http://www.colonialcoins.org)

William Wood’s coinage for North America and Ireland – Rosa Americana and Hibernia coppers. Rosas were not well received by the colonists and had limited circulation. The Rosas were struck in a compound metal called Bath metal. The Hibernias for other reasons were not well received in Ireland. There is debate on how many Hibernias were shipped to the American colonies. Dated from 1722-24.

British regal halfpence and contemporary counterfeits or coppers. British regal halfpence and farthings were long the mainstay of small change but were driven out of commerce by ever increasing amounts of light weight counterfeits. Machin’s Mills the home of Col. Thomas Machin, a revolutionary war hero, was one source of locally produced light weight counterfeits. Machin’s Mills varieties are all quite distinctive. Massive numbers of other light weight counterfeit coppers were shipped to the American colonies in the 1770s and 80s. This is an area of active research.

Confederation era state copper coinage: Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut and New Jersey. Vermont and Connecticut were the first states to begin striking coppers in 1785. New Jersey followed in 1786 and Massachusetts in 1787. All ceased (officially) in 1788. Many varieties exist – Vermont (39 varieties), Connecticut (355), New Jersey (144), and Massachusetts (51). Abel Buell and the Company for Coining Coppers were responsible for legally struck Connecticut coppers. James Jarvis eventually bought a controlling interest. Matthias Ogden, Walter Mould, Albion Cox and Thomas Goadsby were authorized to strike 3 million NJ coppers and it appears that they eventually did from at least three mints in New Jersey and possibly a couple more in New York. Reuben Harmon of Rupert, Vermont was authorized to strike coppers for Vermont. Eventually he sold an interest to the Machin’s Mills partnership. Massachusetts chose to establish a state mint and appointed Joshua Wetherle as mintmaster. He hired Joseph Callender and Jacob Perkins to engrave dies.

Fugio cents, all dated 1787(58). The first coinage authorized by the American Congress. Design elements were the same as used on 1776 Continental Currency and were created/designed by Benjamin Franklin. Abel Buell (Connecticut coppers), engraved the dies. James Jarvis got the contract over Gen. Matthias Ogden (NJ coppers) by paying a $10,000 bribe to William Duer, head of the Board of Treasury. Jarvis was also provided 32 long tons of copper at a nominal price and was required to coin about 32 million coppers. He coined a little over 10% of that amount and then defaulted. Congress obtained a judgment of $10,000+ but was never able to collect.