



# Liberty Seated Basics 101

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### Issue XVI - Chopmarks

Introduction: One of the requests we often hear is for articles in club publications that reach back to more basic skill building. Members are at all different levels, and newer members are in some instances unfamiliar with commonly used terms in our little corner of the hobby. Mint production has changed over the last two-hundred +plus years. The Liberty Seated years (1836-1891) saw its share of production change during that time. Those changes came with a learning curve. A good deal of that learning curve had to do with the first few Branch Mints coming on line and Mint employee's at those Branch Mints needing to learn their craft.

Some of the topics already discussed include the following:

- Issue I - Weak Strikes (June 2020 E-G)
- II - Die Wear in (July 2020 E-G)
- III - Security/Home Safes (August 2020)
- IV - Security/Safe Deposit Boxes (Sept. 2020)

- V - Buying White Coins (October 2020)
- VI - Raw vs. Certified (November 2020)
- VII - Mintage vs. Survival Rate (Dec. 2020)
- VIII - Mintmark Sizes & Placement (Jan.'21)
- IX - Liberty Seated Oddities (February 2021)
- X - Die Lines & Lint Marks (March 2021)
- XI - Learning to Say 'No' (April 2021)
- XII - Covid, CAC and Market Change (May)
- XIII - Doubled Dies vs. Machine Doubling (Jun)
- XIV - The Cadillac Effect (July 2021)
- XV - Networking (September 2021)

Additional topics to be discussed in future months will include: Design Changes, Type Collecting, Popular vs. Rare Dates, Varieties, Cuds/Rust Lumps/and Die Cracks, Dished Dies and more.

"An Introduction to Liberty Seated Basics 101" also appeared in the *The Gobrecht Journal* Summer 2020, Volume 46.2.

### Chopmarks

Let me begin by saying I am not a chopmark expert or necessarily a collector of chopmarked coins. I do own one 1862-S half dollar, WB-2, which is an R-5 die marriage that is chopmarked. I bought it because it was an R-5 die marriage and I thought it was cool that it was also chopmarked.

Prior to the 2000's, chopmarked coins were considered damaged coins and usually sold for very

little. To be sure, in a technical sense they are damaged coins as are counterstamped coins (which are a different class of repunched coins and will not be attempted in this article). Collectors collect what interests them and anything different or unusual will find its way into a collection.

Today, coins with old chopmarks are not only collectable but have become a special segment of numismatics (at least for Trade Dollars). Knowledgeable collectors are even paying multiples over list for

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## L.S. Basics 101 - Chopmarks cont.

certain Trade dollar dates like 1875-P and 1878-CC that are rare with chopmarks.

Most U.S. chopmarked coins are Liberty Seated Trade dollars. This makes sense as the Trade dollar was intended for trade with the orient where chopmarks were used. Chopmarked Liberty Seated dollars are quite rare due to limited mintages and circulation, and the half dollars are also scarce with chopmarks.

Most chopmarked coins are from the San Francisco mint which is reasonable from a geographic standpoint. There are some from Carson City while New Orleans and Philadelphia are very scarce. Philadelphia Trade dollars being made for trade with China are more available with chopmarks than the other denominations but are still scarce overall.

Why and where were chopmarks used? Chopmarks are oriental symbols used all over the far east that were either a name (of a merchant) or a word, usually attesting that the coin was good. Some collectors of chopmarked coins endeavor to learn what each chop translates to. Generally, they are of

little anecdotal interest. Back in the 1800's counterfeit coinage was abundant in circulation. At the time counterfeiting was not meant to fool collectors but to fool merchants and the public in commerce. Chopmarks attested that the coin had passed the inspection of a merchant as genuine money and contained the requisite amount of silver.

Chopmarked coins can have anywhere from one, to over 40+ chops, on an individual coin. For a long time, third party graders slabbed chopmark coins as "Details - Chopmarked" but more and more they are now being graded problem-free, even uncirculated with chopmarks. How a coin can be graded uncirculated with a chopmark is beyond me, but they have done it.

Chopmark collecting has emerged from its infancy and is becoming accepted. Any collector wanting to explore this area of collecting will want to ferret out the needed information to advance their knowledge. A good place to start would be coin blogs such as Collectors Universe, or you might try the club Facebook page.

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**1862-S Liberty Seated Half Dollar with Chopmarks  
(Dennis Fortier Collection, Image by Bill Bugert)**



## L.S. Basics 101 - Chopmarks cont.

There hasn't been much in print in official Liberty Seated publications for coins with chopmarks because until recently they were considered damaged coins. Much of the expert information is still being passed from member to member. This is of course another reason to attend meetings and get to know the people knowledgeable about this specialty area.

Some worthwhile reading on chopmarks from earlier Gobrecht Journals include:

"A Hoard (of Trade Dollars) From the Orient", John E. Dreyer, Gobrecht Journal Collective Vol IV, page 566, Gobrecht Journal #50 March 1991.

"The Chopmarked 1878-CC Trade Dollars", James Sneddon, Gobrecht Journal Collective Vol V, page 640, Gobrecht Journal #77 March 2000.

"A Chopmarked 1860-S Half Dollar", Bill Bugert, Gobrecht Journal Collective Vol II, page 284, Gobrecht Journal #21 July 1981.

These articles can all be found on the Newman

Numismatic Portal or in the collective volumes mentioned.

Other references include:

"Chopmarked Coins - A History", Colin James Gulberg.

There is a Chopmark Collectors Club that mostly deals with world coins. I don't know how much help they might be for the collectors of Liberty Seated Chopmarked coins? Here is the link in any case: [https://www.resellos.com/info/chop\\_club.php](https://www.resellos.com/info/chop_club.php)

There is a loyal and growing following for chopmarked Trade dollars. Half dollars have yet to gain traction except as a single coin oddity in a collection. Liberty Seated dollars are so rare only the strong may venture.

Hopefully, if chopmarked coins are of interest to you, this Basics article will help you get started. Good luck, and good hunting!



An 1875 Trade Dollar with Chopmarks on both the obverse and reverse



## L.S. Basics 101 - Chopmarks cont.

An 1874-CC Trade Dollar literally obliterated with Chopmarks on both sides  
(Both Trade dollars shown and images are from John Frost)



[Terms used in this article, if unfamiliar, can be found in literature published in series-specific books by Liberty Seated experts. Some of these are available on the club website.]

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