



Quarter of the Month

by Greg Johnson, LSCC #1460

Die Marriages of the 1841-O Quarter

Collecting Liberty Seated quarters by die marriage is always challenging. The concerns mentioned last month about the often-poor die condition, inconsistent strikes, and varying amount of detail even on newly minted coins, especially early in the series, makes the effort especially difficult. And especially interesting! At some point between 10 and 15 years after I started assembling a die marriage set of 1841-O quarters, I concluded that “The Comprehensive Encyclopedia of United States Liberty Seated Quarters” (Briggs, 1991) lists eight of six existing die marriages. That was speculation, to be sure, as proof that something does not exist lies somewhere between elusive and impossible.

So, it was with surprise and great interest, that on an infrequent visit to eBay a few months ago, I spotted a coin that appeared to be die marriage 4-E from the book. A coin for which I’d not seen a single example in more than 17 years of searching. A coin for which there was also only a single image of a low-grade piece in the book. It features a “Broken O” mintmark which looks about $\frac{3}{4}$ polished off the die. Both that feature and the mintmark position indicated that this was indeed the elusive 4-E die marriage.

There is a scene in the movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark” in which Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) opens the lid to the crypt which holds the Ark of the Covenant and sees that it’s filled with snakes. Snakes being his Achilles heel, he says with some dramatic effect, “Snakes. Why did it have to be snakes?” I remembered that scene as I viewed the 1841-O online and said, without any discernable dramatic effect, “Mint State. Why did it have to be Mint State?” For those who may not be familiar, mint state seated quarters are not cheap. The 1841-O issue, in particular, usually connects a four-figure price tag to mint state coins that are not attractive, or at the very least have limited eye appeal. The pricing also makes a die marriage set of mint state coins a ridiculously resource intensive project. I prefer to fill the set with XF coins when they are available, but the fact is you need to take what you can get for many of the examples.

Lamenting the cost, I ordered the coin and it appeared as scheduled a few days later. In hand and under magnification it became clear that the coin was not, in fact, the 4-E die marriage. It matched every single diagnostic listed in the book for die marriage 3-D. Except that I already had a nice example of 3-D. Or so I thought. Side by side comparison was convincing. These coins represent two different die marriages. There are a few things to conclude: 1) the new acquisition is the 3-D listed die marriage; 2) the old coin I’d thought was 3-D is a new, unlisted die marriage (not one of the eight); and, 3) I’ve still have never seen an example of the 4-E die marriage.

The two coins discussed are pictured on the next page. Note the mintmark positions are both “slightly right of center”, but one is more to the right than the other. Reverse E (not picture here) features a precisely centered (but partial) mintmark as shown in the book. Another diagnostic for the 3-D is that it is “Very weakly struck on the eagle’s left thigh and left feathers,” as is obvious from Figure 1. The unlisted die marriage, shown in Figure 2, is perhaps the most completely realized 1841-O quarter I have seen. That is, it has complete, strongly struck details, especially for a coin that grades Choice XF in terms of wear.

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Figure 1 - 1841-O (Briggs 3-D)



Figure 2 - 1841-O Unlisted Die Marriage (newly discovered)



There is almost always something interesting to find among the New Orleans quarters!
So Happy Hunting! {Images courtesy of HA.com}

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