

THE UNITED STATES MINT.

A Walk Through the Institution.

One of the most prominent places of interest in this city is the United States Mint, on Chestnut street, below Broad. It is visited by thousands of strangers every year, and yet there are many people who have been born within sight of its tall chimneys (130 feet high) who know little or nothing about it. To enlighten this class the following simple statement of facts has been written.

The hours for visiting the Mint are from 9 to 12 o'clock A. M. Polite and courteous ushers meet you at the door, and accompany you through the departments of the institution which are open to visitors. Standing in the small rotunda at the entrance, and looking into the building, we have the office of the Treasurer of the Mint on our left; on the right is the Cashier's office. On the right, proceeding into the yard, is the Treasurer's clerks; on the left is the deposit room, of which more will be said hereafter. Adams Express occupies a portion of the Treasurer's clerks' room.

The Copper Melting Room. The first object of interest after passing into the yard is the room where all the base metals used in coinage by the Mint are melted and mixed. Up to 1867 the base coin of the United States was exclusively copper. In the year above mentioned, the coinage of what was called the nickel cent was commenced. These pieces, although called nickel, were composed of one-eighth nickel; the balance was copper.

Since the first coinage of nickel money, the pieces have changed two or three times, both in design and mixture. The present coinage of base coins is as follows:—

Table with columns for coin type (NICKEL, BRONZE), weight, and quantity. Includes entries for Three Cent, Five Cent, and one cent coins.

The composition of the five and three cent pieces is one-fourth nickel; the balance is copper. The bronze pieces are a mixture of copper, zinc, and tin, about equal parts of each, of the two last, the former constituting 95 per cent.

There are seven furnaces in this room, each capable of melting five hundred pounds of metal per day. When the metal is heated and sufficiently mixed, it is poured into iron moulds, and when cool and the rough ends clipped off, is ready to be conveyed to the rolling room.

The Silver and Gold Melting Room. The next place of interest is the gold and silver melting room. The visitor is not permitted to enter this room, but takes his view from the doorway. The room is divided in the centre by a partition. On the right is the silver department. Here all the silver used by the Mint in coining money, as well as the fine merchant bars, is melted and mixed.

The silver or gold having passed through a separating and purifying process, is brought to this room, where it is properly mixed, heated, and then poured into an iron mould. When cool, it is knocked out of the mould, and although it is rich-looking, it is without the brilliancy which we see in new coin. The piece taken from the mould is now called an ingot. It is about twelve inches long, and is wedge-shaped at one end. This end is made wedge-shaped to facilitate its passage through the rollers.

A gold ingot is worth about \$1900 in gold. A silver ingot (one dollar) is worth about \$60 in silver. Silver ingots differ in size and weight, according to the denomination of the coin to be struck from them. The false floor in this room excites considerable attention. It is laid in sections, and can be taken up. The sweepings are very valuable.

The Rolling Room. On passing from the gold-melting-room, through the corridor leading to the rolling-room, the first object of interest which meets the attention is an upright engine on the right. This engine is eighty-horse power, and supplies the motive power to the rolling-machines.

On the left are the "Rollers." About two hundred ingots are run through per hour on each pair of rollers. Gold, silver, and base metal ingots are all put through the same process of rolling. They are received from the melting rooms in the same shape and size, and are passed through the rollers until they assume the shape of long thin strips of the requisite thickness for the sort of coin required.

On the right, looking towards the rear of the room, will be seen a number of furnaces. These are the annealing furnaces. The metal, after passing through the "Rolls," becomes very brittle and hard, from being worked, and it is necessary to soften it before putting it through any further process. It is therefore heated to a red heat, and when it becomes soft and pliable is taken out and allowed to cool. The base metal strips are laid loosely in the furnace, but more care is exercised with the precious metals. They are placed in copper cans, and carefully guarded from any friction that may cause them to lose the slightest particle.

Just back of the "Rolls" are a number of machines used for cutting, trimming, and flattening the strips. In the rear of these machines are ranged in a row in the extreme back part of the room the cutting presses. There are nine of these machines, each one capable of cutting two hundred and twenty-five pieces (planchets) per minute. If these planchets are of the denomination of cents, but \$2 25 per minute is made, but if, on the contrary, the planchets are of gold, of the denomination of double eagles, we have the sum of \$4500 per minute.

These presses are a comparatively recent invention, and each press is capable of cutting any denomination of coins, as they are regulated by the size of the punch, which is movable. A sample of planchets from each strip is carefully weighed before the strip is permitted to be used.

The planchets, as cut, fall in boxes beneath the press and are taken out in quantities and again annealed in the furnaces. On the extreme left, on a line with the cutting presses, are the "draw benches." These machines are used for regulating accurately the thickness of the strips of gold or silver in any lumps or other unevenness. This is done by drawing the strips between stationary rollers previously set to the required thickness. The machinery of this end of the room is run by an engine in the cellar beneath.

The Cleaning or Whitening Room. On the right, between the entrance to the rolling-room and the annealing furnaces, is the cleaning or whitening room. (Visitors are not permitted to enter this room, unless accompanied by an officer of the institution.) In this room the planchets are cleaned by heat and acids, and when thoroughly dried are ready for the coining-room.

The Coining Room. This is probably the most interesting department to the casual visitor of any in the Mint. On entering the door is seen the engine, one of the finest pieces of workmanship in this country. It is almost entirely noiseless, and of twelve-horse power. It operates all the machinery in this room. The dial which is attached to the engine, and stands directly in front of the visitor, marks the number of revolutions and enables the Chief Coiner to tell whether the machinery has been stopped at any time without good cause. A greater part of the fine work of the engine was made and put up by the workmen of the Mint in 1830.

On the left, looking towards the engine, are the milling machines. These little machines are operated by ladies, and are used to turn up the edges of the planchets, before they are ready for the coining press. Each machine is capable of finishing about five hundred pieces per minute.

Turning to the right, the massive yet delicate coining presses stand before you, scrupulously clean and finely burnished. There are ten of these presses, each one capable of making from seventy to one hundred and twenty-five coins per minute. They are seldom run at a greater speed than eighty per minute. If each press in the room was run at its greatest capacity, and engaged in making double eagles (\$20), in the short space of one minute we would have the

astonishing sum of \$24,000 manufactured. Only the largest presses are used in making coins of large denomination. The small presses are used for base coins and the smaller denominations of silver pieces. The amount of pressure necessary to making a perfect coin is from twenty to eighty tons. The larger the piece the more pressure is required. These machines are attended by ladies, and do their work in the most perfect manner. The deviation of a hair's breadth would spoil the coin. The impressions on both sides of the coin are made with one motion of the press. A steel die, wherein the characters to be placed on the coin have been engraved, or dug out, is welded on to what is called the "strike," and placed below or on the bed of the press. It is set about the thickness of the coin below the surface, and is surrounded by a "collar." It makes no material difference whether the obverse or reverse of the coin is below, although the latter is generally placed there. On a portion of the machine made to receive it, working directly over the lower die, the obverse die is fixed, and on this portion the pressure is regulated.

The process by which the coins are made is very similar in all denominations, with the exception spoken of below. The planchets are placed in a brass tube by hand, and at each revolution of the press two iron arms, called "feeders," working like a pair of tongs, slide rapidly out, grasp a planchet from the bottom of the tube, and put it on the lower die. Almost at the same moment the lower die sinks below the "collar," the upper one descends, the planchet is pressed between them both, receives the impression, and in a twinkling this one is caught by the arms, is thrown into a box beneath the press, and another planchet takes its place, and so on through the process. After the planchet passes through this process it is cool, and not till then, according to authority, is it noticeable that the base coins have smooth edges, while gold and silver have "reeded" or nicked edges. The difference in the edges is caused by the "collars," in which the planchets are pressed; those for the gold and silver coins are perfectly nicked, while those for the base coins are delicately smooth.

The subjoined statement exhibits the proportion of precious metals and alloy in our gold and silver coins, together with the weights of the several denominations of the same allowed by law; also, a statement of the base metals, composing our minor or token coinage, with weights of the several pieces, and lawful deviation from the same:—

Table with columns for Gold, Silver, and Base Metals, listing various coin types and their weights and compositions.

Note.—480 grains = 1 Troy ounce.

The Deposit Room. Leaving the Coining Room, and passing through the yard, the next object of interest is the Deposit Room. In this room all the precious metal used by the Mint is received and weighed.

About five hundred million dollars worth of gold has been received in this room since the precious metal was first discovered in California, in 1848. Previous to that the gold came from different places, but principally from Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. Considerable quantities, of a very fine quality, have come from Nova Scotia during the past few years. Most of the gold which reaches the Mint at the present time comes from Montana Territory. Nearly all west of that goes to the Branch Mint at San Francisco, California.

Before the discovery of the immense lodes of silver which exist in the Territories of the United States, the silver used by the Mint came principally from Mexico and South America.

The precious metals are now found in most of the Territories through which the Rocky and other mountains run.

The copper used by the Mint comes principally from the mines of Lake Superior. The finest is found in Minnesota. The nickel is principally from Lancaster county, Pa.

Looking into the Deposit Room from the yard are seen the scales used in weighing gold and silver. The largest weight used by the Mint is seen in this room; it is five hundred ounces. The smallest weight used in the Mint is found in the Assay Room; it is the twelve-hundredth part of a grain, and can be scarcely seen with the naked eye, unless on a white ground. The smallest weight used in the Deposit Room is the one-hundredth part of an ounce, or what is more readily comprehended, the one-fifth of a pennyweight.

The largest scale in this room will weigh from six hundred ounces to the one-hundredth of an ounce. The next size weighs as much as three thousand ounces at a draft. The reader can imagine the delicacy of these scales much better than they can be described. They are examined and adjusted alternate days, sometimes oftener.

On the right-hand side of the room is the vaults. There are twelve of these vaults in the institution. They are of solid masonry. The most important of them are lined with iron.

There has never been an attempt to break into the institution or the vaults. An attempt would be fruitless, for not only are the doors of extraordinary strength but every quarter is guarded. The only robbery of import which ever occurred in the Mint was perpetrated by a trusted servant of the Government in 1854. He purloined small particles of gold from the different lots brought in by the miners. He was detected, and a great portion of the stolen gold made good. Since then, new regulations have been made, which render a recurrence of the same thing impossible.

In regard to the discovery of gold in California, the following extract from a letter from the Director of the Mint to the Secretary of the Treasury, dated December 11, 1848, will prove interesting. It reads as follows:—

"On the 8th instant we received the first deposit of gold from California. It was deposited by Mr. Daniel Carter, who brought it from San Francisco by the Isthmus route. It weighed 384.79 ounces Troy. On the 10th another deposit was sent by the Secretary of War, which weighed 225 ounces. The average value per ounce of the bullion before melting is \$15.000."

The purest gold in this country has been found in the State of Georgia. It is seldom found in any great quantity in any of the Southern States.

The largest nugget of gold ever brought to the Mint came from California in 1852, and was worth nearly six thousand dollars in gold.

Attempts have been made to deposit spurious or manufactured nuggets at the Mint; but no matter how closely the fraud has been concealed, the cheat has always been detected before the "stuff" was melted.

Gold, as received from the hands of the miner, in its native state, is often of curious formation, and differs considerably in outward appearance. It is found in fine dust, in grains from the size of a pin's head to that of a pea, and in lumps varying in size from a pea to the size of a man's hand. It is occasionally found in crystalline form.

The Deposit Melting Room. Passing again into the building, on the right, just inside the hall door, will be seen the deposit melting-room. There are four furnaces in this room, and the first process of melting which the gold or silver goes through after falling into the hands of the Mint takes place in this room.

The metal is weighed carefully in the deposit room, in the presence of the depositor and officers of the Mint. It is then locked up in iron boxes, and conveyed to the melting room, where they are un-

locked by two men, each one having a key. The metals then placed in pots and melted. It is then poured into iron moulds, and when cool is again carried to the deposit room and re-weighed, after which from each deposited lot by the Assayer. From this small piece the fineness of the whole lot (perhaps \$10,000 worth) is ascertained, its value calculated, and the depositor paid.

The gold in its rough state is then ready to be transferred to the melter and refiner to be refined, and rendered fit for coinage. Passing to the second story of the building, you register your name and residence in a book provided for the purpose, and then pass on to the Cabinet. Here much will be found of interest to the visitor. Portraits of the different gentlemen who have acted as Directors of the institution at different times grace the walls, while arranged in cases, around and about the room, are collections of medals and coins. Each of the medals has an interesting history attached to it, as commemorating some important event in the annals of this and other nations. Specimen coins of all the nations in the world will here be found. Among these are those of ancient Rome, A. D. 177 to 222; Greek Republic, 3 to 7 B. C.; together with a collection of Oriental, China, and Japan. Passing on round the room, a plaster cast of Oliver Cromwell is seen. It is said to be a good likeness. A machine for assorting coins attracts considerable attention on account of the delicacy of workmanship. It is not in use. A large and most elegant collection of agates, petrified wood, together with specimens of gold in its native state, will be found here. At the opposite end of the room, among a collection of odd and rare specimens, will be seen the "smaller of all ancient coins, and which is spoken of in the Bible. The visitor will find much in this department which is entertaining and instructive.

The Director's Room, Etc. Just outside of the exit door of the cabinet is seen, in a glass case, a fine specimen of the American eagle, started, with its outstretched wings, as though in flight, by a plaster cast of Oliver Cromwell is seen. It is said to be a good likeness. A machine for assorting coins attracts considerable attention on account of the delicacy of workmanship. It is not in use. A large and most elegant collection of agates, petrified wood, together with specimens of gold in its native state, will be found here. At the opposite end of the room, among a collection of odd and rare specimens, will be seen the "smaller of all ancient coins, and which is spoken of in the Bible. The visitor will find much in this department which is entertaining and instructive.

To the right, looking down the stairs, is the Director's office. Here this officer receives his visitors and transacts the business of his office. The next door, on the same side, is the Chief Clerk's room. "Further on is the private office of the Chief Coiner. This room has a fine library of scientific and historical works. On the left is the messenger's room, back of which are the metal and other departments for the transaction of business.

Passing the Chief Coiner's room, and thence out upon the gallery, which runs completely around the building, the machine shop is reached. This department is stocked with lathes and all the necessary tools for doing the work of the establishments.

Back of this, and adjoining it, are the engravers' apartments. Here the dies used by the Mint are engraved. The dies for all the different branch mints are also made here.

The Adjusting Room. Leaving the engravers' department, we pass immediately into the adjusting room. The work of this room is done entirely by ladies. The planchets of gold and silver are conveyed to this room. Here they are weighed and adjusted by the ladies.

There is a certain deviation in the weight allowed by law. If a planchet is found too light, it is thrown aside and is melted over again. If too heavy, but very near the weight allowed by law, it is taken in hand, and a small particle filed off the edges; if too heavy to admit of filing, it is thrown aside with the light ones, and melted again into ingots.

If the planchet is found to be of the proper weight, it is then ready for the coining press. The base coins (nickel, etc.) are not taken to this room. It belongs to the Chief Coiner's department.

The Separating Room. Occupying a greater part of the west side of the building (second floor) is the Separating Room. Here the gold and silver used by the Mint in the manufacture of coin are separated from the rest of the metal which reaches the Mint at the present time comes from Montana Territory. Nearly all west of that goes to the Branch Mint at San Francisco, California.

In separating and purifying gold it is always necessary to add to it a certain quantity of pure silver. The whole is then immersed in nitric acid, which dissolves the silver into a liquid which looks like pure water. The acid does not dissolve the gold, but leaves it pure. The silver solution is then drawn off, leaving the gold at the bottom of the tub. It is then gathered up into pans, washed, and dried, after which it is ready for the use of the gold-melting room. The silver used in this process, in its liquid state, is then run into tubs prepared for it, and "precipitated," or rendered into a partially hard state, by being mixed with common salt water. After being "precipitated" it is called "chloride," and resembles very closely newly-slacked lime, or "amercure." By putting spelter or zinc on the precipitated chloride it becomes metallic silver, and only needs washing and melting to make the purest virgin metal.

The process of refining silver is of two kinds, that of melting it with saltpetre, etc., which was known some thousands of years since, and the modern process of dissolving it in nitric acid, just like the method of extracting it from gold in the above described operation.

The Assay Rooms. Passing along the gallery we enter the building at the assay rooms. In the back room are the fires, stills, and other appliances necessary to performing all the work of the department.

In the front room are the delicate scales referred to in the description of the deposit room. These scales or "balances" are enclosed in glass cases, and when the Assayer is engaged in weighing the gold they are kept closed that the air may not reach them and thereby influence either side.

The Process of Assaying Gold. The gold is placed in a black lead crucible, and covered with borax, to assist the fusing and to prevent oxidation of the alloy. It is then melted down and stirred; by which a complete mixture is effected, so that an assay piece may be taken from any part of the bar cast out. The piece taken for this purpose is rolled out for convenience of cutting. It is then taken to an assay balance (sensible to the ten-thousandth of a half gramme or less), and from it is weighed a half gramme, which is the normal assay weight for gold, being about 7.5 grains Troy. This weight is stamped 1000; and all the lesser weights (afterwards brought into requisition) are decimal divisions of this weight, down to one ten-thousandth part.

Silver is next weighed out for the quartation; and as the assay piece, if standard, should contain 900 thousandths of gold, there must be three times this weight, or 2700 thousandths of silver; and this is accordingly the quantity used.

The lead used for the cupellation is kept prepared in thin sheets, cut into square pieces, which should each weigh about ten times as much as the gold under assay.

The lead is now rolled into the form of a hollow cone and into this are introduced the assay gold and the quartation silver, when the lead is closed around them and pressed into a ball.

The furnace having been properly heated, and the cupels placed in it and brought to the same temperature, the leaden ball, with its contents, is put into one of the cupels, the furnace closed, and the operation allowed to proceed, until all agitation is ceased to be observed in the molten metal, and its surface has become bright.

This is an indication that the whole of the base metals have been converted into oxides and absorbed by the cupel.

The cupellation being thus finished, the metal is allowed to cool slowly, and the disc or button which it forms is detached from the cupel.

The button is then flattened by a hammer; is annealed by bringing it to a red heat; is laminated by passing it between the rollers; is again annealed, and is rolled loosely into a spiral or coil called a cornet. It is now ready for the process of quartation.

For this purpose it is introduced into a matrass containing about 1 1/2 ounces of nitric acid, at 22 deg. of Baume's hydrometer; and in this acid it is boiled for ten minutes, as indicated by a sand-glass.

The acid is then poured off, and three-fourths of an ounce of stronger acid at 32 deg. is substituted for it, in which the gold is boiled for ten minutes.

This second acid is then also poured off, and another equal charge of acid of the same strength is introduced, in which the gold is kept for ten minutes longer. It is then presumed that the whole of the silver has been removed, and the gold is taken out, washed in pure water, and exposed, in a crucible, to a red heat, for the purpose of drying, strengthening, and annealing it.

Lastly, the cornet of fine gold thus formed is placed in the assay balance, and the number of thousandths which it weighs expresses the fineness of the gold assayed, in thousandths. The Silver Assay. The silver is melted in a black lead crucible, with the addition of fine charcoal within the pot, to prevent oxidation and to allow of dipping out. After stirring, a small portion of the fluid metal is poured quickly into water, producing a granulation, from which the portion for assay is taken. As this differs from the mode pursued with gold, it must be specially noted that in the case of silver alloyed with copper there is a separation, to a greater or less degree, between the two metals in the act of gradual solidification. Thus an ingot cooled in a mould, or any single coin cut out of such ingot, though really 900 thousandths fine on the average, will show such variations, according to the place of cutting, as might even exceed the limits allowed by law. This fact has been established by many experiments, both in this Mint and the Mint of Paris, since the enactment of our Mint law, and it possesses the stubbornness of a law of chemistry. But the sudden chill produced by throwing the liquid metal into water yields a granulation of entirely homogeneous mixture, and it can be proved that the same fineness results, whether by assaying a single granule, or part of one, or a number together.

From this sample the weight of 1115 thousandths is taken; which is dissolved in a glass bottle, with nitric acid. Into this solution the large pipette-full of standard solution of salt is introduced, and it produces immediately a white precipitate, which is chloride of silver, and which contains, of the metallic silver, 1000 parts.

To make this chloride subside to the bottom of the vessel, and leave the liquid clear, it is necessary that it be violently shaken in the bottle; and this is accordingly done, by a mechanical arrangement, for the necessary time.

Unless the pieces have changed to be below the allowable limit of standard, the liquid will still contain silver in solution, and accordingly a portion of the decimal solution is introduced, from the small pipette, capable of precipitating a thousandth of silver, and a white cloud of chloride will show itself. More doses are added, if the indications require it.

The liquid is again shaken, and cleared; and the process is thus repeated, until the addition of the salt water shows only a faint trace of the chloride below the upper surface of the liquid.

Let us suppose, for the sake of an example, that three measures of the decimal solution have been used with effect. This will show that the 1115 parts of the piece contained 1008 of pure silver; and thus the proportion of pure silver in the whole alloyed metal is ascertained.

Chief Coiner's Office. After passing from the assay rooms and down the stairs, we enter over to the southeast corner of the building. Here is the general business office of the Chief Coiner. In this room the gold and silver coins are weighed and counted, before being transferred to the Treasurer. This department is provided with three large vaults, all fire and burglar proof.

The Cellar. Advancing toward the coining room, we reach a stairway leading to the cellar. Passing down, we find numerous vaults, used for different purposes, ranging along the hall fronting on Chestnut street. Now we pass on to the main cellar. In the centre is a large space, the same size as the yard above. In this space are six large boilers, which generate the steam for the different engines, and to heat portions of the building.

On the right is the blacksmith, carpenter, and paint shops. In the rear of this is the medal-striking department. The process of striking a medal differs from that of coin. They are struck with a screw-press, worked by hand.

The "Sweeps." On the west side of the cellar is the "Sweep Grinding Room." Into this room all the dirt and sweepings of the Mint are conveyed and ground up into fine powder, and after the best has been selected it is taken to the melting room, and all the metal extracted. The residue is sold.

The Wells. In this vicinity are also the wells, wherein all the water that is used in washing out the different rooms, as well as that which comes from the different portions of the building in time of rain, is received and filtered. They are cleaned out every few years, and the dirt disposed of as in the case of the "sweepings."

Of late years the sweepings, etc., have been of comparatively little value.

General Remarks. Owing to the immense amount of precious metal which is constantly in course of transition from one form to another, and the care and watchfulness necessary to a correct transaction of business, visitors are not permitted to visit some of the departments. These are of little interest to the unscientific, and are described under their proper heads.

Everything is weighed so nicely and so often that the purloining of the slightest particle would be detected within a few moments after the act had been perpetrated.

The building is constructed almost entirely of stone and iron, and is therefore fire-proof. Deposits of less than one hundred dollars in value are not received by the Mint.

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