

Once Every Twenty-Five Years

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)

America's coins don't change often. Lincoln has been on the cent since 1909. Washington has been on the quarter since 1932. The reason is that on September 25, 1890, Congress specified that there shall be no change more often than once in twenty-five years without the express permission of Congress. However, there were some exceptions.

The Liberty Seated design created by Christian Gobrecht had been in use for over 50 years. From 1837 until 1890, our nation's silver coins were remarkably enduring. Then, there was a move afoot for change. William Barber, his son Charles Barber, and George Morgan -- all three from Britain -- were employed by the Mint and each wanted to bring new themes to America's metal money. Patterns and trial pieces were created and distributed to influential people.

But America had already seen its silver dollars rejected by Chinese merchants. And before 1857, banks in Kentucky and Ohio had issued notes redeemable in Spanish and Mexican silver coin. To ensure stability, Congress required that any new American coins have the same design for at least 25 years.

But when the Washington quarter was introduced, the Standing Liberty was only 15 years old and a special act was required to change this Washington commemorative into a regular issue coin. Similarly, the Franklin half dollar was only 13 years old when a special act of Congress authorized the Kennedy half. The change from the Eisenhower dollar to the Susan B. Anthony also required a special act of Congress.

Even so, America's metal money has been a constant indicator of the stability of our form of government.