

Collecting the “Other” Liberty Seated Coins by John Frost, LSCC #2005

When I attend an LSCC meeting at a regional show, we always begin with introductions. I always say the same thing...

“I’m John Frost, and I collect half dimes, dollars, and Trade dollars, but am best known for twenty-cent pieces. I collect the other Liberty Seated series by Type.”

Apart from the four series above where I am building sets, I was recently thinking about how I go about collecting the other series.

I have always been a fan of the unusual. I don’t want the most common of anything. If I show a type coin to somebody, I don’t want it to be the one they are expecting it to be – I want it to be at least a little bit of a surprise. Not necessarily *the* keys, but at least semi-keys. And there are plenty of opportunities for this in Liberty Seated dimes, quarters, and halves.

The first Liberty Seated dime I wanted to obtain (other than the one given to me by my grandfather) was a No Stars type. The choices were 1837 (“large” or “small” date – both common) or an 1838-O, with a much lower mintage and survival rate. I was choosy from a quality perspective, and went for a problem-free VF+ coin I found in a local auction. Original, no rim issues, no marks, no nothing, with a nice grey tone.



For other types of dimes, I had several dates that I wanted to consider for possible type coins. These included 1846 (versus 1844) for the Stars obverse, and 1860-O, 1870-S, 1878-CC, or 1885-S for the Legend obverse. For the Arrows type, the early ones presented no challenge as there are no challenging dates in that period, but an 1873-CC coin would be a good example for the later Arrows type (without having to shell out the much higher cost of the 1874-CC).

I had great success early, obtaining a nice XF 1846 dime from Jim O’Donnell, and getting an 1878-CC in an auction. I couldn’t find an affordable 1860-O that I liked, but at least the 1878-CC covered the Legend type. And it even had the Type I reverse, with the wreath nearly touching the E in ONE.



A friend of mine found an acceptable 1873-CC, a typically banged up Fine 15 (but not worse than normal) at the right price, so that coin worked for me. That same friend also showed me an XF+ 1844 dime he bought in a multi-coin lot. While not rare in VF and lower grades, a nice XF is rare, and this one was nice! For XF bid I was all in.



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Then an amazing thing happened... a local dealer showed me an 1845-O dime in AU58 with a large hit/gash on the back. It was a severely-damaged coin, the gash causing a bend or stretch mark on the other side at Liberty’s head. But it was original with beautiful color. The dealer didn’t know what he had, but I knew exactly what I was looking at, and had to contain my excitement when he quoted me \$30 for a “damaged AU Seated dime.” With only two mint state coins known, this would likely be the 3rd-finest known if not for the damage. It is still one of my favorite coins and any Liberty Seated dime specialist would just shake their head and say “Wow.”



Just a year or so ago, a beautifully-original VF 1870-S popped up with a local dealer, and I was actually able to get it at wholesale levels! Gerry Fortin loved this coin! And so do I. Those are my dimes.



For quarter dollars, it is a different mix. Excluding varieties, the dates that I really wanted in my type set included 1849-O for the Drapery No Motto type, although I also liked the low-mintage 1864-S. For the Arrows and Rays, the 1853-O is much tougher than the Philadelphia version, and for the Arrows type, either 1855-S or O, with a strong bias for the New Orleans coin. For the Motto coins, the early CC dates were out of my price range for any decent coin, but at the end of the series sits the 1891-O, very tough as a date, and rare in high grades.

I started with the 1849-O. I bought a nice XF coin at auction for a birthday present to myself and this provided a great anchor coin for my quarter type set. Literally a month later, Jim O’Donnell offered me an AU58 1849-O that he had just obtained. Despite him telling me I should buy it also, I just couldn’t do it. Silly me – he was right and I always regretted not buying his piece too. Still, I have a great coin and a rare one at that.



The 1853-O was out there in some numbers, but finding a nice one was harder than I expected. Still, with some luck, I obtained a nice XF45+ coin for XF bid and was thrilled with it. I’d passed on numerous inferior pieces for a lot more money. Next up was the ANA in Denver in 2006. I had gone the entire show without any significant purchase. At 10 minutes before the show closing (they were already announcing “Show closes in 10 minutes... get out!” over the PA system), I was saying my goodbyes. Dick Osburn was mostly packed and I asked him how the show was. He said, “It was an OK selling show but a great buying show.” I laughingly asked, “You didn’t happen to pick up an AU-ish 1891-O quarter, did you?” to which he answered, “Well, kind-a yeah.” He dug it out of the box he had just packed and the deal was done!

The Arrows candidates of 1855 were painful. I found a decent-enough-looking VF 1855-O that had been in a bezel (smooth edges, knife-like rims), and the price was very cheap, so I got it as a space filler. But a couple years later, an outstanding, crusty borderline XF+/AU piece popped up at a friend’s table. I think I was the first person at his table to see it. Instant purchase, and for just a 50% premium over XF bid at the time, which was cheap.

From a variety perspective, there was one variety that was scarce but certainly not rare, but fascinating nevertheless, that had caught my attention. I knew, however, that I would never buy one because I thought they were significantly overpriced. Many readers will recognize I am describing the 1854-O Huge O. Then

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would surely see the listing for the Huge O and at least wonder if the coin was the variety. He looked at the coin and the sheet a couple of times, and he simply responded “Well, I paid \$40 for it. How’s \$45?” Needless to say, it worked. I wasn’t going to pay the going prices for a Huge O, but if somebody was willing to give me one for free, I wasn’t going to say no.

In addition to my targeted type coins, there are several other great coins that fell into my lap. The friend that supplied my 1844 dime also had a remarkable VF35 1868-P quarter, with AU-quality surfaces, and an OK 1864-S in VF. Finally, I picked up (for bid) a decent 1847-O. Those are my quarters.



one day, lightning struck. I was in Houston in late 2014, and while looking at 20-cent pieces (what else?), I saw nearby a Fine+ 1854-O quarter. Since the case was already open, I decided I had to ask to see it, knowing there was no way it would be a Huge O. I turned it over and almost choked on my Dr. Pepper! It was a Huge O. I saw a small obverse lamination, made note of it, and asked how much. He pulled out the *Grey Sheet* and also looked again at the coin. I was sunk – he



Finally, the half dollars. With such a large series and with a stopper (the 1878-S), I really did not think I had a realistic chance to collect the entire set, so again I focused on type coins. My first Liberty Seated half dollar was an 1853-O Arrows and Rays, knowing it was tougher than the P-mint issue. But what of the others? I read what I could, and began getting some

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nice type coins, all of them better dates. I had to pay the money for the 1839 No Drapery, as it is a one year type, and much more expensive than it should be based on scarcity (it is not scarce).

With the No Drapery and the Arrows & Rays coin covered, I needed the Arrows, No Rays type. The obvious key coin of the type is the 1855-S. A local dealer had a nice coin in a VF35 holder. He was asking a premium price and I didn't jump in at first. But after several months of inaction on his coin, I noticed at a couple of large coin shows (Baltimore, FUN) that the price of this issue was going up fast, and people were asking much more for inferior coins. The second I got back to my local shows, I purchased the coin. Within the next quarter, the *GreySheet* had increased that issue substantially. Good timing!



For the With Motto example, I really wanted an 1873-CC No Arrows, knowing it is much scarcer than the With Arrows version. Just stumbling onto one soon thereafter netted me a fantastic VF35 and at a very reasonable price. Now, I needed the No Motto type.



I asked Dick Osburn for a recommendation for a great date and he suggested the 1851-P. Within a couple months, a couple of them appeared at auction when the Winter ANA was in Charlotte. I wasn't able to go, so I asked a friend to do lot viewing for one particular coin – a PCGS XF45 with what looked like won-



derful original toning. He called me from lot viewing, and asked me what I wanted to know. I asked, "Is it as nice as the photo on the internet would indicate?" His answer was, "No, it's nicer." I paid double bid for the coin and thought I stole it. To give you some idea of how nice the coin is, a dipped white PCGS AU55 that followed this coin realized quite a bit less.

Finally, to wrap up my half dollars, I got a nice VF35 1874-CC Arrows With Motto and finished off with an underrated 1878-CC when I bought a large lot of Liberty Seated half dollars. Although the coin only graded VG10, I was in the coin only \$800.



To give an idea of just how nice my half dollars are, I submitted three of the slabbed coins to CAC and they all stickered. Probably the nicest overall quality of the three denominations.

I am quite pleased with the type coins I've acquired for the dimes, quarters, and halves. I used many of them in last year's ANA Summer Seminar Liberty Seated class and in this year's class as well. As instructors, we wanted to provide the students with some quality coins to examine, and some rare ones as well. I was gratified to see the reactions of students when they were able to see so them.

I am certainly not done, as there are some specific types I have not yet added to the collection, and there are also some neat dates that I would like to find someday. Plus who knows, there might be some rare variety out there just waiting to be found!