

1938 Jefferson Nickel Patterns - Winning & Losing Design Set “A must have for Jefferson Nickel Collectors.”

The **Jefferson Nickel** replaced the highly popular **Buffalo Nickel**, which was first struck in 1913. By law, design changes for any given denomination were restricted for a period of 25 years. Thus, it was not until 1938 that it was first possible to change the nickel’s design so a competition was created.

Design Competition

The Treasury Department announced a public competition early that year to select the new design. According to the rules of the competition, the obverse was to feature “an authentic portrait” of **Thomas Jefferson**, 3rd president of the United States from 1801 to 1809. The reverse had to feature “a representation of Monticello—Jefferson’s historic home near Charlottesville.”

A total of 390 different designs were submitted for the competition. The winning model was prepared by **Felix O. Schlag**. He was awarded the sum of \$1,000 for his winning design. Some changes to his submitted design were made, including replacing the stylistic lettering with a more formal style, and replacing his three-quarters view of Monticello with a more static one. A palm tree which originally appeared was also removed.

Final Design

The final design for the Jefferson Nickel featured an elegant bust of Thomas Jefferson facing to the left on the obverse. As required by law, the motto “IN GOD WE TRUST” appears in front of Jefferson. Behind, is the word “LIBERTY” and the date. The reverse, besides the previously mentioned depiction of Monticello, included the inscription “E PLURIBUS UNUM” above Jefferson’s home and “MONTICELLO,” “FIVE CENTS,” and “UNITED STATES OF AMERICA” below.

Felix O. Schlag’s modified obverse and reverse designs were used without interruption from 1938 to 2003. In the following year, the **Westward Journey Nickels** would bring both temporary and permanent changes to the series. The original obverse was used in 2004, paired with two different, newly prepared reverse designs. In 2005, a new obverse was used together with two more different reverse designs. Finally, in 2006, a second new obverse design was introduced and paired with the original reverse. This combination has been used for all subsequent years.

1938 Jefferson nickel Award Winner. Felix Schlag version Nickel Design (Original Design)



The Gallery Mint was commissioned to recreate his original design. These were produced in .999 silver for the Full Step Nickel Club (FSNC) in 2002 using the original winning design submitted by Felix Schlag.

The FSNC obtained the original design and had **1,938** sets of Matte and Proof finish pieces produced.

Most sets were numbered and slabbed by **SEGS** (Sovereign Entities Grading Service) by Larry Briggs and they were sold for \$80/set by Darrell Crane of the FSNC.

These are rather popular and not cheap. A quick search on eBay finds single coins (either proof or matt finish) asking price of \$169 or a numbered set asking \$274 to \$632.

The Frans Hejda (or was it?) 1938 Original Design – One of the Losing designs

The story of the Frans Hejda silver restrike nickel is:

In 1994 Stacks auctioned off two 11' uniface plaster models that were identifies from the Dutch designer, Frans K Hejda that had been submitted for the 1938 competition.



The plasters sold for \$4,180. As the story goes (per Coincraft of London) a European dealer purchased the plasters and had dies produced (reduced) from them. and had 1,998 pieces of proof quality, sterling silver strikes made in honor of the 60th anniversary of the competition and the dies were destroyed. In 2002 the firm still had a few pieces left for sale at 34.50 pounds (about \$62+ in US \$). These are much more expensive today with examples on eBay as low as \$285 and as high as \$900.



proof
5.28g.
.925 silver
21.4mm.

But, that is NOT the end of the story...

The 1938 nickel competition submission may not be from Frans Karel Hejda as it is most often ascribed, but rather the father and son team of William (Wilhelm) and Frank Hejda.

On Dec 18, 2017, a person on CoinCommunity.com posted personal information of this piece attributing it to Wilhelm and Frank Hejda, relatives of his wife. Wilhelm Hejda is a well-known Austrian sculptor and medalist who lived from May 26, 1868 to January 19, 1942, being born and passing in Vienna. His son Franz lived in the US and may have been the reason for their entry into the competition. Frans may have "entered" the design, but it was most likely created by Wilhelm and Frank. We may never know the truth, but interesting to say the least.