



The Curious Collector

by Len Augsburger, LSCC #1271

Fun With 1853/4 Arrows & Rays Quarters

This month we take a look at an overrated variety, the 1853/4 Arrows & Rays quarter (Briggs 1-A). Quarters of the year 1853 are legend, with a mintage over 15 million pieces, and the varieties for this year are seemingly just as numerous. In truth, Briggs reports 119 obverse and 120 reverse dies, and observes that one could spend a lifetime studying the various combinations. I can only agree. The issue is replete with all the problems you would expect from a high-mintage, 19th century coin – die cracks, cuds, rotated dies, and, in this case, mispunched digits.

The Heritage archive notes 157 auction appearances, as compared to a total of 1,524 sales for other 1853 Arrows & Rays pieces. The ratio at PCGS isn't terribly far different, with 178 reported examples of the overdate, vs. 2,668 grading "events" for the normal date. One can expect to see multiple examples of the overdate at just about any coin show.

Unless you wish to collect die states of the Briggs 1-A, and to be sure there are such collectors among us, I would recommend searching for early die state examples that more strongly exhibit the

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overdate. Here are a couple images courtesy of the Heritage auction archive. The first image below clearly illustrates more “crud” inside the 3, while the arrow remnants are easily more visible. These details are fainter on the second coin shown.



Interestingly, the die cracks are distinctly different on these two examples. Is it possible that more than one obverse die exhibits the overdate? An examination of about twenty examples was not sufficient to definitively answer this question. We will not ever decode the entire production of 1853 Arrows & Rays quarters, but this seems like a question that our collective effort might resolve one way or another. So, here is a bit of homework!

(END)