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# **Early commemorative issues US Half Dollars**

**Madison County Coin Club  
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Early commemorative coins were issued between the years 1892 and 1954 and have included primarily silver half dollars and gold dollars.

Classic commemorative coins are typified by a wide selection of half dollars minted to commemorate various events in American history, with a few issues in other denominations, including some gold coins

Profits earned from the sale of coins were generally used to fund a specific project or an anniversary celebration.

The first commemorative Half Dollars issued by the United States were used to raise money for the Columbian Exposition in Chicago held in 1892 and 1893. A total of 2,500,405. At the Exposition, people could buy a Columbian Half Dollar for a Dollar.

Between 1892 and 1954, forty-eight different commemorative half dollars were issued. All of these coins were known as the “Early Commemorative” or “Classic Commemorative” series and were struck from a .900 silver and .100 copper alloy, with the same specifications as the circulating half dollars of the day

# Early commemorative issues US Half Dollars

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- Panama–Pacific half dollar (1915)
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- Pilgrim Tercentenary half dollar (1920–1921)
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- Texas Centennial half dollar (1934–1938)
- Daniel Boone Bicentennial half dollar (1934–1938)
- Connecticut Tercentenary half dollar (1935)
- Arkansas Centennial half dollar (1935–1939)
- Arkansas-Robinson half dollar (1936)
- Hudson Sesquicentennial half dollar (1935)
- California Pacific International Exposition half dollar (1935–1936)
- Old Spanish Trail half dollar (1935)
- Rhode Island Tercentenary half dollar (1936)
- Cleveland Centennial half dollar (1936)
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- Cincinnati Musical Center half dollar (1936)
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- York County, Maine Tercentenary half dollar (1936)
- Bridgeport, Connecticut Centennial half dollar (1936)
- Lynchburg Sesquicentennial half dollar (1936)
- Elgin, Illinois, Centennial half dollar (1936)
- Albany Charter half dollar (1936)
- San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge half dollar (1936)
- Columbia, South Carolina Sesquicentennial half dollar (1936)
- Delaware Tercentenary half dollar (1936)
- Battle of Gettysburg half dollar (1936)
- Norfolk, Virginia, Bicentennial half dollar (1936)
- Roanoke Island half dollar (1937)
- Battle of Antietam half dollar (1937)
- New Rochelle, New York half dollar (1938)
- Iowa Centennial half dollar (1946)
- Booker T. Washington Memorial half dollar (1946–1954)

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Oregon Trail Memorial half dollar (1926–1939)

Vermont Sesquicentennial half dollar (1927)

Hawaii Sesquicentennial half dollar (1928)

Maryland Tercentenary half dollar (1934)

Texas Centennial half dollar (1934–1938)

**Daniel Boone Bicentennial half dollar (1934–1938)**

Connecticut Tercentenary half dollar (1935)

Arkansas Centennial half dollar (1935–1939)

Arkansas-Robinson half dollar (1936)

Hudson Sesquicentennial half dollar (1935)

**California Pacific International Exposition half dollar – San Diego (1935–1936)**

**Old Spanish Trail half dollar (1935)**

Rhode Island Tercentenary half dollar (1936)

Cleveland Centennial half dollar (1936)

Wisconsin Territorial Centennial half dollar (1936)

Cincinnati Musical Center half dollar (1936)

Long Island Tercentenary half dollar (1936)

York County, Maine Tercentenary half dollar (1936)

Bridgeport, Connecticut Centennial half dollar (1936)

Lynchburg Sesquicentennial half dollar (1936)

Elgin, Illinois, Centennial half dollar (1936)

Albany Charter half dollar (1936)

San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge half dollar (1936)

Columbia, South Carolina Sesquicentennial half dollar (1936)

Delaware Tercentenary half dollar (1936)

Battle of Gettysburg half dollar (1936)

**Norfolk, Virginia, Bicentennial half dollar (1936)**

Roanoke Island half dollar (1937)

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# 1920 Pilgrim Commemorative Half Dollar

1920 United States Pilgrim Tercentenary half dollar, honoring what was then the 300th anniversary of this culturally iconic occasion.

2020 marks the quadricentennial (or 400th anniversary)

The Pilgrim Tercentenary half dollar was authorized by Congress on May 12, 1920.



Designed by Boston sculptor Cyrus E. Dallin, an acclaimed sculpture whose legacy includes several notable Native American-inspired sculptures:

The Medicine Man in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park

Appeal to the Great Spirit (1909) in Boston's Museum of Fine Art.

On the Pilgrim half dollar, Dallin's initial, "D", resides on the obverse below the elbow of Governor William Bradford, an English Puritan who was among the adventurous revolutionaries aboard the Mayflower in 1620.

# 1920 Pilgrim Commemorative Half Dollar

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The reverse of the Pilgrim half dollar features a striking portrait of the ship sailing upon the high seas.

Became one of the highest-mintage pre-1930 United States commemoratives by type.



## Mintage

1920 - 152,112 pieces

1921 - showing the date "1921" in the left obverse field, saw 20,053 examples struck.

According to PCGS CoinFacts®, 1920 specimens in XF40 trade for \$65, while the scarcer 1921 strikes realize around \$130 in the same grade.



# Old Spanish Trail Half Dollar



This obverse design features a Texas steer skull and the name of the pioneer Alvar Nunez Cabeza De Vaca.

Year of Issue: 1935

The Old Spanish Trail Half Dollar commemorated the 400th anniversary of the Cabeza de Vaca Expedition and the opening of the Old Spanish Trail.

Designer: L.W. Hoffecker

Hoffecker purchased the coins from the government and sold them to collectors, ostensibly on behalf of the local museum, but in fact for his personal profit, something he later denied in testimony before Congress. There were no complaints about the distribution printed in the pages of *The Numismatist* and Hoffecker went on to the presidency of the American Numismatic Association in 1939.



The reverse features a yucca plant in flower and a map showing the trail taken by Cabeza De Vaca.

The fact that only 10,000 of the half dollars were struck has made them prized among those seeking to complete a "type set" of early commemorative coins, that is one coin of each different design

# Alabama Half Dollar

Struck in 1921 as a belated acknowledgement of the 100th anniversary of Alabama's admission to the Union in 1819.

The delay was apparently due to the initial decision to depict President Wilson, a Democrat, might be reversed depending on the results of the 1920 presidential election.

## Reverse



Features an eagle, possessing arrows and a shield, but no olive branch to symbolically counter the instruments of war; matched branches and arrows are often present in heraldic depiction of eagles on coins. The eagle's beak holds an end of a ribbon on which is inscribed the Alabama state motto, "HERE WE REST" about which Swiatek and Breen, in their 1988 book jibed, "no pun intended about the sleepy Deep South".

The coin was created by Laura Gardin Fraser, the first woman credited with designing a coin.



# Alabama Half Dollar

The obverse of the coin features jugate busts of William Bibb, Alabama's first governor as a state, and the incumbent in 1919, Thomas Kilby.

Governor Kilby the first living person to appear on a U.S. coin.

The issuance was not controversial at the time, as the Act of May 16, 1866, that forbids the depiction of living people on currency was deemed to refer to paper money only.

## Obverse

A total of 22 stars flank the busts, symbolic of Alabama being the 22nd state

To boost sales, a symbol, 2X2 (recognizing Alabama as the 22nd state) was included in the design for a minority of the coins.



## Mintage

Without "2X2": 64,038 including 38 pieces for the Assay Commission

With "2X2": 6,006 including 6 assay pieces

# Norfolk, Virginia, Bicentennial half dollar

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This Norfolk Virginia Bicentennial Half Dollar was designed by William and Marjorie Simpson and celebrates the 200th anniversary of the establishment of Norfolk as a royal borough and the 300th anniversary of the original land grant.

There were only 16,936 of this Norfolk Half Dollar minted at the Philadelphia Mint in 1936, making it of great worth and value to the commemorative coin collector. The Norfolk Commemorative Coin is comprised of .900 silver and .100 copper (90% Silver), has a diameter of 30.6mm, and weighs 12.5 grams

# Norfolk, Virginia, Bicentennial half dollar



At the center of the obverse is a reproduction of the Norfolk City Seal, which carries a three-masted ship, plow and stocks of grain. Inscriptions are placed in three concentric circles surrounding this image. The inscriptions read “Borough of Norfolk Bicentennial”, “1936”, “City of Norfolk Virginia”, “Town 1682”, “Borough 1736”, “City 1845”, “Et Terra Et Mare Divitiae Tuae” (Both by Land and by Sea Thy Riches Are), and “Crescas” (Thou Shalt Grow).

The reverse carries an image of the Royal Mace of Norfolk, which was presented by Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie in 1753. The date “1636” appears at center with two floral sprays. As with the obverse, many inscriptions surround, reading “United States of America”, “Half Dollar”, “Norfolk Virginia Land Grant”, “In God We Trust”, “E Pluribus Unum”, and “Liberty”. Designs for the coin were prepared by William Marks Simpson and Marjorie Emory Simpson.

# San Diego half dollar



San Diego half dollars were struck at the San Francisco Mint in 1935 and the Denver Mint in 1936. They were struck to commemorate the "California-Pacific International Exposition, held in San Diego in 1935 and 1936. They were sold at the Exposition for \$1 per coin.

For the 1935-S San Diego there were 70,132 coins distributed. But actually, only about half reached public hands and some 30,000 pieces were retained by a few individuals associated with the Exposition. Several hoards were disbursed in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, approximately 5000 1935-S and 5000 1936-D San Diegos were sold into the market. Bottom line: the San Diego is a "hoard coin". In fact, PCGS has graded more 1935-S San Diegos (over 10,000 pieces) than any other silver commemorative of the 1892 to 1954 classic commemorative era.



# Daniel Boone Half Dollar

The Daniel Boone Half Dollar was minted to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the famous frontiersman, explorer, and folk hero.

On the obverse of the coin is a portrait of Daniel Boone. Since no known portraits of him exist, this is an artist's conception created by Augustus Lukemann. The likeness looks decidedly different than the portrait of Boone, which had appeared on the previous 1921 Missouri Centennial Half Dollar. The inscriptions surrounding the portrait include "United States of America" and "Half Dollar".



The reverse of the coin features a scene of the frontiersman holding a chart of Kentucky and a musket, facing an American Indian holding a tomahawk. In the background a blockhouse stockade and a sun with rays appear. This was also designed by Augustus Lukemann. The inscriptions read "In God We Trust", "E Pluribus Unum", "Daniel Boone Bicentennial Pioneer Year", and the date of issue.

**Designer:** Augustus Lukemann

# Daniel Boone Half Dollar

Out of the maximum authorized mintage of 600,000 coins, there were only 10,007 of the 1934 Daniel Boone Half Dollars produced and sold at a price of \$1.60 each. In the following year, additional coins were struck at the Philadelphia, Denver, and San Francisco Mints carrying the 1935 date. Subsequent to the initial distribution, legislation was passed in Congress stipulating that the original design should be supplemented by adding the bicentennial year “1934” to the reverse of the coin. A smaller number of coins were minted with the “small 1934 on reverse” and came to represent a scarce variety.



More coins continued to be minted and issued in 1936, 1937, and 1938. The final two years would have smaller net distribution levels as collectors began to grow weary of the endless string of varieties of the commemorative coin, issued years after the actual bicentennial.

**Designer:** Augustus Lukemann



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