

Dies for the Carson City Mint, 1871—1872

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1872-CC Liberty Seated Half Dollar. (Images courtesy of Stack's Bowers)

In the last issue of the *Gobrecht Journal* (Summer 2017), the dies furnished to the Carson City Mint for 1869 and 1870 were discussed. In this installment the dies sent for 1871 and 1872 will be covered.

The last dies meant for the coinage of 1870 were sent on July 21, 1870, and received at Carson City on July 30. The nine days required for the shipment were a bit slower than usual but does show the time that the package of dies was on the way to Nevada.

On November 2, 1870, Carson City Mint Superintendent Abraham Curry wrote Mint Director James Pollock requesting the dies needed for 1871. The list included the following: double eagle—2 obverses, eagle—2 pairs, half eagle—2 obverses, quarter eagle—2 obverses, silver dollar—2 obverses, half dollar—2 pairs and 2 extra obverses, quarter dollar—4 obverses, and dime—1 pair. (The term “pair” always meant one obverse and one reverse.)

The November 2 letter was received in due course and a copy given to Chief Engraver William Barber. The latter began work on this order as time permitted (dies for Philadelphia and San Francisco were also being done at the same time) and on December 8, Director Pollock was able to notify Superintendent Henry F. Rice that the requested dies were being shipped that day. On December 15, Rice wrote Pollock that the dies had been received in good order.

(Abraham Curry was replaced as Carson City Mint superintendent by Henry F. Rice in late November 1870.)

Superintendent Rice was informed by Carson City Coiner Granville Hosmer in early January 1871 that the dies just received were not quite enough to cover his needs. On January 18, Rice then wrote Pollock for additional dies. This list included the following: half eagle—1 pair plus 2 extra reverses, dime—1 pair, 1 dozen unfinished collars, and one-half dozen copper canisters – each 4 feet long.

Pollock was able to notify Rice on February 17

that he was mailing that day the dies and collars that had been requested on January 18. The canisters, however, were not yet ready. On March 2, Rice wrote that the packages had been received. There was no further discussion of dies for Carson City until the fall of 1871.

On September 26, 1871, Director Pollock notified the chief engraver that the following dies were needed for Carson City: double eagle—2 pairs, eagle—2 pairs, half eagle—2 pairs, quarter eagle—2 pairs plus two extra obverses, silver dollar—2 pairs, half dollar—2 pairs plus two extra obverses, quarter dollar—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, and dime—1 pair plus 1 extra obverse.

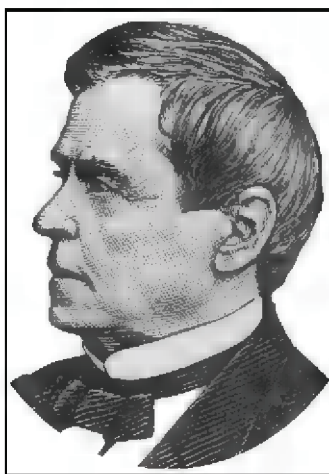
The September 26 order by Pollock would seem to be definitive except that Superintendent Rice had not yet ordered the dies needed for 1872. The mint director had simply exercised his authority to order the dies he thought would be needed at the Nevada Mint.

It is not quite clear what happened at this point but it appears that Pollock thought better of his order to the chief engraver and told Barber to do nothing until further information from Carson City was received. No written letter was put on file for this delay but, as the order was not carried out, there is little question as to the sequence of events.

On November 14, 1871, Pollock wrote Rice requesting the Carson City die order for 1872. On the 21st of the same month Rice replied with a list of dies that he needed. These were as follows: double eagle—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, eagle—2 obverses, half eagle—2 obverses, quarter eagle—2 obverses, silver dollar—2 obverses, half dollar—4 pairs, quarter dollar—2 obverses, and dime—2 obverses.

The letter from Rice was received by Pollock on the 27th of that month and the chief engraver was directed to prepare the necessary dies. For reasons that are not clear, however, the list provided to Barber varied some-

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Mint Director James Pollock

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what from the November 21 order from Rice. (Pollock also noted in his instructions to Barber that this new order was “in lieu of” the September 26 directive.)

The new list was as follows: double eagle—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, eagle—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, half eagle—2 pairs, quarter eagle—2 pairs, silver dollar—2 pairs, half dollar—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, quarter dollar—1 pair plus 2 extra obverses, and dime—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses.

At this point in time there was an unexpected problem. On January 18, 1872, Superintendent Rice telegraphed Pollock asking as to the whereabouts of the dies that he had ordered on November 21. The following day saw Pollock replying, also by telegraph, that the “dies and collars” had been sent on December 9 via the “fast freight line” by mistake. Pollock also noted that the rest of the dies that had been ordered would be sent instead by “express.”

The branch mint letter books do not have a December 9 cover letter so we do not know the exact details of this shipment. However, when the dies did arrive, in March, we do have such a list.

On January 20 Pollock sent a second telegram, mostly repeating what had been said the day before. He added that additional dies have been ordered from the engraving department, though without specifying the denominations in the message to Rice. These were scheduled to be sent by express on January 22. The director also specifically noted that obverse dies dated 1871 could not be used in 1872.

January 22 saw Pollock writing Rice with details of the shipment that went out that day. The following dies were sent: double eagle—1 pair plus 1 extra obverse, eagle—1 obverse, half eagle—1 pair plus 2 extra reverses, quarter eagle—1 obverse, silver dollar—1 pair, half dollar—1 pair plus 1 extra obverse, quarter dollar—1 obverse, and dime—1 obverse.

The winter of 1871–1872 was especially bad in the Nevada/Utah area and railroad traffic could not get through the heavy built-up snow banks – the result of numerous avalanches – to many destinations, including Carson City. As a result, it was not until February 24, 1872, that Rice was able to notify Pollock that the second (express) shipment of dies, sent on January 22, had been received that very day. He was, however, still awaiting the December 9 die shipment.

Rice finally received on March 7 the dies sent on December 9; they had taken 89 days to arrive. He did list the dies, however. They were as follows: double eagle—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, eagle—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, half eagle—2 obverses, quarter eagle—2 obverses, silver dollar—2 pairs, half dollar—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, quarter dollar—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses, and dime—2 pairs plus 2 extra obverses.

Pollock acknowledged the March 7 letter from Rice on the 21st, saying that he was glad to hear of the safe arrival of the December 9 shipment. There was then no further discussion of dies needed at Carson City until October 1872 when the order for 1873 dies was furnished by Superintendent Rice.

Even though there were delivery difficulties for the dies sent to Carson City there would not seem to be any problems because all of the dies were in fact received. But there were problems, because the first obverse dies dated 1872 were not received until February 24 and all of them not until March 7. The trouble is that coinage in 1872 began before February 24, not after.

Doubles eagles were struck on February 15 (1,750 pieces) and February 17 (1,000). Eagles were minted on February 21, 900 pieces. There were 14,000 half dollars delivered by the coiner on February 21. In all there were 17,650 coins struck in February before the 1872 dies arrived. (There was no coinage in January 1872.)

Under normal circumstances, the assumption would be that obverse dies of 1871 were used, despite Pollock’s note in his January 20 letter that dies of 1871 could not be used in 1872. The problem is a report that appeared in a 1972 book by Howard Hickson, *Mint Mark “CC,” the Story of the United States Mint at Carson City, Nevada*.

According to Hickson, who used Carson City newspapers as a resource (the internal Carson City records having been destroyed decades ago), the non-arrival of the dies by late January caused Superintendent Rice to ask the San Francisco Mint for the loan of certain obverse dies dated 1872. Rice said that the reverse dies were not borrowed because of the “S” mintmark.

The story seems straightforward except that, according to Hickson, Rice ordered that only one side (the obverse) of the coins be struck. Once the reverse dies were received from Philadelphia then the other side of the coins could be struck. The story is nonsense but perhaps has a grain of truth. The necessary Carson City reverses were presumably on hand and could have been used with the obverse dies borrowed from San Francisco.

That the obverse dies may have been borrowed does seem possible, and perhaps even likely, in view of the article in the last *Gobrecht Journal* (Summer 2017) reporting that the San Francisco Mint borrowed from Carson City an obverse silver dollar die dated 1870.

If the above scenario is true, then why make up a strange story about the coins being struck one side at a time? Perhaps when a researcher examines the San Francisco letter books, we might have a better understanding of the matter.

Whatever the situation in 1872, the double eagles, eagles, and half dollars struck prior to February 24 of that year certainly are in a special class all of their own.