

A Collector's Exhibit on Liberty Seated Coins (Part I)

by Steve D'Ippolito, LSCC #2294

At the ANA World's Fair Of Money, I entered a Collector's Exhibit titled "An Overview of Liberty Seated Coinage," and that's exactly what I strove to deliver over the span of 10 display cases (the maximum allowed). The Collector's Exhibits are competitive, with class and best-of-show awards awarded by judges, and the People's Choice award given to the exhibit that gets the most votes from the public who visit the Collector's Exhibits area.

As it happened the exhibit was 42 feet (my feet, paced heel to toe) away from the LSCC table. That was convenient!

I won the "US Coins" class award with one of the class judges telling me later that it was one of the three best exhibits he had ever seen. A different judge was practically raving with approval in his comments (these were in writing). However, the best-of-show judges didn't see it that way (they have limited time and may not have read it), so I did not even place for best of show. I am a three-time best-of-show winner and have judged both class and best-of-show levels, so I think I can knowledgeably say I should have been a contender; I was doing things to appeal to the best-of-show judging criteria. And others said so too.

However, I got a very pleasant surprise. LSCC Club members really enjoyed the exhibit and there were times I could look over towards it and see three people reading the thing, and every one of them was wearing an LSCC lanyard. One thing that irritates people is a subject they love exhibited poorly, so that either meant three votes for People's Choice, or it didn't!

At the very end of the show, People's Choice is announced. I wasn't terribly optimistic because I had heard that one of the local club members was bringing all of his friends, neighbors, and pets in to vote for his exhibit (OK, "pets" was an exaggeration). But in the end, the LSCC plus others put me over the top and for the first time in my life, I won the People's Choice award. **Thank you all!** I had a lot of difficulty and last-minute snafus putting the thing together but I managed to overcome them all and it was worth it!



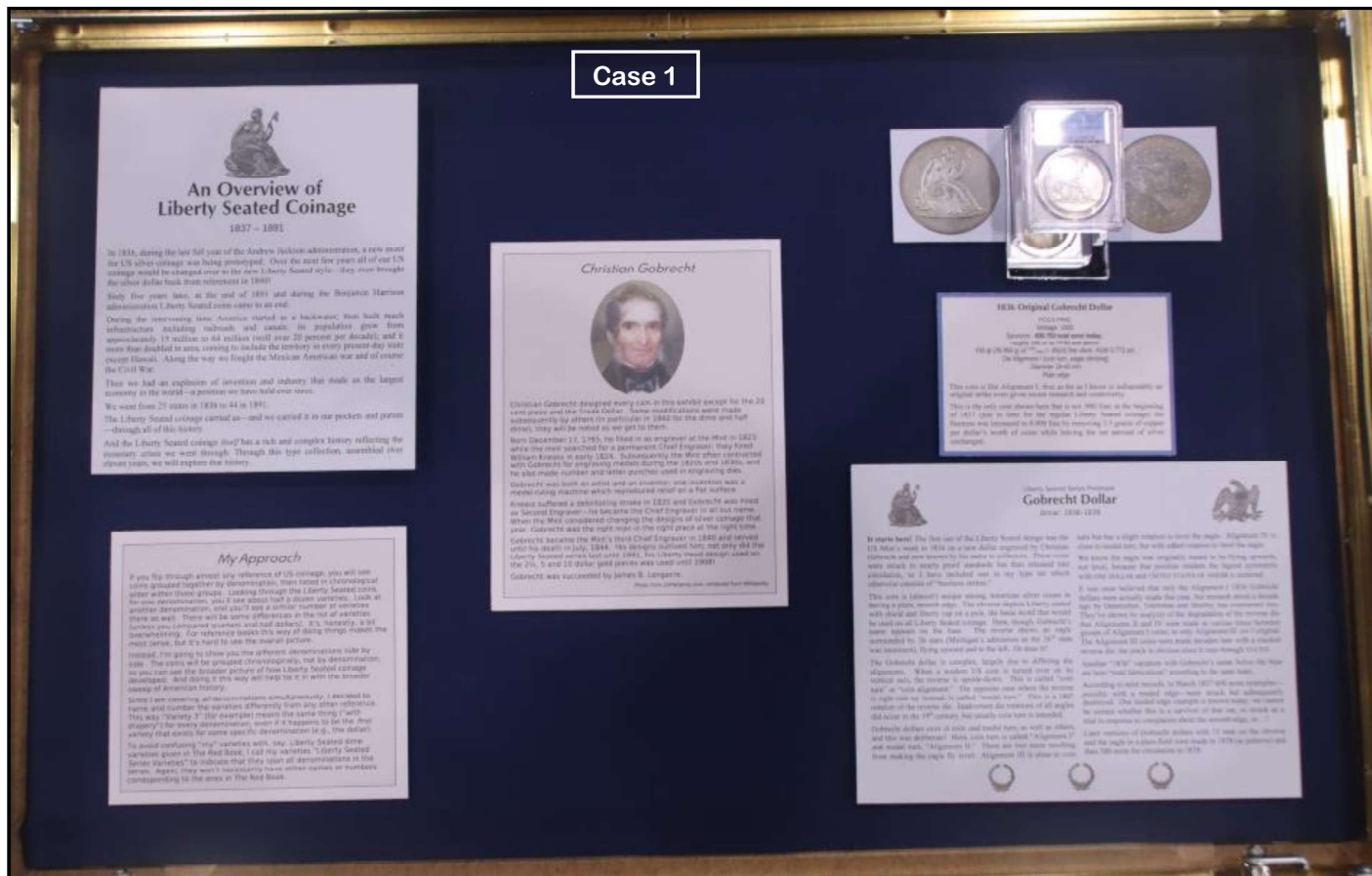
I believe (regardless of the judges) that it is the best exhibit I ever put together.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

So here is the exhibit. I'm going to present a photograph of a case, and then the text (and coins) below the photo. There's a "main flow" of narrative, some "sidebars" (on topics like type collecting, mint engravers, etc.), and of course the descriptions of the individual coins. I'll put the sidebars in italics to make them conspicuous; you can skip over them and come back to them if you don't want to interrupt the main flow.

I already know of one mistake, and it's at the very end where I list references. There is a book on Liberty Seated dollars, and just to prove that, I bought a copy at the show.



An Overview of Liberty Seated Coinage 1837 – 1891

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

In 1836, during the last full year of the Andrew Jackson administration, a new motif for US silver coinage was being prototyped. Over the next few years, all of our US coinage would be changed over to the new Liberty Seated style - they even brought the silver dollar back from retirement in 1840!

Sixty five years later, at the end of 1891 and during the Benjamin Harrison administration, Liberty Seated coins came to an end.

During the intervening time, America started as a backwater, then built much infrastructure including railroads and canals; its population grew from approximately 15 million to 64 million (well over 20 percent per decade); and it more than doubled in area, coming to include the territory in every present-day state except Hawaii. Along the way, we fought the Mexican American war and of course the Civil War.

Then we had an explosion of invention and industry that made us the largest economy in the world - a position we have held ever since.

We went from 25 states in 1836 to 44 in 1891.

The Liberty Seated coinage carried us - and we carried it in our pockets and purses -through all of this history.

And the Liberty Seated coinage itself has a rich and complex history reflecting the monetary crises we went through. Through this type collection assembled over eleven years, we will explore that history.

My Approach

If you flip through almost any reference of US coinage, you will see coins grouped together by denomination, then listed in chronological order within those groups. Looking through the Liberty Seated coins for one denomination, you'll see about half a dozen varieties. Look at another denomination, and you'll see a similar number of varieties there as well. There will be some differences in the list of varieties (unless you compared quarters and half dollars). It's honestly, a bit overwhelming. For reference books, this way of doing things makes the most sense, but it's hard to see the overall picture.

Instead, I'm going to show you the different denominations side by side. The coins will be grouped chronologically, not by denomination, so you can see the broader picture of how Liberty Seated coinage developed. And doing it this way will help tie it in with the broader sweep of American history.

Since I am covering all denominations simultaneously, I decided to name and number the varieties differently from any other reference. This way "Variety 3" (for example) means the same thing ("with drapery") for every denomination, even if it happens to be the first variety that exists for some specific denomination (e.g., the dollar).

To avoid confusing "my" varieties with, say, Liberty Seated dime varieties given in The Red Book, I call my varieties "Liberty Seated Series Varieties" to indicate that they span all denominations in the series. Again, they won't necessarily have either names or numbers corresponding to the ones in The Red Book.

(Continued on next page)

(END)

(Continued from previous page)

Christian Gobrecht



Christian Gobrecht designed every coin in this exhibit except for the 20 cent piece and the Trade Dollar. Some modifications were made subsequently by others (in particular in 1860 for the dime and half dime); they will be noted as we get to them.

Born December 17, 1785, he filled in as engraver at the Mint in 1823 while the mint searched for a permanent Chief Engraver; they hired William Kneass in early 1824. Subsequently the Mint often contracted with Gobrecht for engraving medals during the 1820s and 1830s, and he also made number and letter punches used in engraving dies.

Gobrecht was both an artist and an inventor; one invention was a medal-ruling machine which reproduced relief on a flat surface.

Kneass suffered a debilitating stroke in 1835 and Gobrecht was hired as Second Engraver - he became the Chief Engraver in all but name. When the Mint considered changing the designs of silver coinage that year, Gobrecht was the right man in the right place at the right time.

Gobrecht became the Mint's third Chief Engraver in 1840 and served until his death in July, 1844. His designs outlived him; not only did the Liberty Seated series last until 1891, his Liberty Head design used on the 2½, 5 and 10 dollar gold pieces was used until 1908!

Gobrecht was succeeded by James B. Longacre.

(Continued on next page)



1836 Original Gobrecht Dollar

PCGS PR62

Mintage: 1000

Survivors: **600-750 total exist today**,
roughly 200 or so PF60 and above.

416 gr (26.956 g) of $^{1485}_{1664}$ (~.8924) fine silver, ASW 0.773 ozt.

Die Alignment I (coin turn, eagle climbing)

Diameter 39-40 mm

Plain edge

This coin is Die Alignment I, thus as far as I know is indisputably an original strike even given recent research and controversy.

This is the only coin shown here that is not .900 fine; at the beginning of 1837 (just in time for the regular Liberty Seated coinage) the fineness was increased to 0.900 fine by removing 3.5 grains of copper per dollar's worth of coins while leaving the net amount of silver unchanged.

Liberty Seated Series Prototype

Gobrecht Dollar

Dollar: 1836–1839

It starts here! The first use of the Liberty Seated design was the US Mint's work in 1836 on a new dollar engraved by Christian Gobrecht and now known by his name to collectors. These coins were struck to nearly proof standards but then released into circulation, so I have included one in my type set which otherwise consists of "business strikes."

This coin is (almost!) unique among American silver issues in having a plain, smooth edge. The obverse depicts Liberty seated with shield and liberty cap on a pole, the basic motif that would be used on all Liberty Seated coinage. Here, though, Gobrecht's name appears on the base. The reverse shows an eagle surrounded by 26 stars (Michigan's admission as the 26th state was

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

imminent), flying upward and to the left. Or does it?

The Gobrecht dollar is complex, largely due to differing die alignments. When a modern US coin is turned over on its vertical axis, the reverse is upside-down. This is called “coin turn” or “coin alignment.” The opposite case where the reverse is right-side-up instead, is called “medal turn.” This is a 180° rotation of the reverse die. Inadvertent die rotations of all angles did occur in the 19th century, but usually coin turn is intended.

Gobrecht dollars exist in coin *and* medal turn, as well as others, and this was deliberate! Here, coin turn is called “Alignment I” and medal turn, “Alignment II.” There are two more resulting from making the eagle fly level: Alignment III is close to coin turn but has a slight rotation to level the eagle. Alignment IV is close to medal turn, but with added rotation to level the eagle.

We know the eagle was originally meant to be flying upwards, not level, because that position renders the legend symmetric with One Dollar and UNITED STATES OF AMERICA centered.

It was once believed that only the Alignment I 1836 Gobrecht dollars were actually made that year, but research about a decade ago by Dannreuther, Teichman and Sholley has overturned this. They’ve shown by analysis of the degradation of the reverse die that Alignments II and IV were made at various times between groups of Alignment I coins; so only Alignment III *isn’t* original. The Alignment III coins were made decades later with a cracked reverse die; the crack is obvious since it runs through STATES.

Another “1836” variation with Gobrecht’s name *below* the base are later “total fabrications” according to the same team.

According to mint records, in March 1837, 600 more examples - *possibly* with a reeded edge - were struck but subsequently destroyed. One reeded edge example is known today; we cannot be certain whether this is a survivor of that run, or struck as a trial in response to complaints about the smooth edge, or...?

Later versions of Gobrecht dollars with 13 stars on the obverse and the eagle in a plain field were made in 1838 (as patterns) and then 300 more for circulation in 1839.

(Continued on next page)

