

The Third Side of the Coin: Irradiated Dimes

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)

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The sealed holder says "Neutron Irradiated / Oak Ridge National Laboratory." Inside is a Mercury or Roosevelt dime. You see them in auctions or in coin stores. Some sellers get \$10 each since they are such novelties now. Some dealers pay only \$1 because they are so common. There are several types, if you want to collect one of each -- in fact, you could build a Date and Mint Set. Sometimes, the holder is real, but the coin is questionable.

From 1941 to 1949 Oak Ridge, Tennessee, was a town that did not exist. It was one of the top secret facilities for creating the atom bomb of the "Manhattan Project" of World War Two. This was the site of the a working nuclear reactor for producing fissionable isotopes of uranium. After the town was opened to the public, it became a tourist spot. The Laboratory museum created and sold "Irradiated Dimes."

- The dimes are the product of a special isotope cabinet, not a nuclear reactor.
- The radioactivity lasted about four minutes.
- Irradiated dimes are chemically different from others.
- Only silver dimes could be irradiated.
- More than one million dimes were created from 1949-1967.

In addition to several types of sealed encasing -- blue, red, or black printing; different legends as the official name changed -- there are also non-secured holders in which dimes were simply placed unsealed. Holders like these were also used for irradiated dimes from the New York World's Fair of 1964. Since these holders are not secure, ANY dime or dime-sized object, could be placed in one at any time. The holder is collectible; the object is questionable.

If you find an encased irradiated dime (or a big plastic holder) for \$3 to \$6, the price is right for a retail sale, depending on how much you like the seller or want them to like you.

(Material here is based on an article in the October 4, 1999 issue of COIN WORLD, which I wrote, and which is copyrighted to Amos Press. It has some nice color art and a narrative worthy of a literary prize. I visited Oak Ridge twice over Labor Day Weekend, interviewing people and taking copious notes. If you want to read it online, send your email to cweditor@coinworld.com and ask to have it posted on the Coin World Web site. Do not send email to Kenneth Chen; he is long gone from their staff, as am I.)