



Quarter of the Month

by Greg Johnson, LSCC #1460

Set Building

Anyone who reads the E-Gobrecht and/or this column with regularity, or who has simply bothered to check the title of this column, will not be surprised to learn that I have something of an obsession with Liberty Seated quarters. It's been just over 29 years since I purchased my first Seated quarter and I remain just as enthusiastic as ever. Exploring the die variety rabbit hole has led to some impressive accumulations during that time. Though I've never owned 300 Seated quarters at the same time, I have come pretty close on a couple of occasions. Despite such a large total number of coins, something I have not had for most of my Seated collecting career, is the goal of forming a complete set by date and mintmark. The first thought that maybe could or should be a goal arrived unannounced a couple of years ago. The stars aligned to provide a buying opportunity along with the financial resources to capitalize on it, and I acquired a couple of coins that I had never expected to own. As I have focused on varieties, and particularly on some favorite issues by die marriage, the set has gradually grown to the point that I am quite likely to complete a date and mintmark set of Seated quarters within the next year or two.

It has been a strange progression from "that's not a possibility", to "well, it could be done", to "maybe I should just make that a goal", to "this is going to happen". I'm not exactly sure how I feel about reaching such a milestone. Everything, I think. Pleased that the time, effort, energy and money that has been committed is resulting in a tangible result representing something very challenging and uncommon. It will have taken me decades of focus, but not many collectors have assembled a complete date and mintmark set of Liberty Seated Quarters. I am also disappointed that there won't be anymore "holes" to fill in the set. Acquiring a Seated quarter issue that I've never owned will be a thing of the past. Frankly, I still get a particular (and peculiar) sense of excitement from that. I also feel kind of indifferent about the whole thing. I have no intention of dispersing the set, or of stopping acquisitions. I will simply have completed a transition from "set builder" to "set improver." Like moving from building a new home to periodically remodeling one that is already built. Not quite the same thing, but with many common themes.

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1870-CC Liberty Seated Quarter
PCGS AU55/CAC

Image: PCGS TruView
Ex: Richmond Collection,
Battle Born Collection,
& Gene Gardner Collection



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A number of numismatic commentators have referred to the Seated Quarters as an “extreme series” or even as the “most difficult U.S. silver series to complete.” It’s not clear precisely how the word difficult is defined in this context, but I will concur that it is not easy. The last Liberty Seated Collectors Club quarter survey was published in 2007. The Gobrecht Journal article reporting the results (Darrell Low, GJ #100) noted that at that time 4 members had complete sets, 5 more were within 5 coins of a complete set, 6 needed 6-10 coins and 5 needed 11-25 coins. That is 20 collectors with sets that were more than 75% complete. Fifteen years later it is not at all clear (to me) how many people are working on date and mintmark sets of Seated quarters. I do know it’s at least one. Maybe it is time for another survey?

Seated quarters are a great, interesting, challenging series that I will say from personal experience are worth and will pay back your time and attention. Fortunately, there are many ways to collect this fascinating series other than with a single-minded focus on a complete date and mintmark set. My personal favorite has been to identify a few issues with interesting die marriages and pursue a set of die marriages for that issue. There are also some really interesting short sets to be collected such as no motto issues, with arrows issues or focusing on a specific mint. If you’ll permit me to steal and modify a catch phrase (from David Hall)... Have Fun with your Quarters!

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