

Robert Scot

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)

On November 23, 1793, Robert Scott was appointed the first chief engraver of the United States Mint. Scot took a lot of criticism in his own time and later, but it was he who designed the first coins struck by the new federal government.

The present Constitution was adopted in 1789 and, like the Articles of Confederation, it gave to Congress the right to coin money and to regulate its value. Both Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton argued in favor of a federal mint to coin money for the republic. Congress authorized the US Mint in 1793 and Thomas Jefferson chose Robert Scot to be the chief engraver.

Scot's appointment was a matter of necessity. While he had engraved plates for paper money during the Revolution, his ability to work as a die sinker for coins was limited. Also, he was already advanced in years and his eye-sight was failing. Even so, he worked to the fullest of his abilities and the new federal government was rewarded with gold, silver, and copper coins.

Scot's inability to surpass European standards made his job a target for Congress. However, there was no better qualified artist in American -- and Congress would not contract the work to a European firm. Numismatic historians such as Walter Breen, Donald Taxay, and Q. David Bowers, have all agreed that Scot's tenure was a poor beginning for the US Mint. It may be true, but the fact remains that when he was appointed, Scot was the only artist in America who could do the work.