

Mind Your Business

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)

"Mind your business" is always good advice. In fact, this was the motto on the very first coins of the United States of America. These copper cents were authorized on April 21, 1787.

Starting in colonial days and continuing through revolutionary times, coins were struck by private individuals. The governments of New Jersey, Massachusetts, and a few other states also issued coins. It wasn't until 1787 that Congress got around to creating truly national, truly American cents.

This was two years before the present Constitution was adopted. We were still operating under the Articles of Confederation in those days. Therefore, it is not surprising that these first American coins were humble tokens of a hesitant central government. The idea of honoring the president of Congress -- or anyone else -- on the coppers would have been an abhorrent reminder of the British monarchy. The eagle was not yet the national emblem.

The first coins of the United States showed a sundial with the legend "Fugio", meaning "I fly." The sundial refers to time, so the message was that "Time flies." Under the sundial is the motto, "Mind your business." On the reverse of these cents is a chain with 13 links. The legend on the reverse says, "We are one." All of these mottos are attributed to Benjamin Franklin and collectors call these "Fugio cents" or "Franklin cents."

Although 300 tons of copper were authorized for these coins, quite a bit less was struck. In fact, we believe that the copper came from the bands of kegs of gunpowder sent to us by France during the revolution. Today, the common varieties of these cents sell for a couple hundred dollars in average circulated condition.