

Designer's Spotlight: Charles E. Barber

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Charles Edward Barber, perhaps one of America's most famous Chief Engravers for the U.S. Mint, was born on November 16th, 1840 and passed away on February 18th, 1917, at the age of 76. Charles Barber brought about many coins, such as the Barber dime, quarter, and half dollar. Other lesser known examples of his work are the Four Dollar Gold Stella piece, as well as the Liberty Head (V) Nickel.

Charles Barber was born in London in 1840, but traveled to America with his family in 1852. Charles was a third generation engraver. Charles learned from his father, who had learned the art from Charles's grandfather. Charles's father, William Barber, was appointed as Chief Engraver of the United States Mint shortly after arrival in America. Charles was appointed as an assistant to his father, making a total of four dollars a day in 1877. Charles did not show near as many skills as his father while working as his apprentice. When William Barber passed away from bathing in the cold ocean, Charles took the job over from his father, though some thought that George T. Morgan would be better for the job, after designing the famous Morgan silver dollar.

In the March of 1875, Charles Barber married his first wife, Martha E. Jones. The couple had one child, Edith. Martha Jones passed away in 1898. It only took Charles 4 years to get wed again. Charles was remarried on December 3rd, 1902 to Caroline Gaston. This relationship did not produce any children.

As Chief Engraver of the United States Mint, Charles E. Barber put 5 different U.S. coins into circulation. The gold four dollar Stella coin, created mainly for trade with foreign nations, did not manage to last long before production ceased. The Barber silver coins (dime, quarter, and half dollar) fared a little better, being produced for 24 years (1892-1916). Charles Barber submitted several other designs to reform America's coinage, but all of them were shot down for the dime, quarter, and half dollar. He finally won approval with the 'Barber' design. The Liberty Head, or 'V', nickel was the longest lasting of Charles Barber's circulating coins, being minted from 1883 until 1913 (30 years).

Charles Barber was once known as the 'enemy' to president Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt thought that Barber's coins were dull and lifeless, and sought to renew the design of every circulating coin from the lowly one cent piece, all the way up to the mighty double eagle. Theodore Roosevelt wanted Augustus St. Gaudens to perform this task, which left Charles Barber in an outrage. Charles thought that he should have the right to redesign the coins, since he was the Chief Designer. He argued that St. Gaudens had no history of working for the United States Mint. In the end, Augustus St. Gaudens only got to redesign one coin, the twenty dollar gold Double Eagle. Charles Barber continued to be the Chief Engraver of the United States Mint until 1917, when he passed away.

For further reading, check our article on the [1894-S Barber Dime](#), one of the scarcest U.S. coins minted.