



## The Curious Collector

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### The 1842 Small Date Halves Are Missing

This month's rant concerns the 1842 small and large date quarters and half dollars. Let's start with the quarter. The 1842-O large date quarter is a slightly better date in the New Orleans series that is not hard to find. The 1842-O small date quarter is a well-known rarity in the series. The two are not hard to distinguish, as the small date variety has a flat top on 1, whereas the large date coin exhibits a curve at the top of 1. The ever-bountiful Heritage Auctions archive provides easy-to-comprehend visual confirmation:



The coin on the left (small date) is from the McCloskey collection, while the large date variety is to the right. A ruler applied to the blown-up image, and some arithmetic, indicates that the large 1 is 1.56mm tall, while the small 1 comes in at 1.4mm tall. A difference of 0.16mm in the height is hard to eyeball, but another way is to consider this is the relative amount of space consumed below the rock. The small date variety clearly exhibits additional distance between the rock and the top of the date.

So far, so good. However, the situation becomes muddled when considering the Philadelphia pieces. All the guides refer to "small date proofs." This is redundant! Of the 6 or 7 proof examples known of this date, all have small dates. Just call them proofs and be done with it.

On to the half dollars. Bill Bugert's master work on half dollar varieties describes 13 die marriages for the 1842-O half, of which two exhibit a small date and the remaining 11 feature the "medium date."

Let's have a closeup look. The small date is to the left and measures 1.57mm high. The medium date, to the right, is 1.77mm high. Again, there is considerably more "white space" on the

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Small date variety. The date style of the 1 is curved for both types.

Similarly, for the Philadelphia 1842 halves, there are two die pairs with the small date and five with the medium date.



Now, here's the rub. Why do the guides recognize the small date quarter but not the small date half? Indeed, the small date half is visually more distinguishable than the small date quarter. For the sake of consistency, I'd move to the "small date" and "large date" terminology on the half dollar, to match the quarter.

As usual, a lot of it has to do with money. Adding a variety across the board is a heavy lift, and requires IT changes from all the major players, including the auction houses, grading services and price guides. This is a commercially competitive, crowded field, and getting everyone to act in lock step is no small feat. However, if the market starts recognizing the relative scarcity of the 1842 small date half dollars, this will eventually happen.

As Ken Bressett explains the Guide Book, the intent of the publication is to "follow the market," but never to "lead the market." As the market starts distinguishing more popular varieties, price guides will strive to reflect the overall opinion of the collecting public.

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