

Results of the Liberty Seated Half Dollar Survey

by

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Liberty Seated half dollars have proven to be a very difficult and challenging series to collect but the many overdate varieties and mintmark size variations contribute to make this one of the most interesting series of Seated coins. To determine the availability of half dollars by date and grade, a survey was conducted of LSCC member holdings during the fall of 1991. I hope this information will be helpful to members when making purchasing decisions and in evaluating the quality of their collections. Because of the possible confusion in identifying specific varieties, this survey included only a few of the major varieties. It is expected that this survey will be repeated with all major varieties once the reference book on half dollars by Randy Wiley and Bill Bugert has been published.

Possible Biases

When interpreting the results of this survey, one must remember that it is not a random sampling of available half dollars. It is biased by member goals and individual buying habits. For a list of possible biases in this type of survey, the reader is directed to the Half Dime Survey Report published in Issue #41 of the *Journal*. The influence of variety collectors appears to be the most important bias in this survey. Many respondents reported multiple examples for dates with interesting varieties. This was especially true for San Francisco dates with mintmark size variations. The Carson City half dollars appear more common than they really are since a few respondents collected only CC coins. The second most important bias is the one collector—one coin bias. Very limited if any hoarding was reported for any date. Most collectors appear to have sold their duplicates or possibly waited for a coin to appear in the desired grade.

Because of the above biases, the absolute proportionality among the dates cannot be determined from this type of survey. For example, there were 8 examples reported for the 1878-S and 118 examples for the 1853 Arrows and Rays. But one should *not* conclude from this that the 1878-S is only 15 times rarer than the 1853 Arrows and Rays. The 1878-S is actually many times rarer than these figures would indicate.

Results

There were 129 respondents to the survey. The results are presented in Table 1. A listing of the dates ranked by the number of reported pieces according to mint is presented in Tables 2 - 5. These coins are listed by mint to reduce the bias caused by mintmark variety collectors and by CC collectors. Tables 2 - 5 also report the median grade for each of these dates. The median grade is the grade of the middle coin for that date. This information can be used to rank a coin against the typical example for the date or to evaluate the chances of assembling a uniform set in a particular grade. Each grade is divided into a lower third, a middle third and an upper third. A VF-35 grade indicates that the median grade is in the middle third of the VF30-39 reporting group, while a VF-32 grade indicates that the median grade is in the lower third of the VF 30-39 reporting group.

Table I

Liberty Seated Half Dollars by Frequency and Grade

Date	Total	G	VG	F	VF	VF	XF	AU	MS	MS	MS	PF
		4-7	8-11	12-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60	63	65+	60+
1839 No Drap.	47	5	3	5	8	7	14	5	-	-	-	-
1839 Drapery	50	3	4	2	3	4	25	8	-	1	-	-
1840 Lg. Letters	23	-	6	-	1	5	9	2	-	-	-	-
1840 Sm. Letters	73	2	11	6	4	12	23	13	-	2	-	-
1840-0	76	6	8	7	4	10	31	8	2	-	-	-
1841	39	-	1	5	3	4	14	10	1	1	-	-
1841-0	59	2	7	5	5	12	18	8	-	2	-	-
1842 Sm Date	45	1	6	4	6	6	13	9	-	-	-	-
1842 Lg Date	64	2	4	3	7	7	24	14	2	1	-	-
1842-0 Sm Date	21	-	6	4	-	1	8	2	-	-	-	-
1842-0 Lg Date	42	3	4	3	4	5	14	8	1	-	-	-
1843	76	7	10	4	4	8	26	14	2	1	-	-
1843-0	50	1	7	6	6	3	15	11	1	-	-	-
1844	61	2	6	5	3	6	23	10	4	2	-	-
1844-0	67	9	9	6	4	13	18	7	1	-	-	-
1845	50	3	8	5	2	5	21	5	1	-	-	-
1845-0	85	6	7	12	4	15	29	11	1	-	-	-
1846	83	3	6	4	9	13	25	17	4	2	-	-
1846-0	66	9	11	3	3	8	22	7	1	2	-	-
1847	57	2	4	5	3	2	21	16	2	1	1	-
1847-0	55	4	5	4	4	9	16	11	2	-	-	-
1848	47	4	5	1	2	5	17	13	-	-	-	-
1848-0	50	7	9	3	3	8	11	8	1	-	-	-
1849	55	4	6	-	3	5	16	17	4	-	-	-
1849-0	51	4	7	3	3	7	15	9	2	1	-	-
1850	32	1	4	3	-	3	10	10	1	-	-	-
1850-0	51	4	10	3	6	3	13	10	2	-	-	-
1851	31	2	2	5	2	2	7	10	-	-	1	-

Liberty Seated Half Dollars by Frequency and Grade

Date	Total	G 4-7	VG 8-11	F 12-19	VF 20-29	VF 30-39	XF 40-49	AU 50-59	MS 60	MS 63	MS 65+	PF 60+
1851-0	43	4	5	2	5	3	13	10	1	-	-	-
1852	26	1	1	3	2	1	7	10	-	1	-	-
1852-0	31	-	7	5	1	3	11	4	-	-	-	-
1853-0 No Arr.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1853 Arrows	118	15	18	8	6	12	29	24	2	2	1	1
1853-0 Arrows	74	16	14	4	4	9	16	10	-	1	-	-
1854	95	14	16	7	9	4	28	15	1	1	-	-
1854-0	103	13	12	12	8	8	33	12	2	3	-	-
1855	61	2	8	6	5	5	22	12	-	-	1	-
1855-0	89	5	20	9	3	15	22	11	3	1	-	-
1855-S	34	7	5	4	2	1	10	5	-	-	-	-
1856	46	4	3	3	9	6	12	9	-	-	-	-
1856-0	84	9	15	3	7	4	27	16	2	1	-	-
1856-S	42	4	8	5	4	5	10	5	-	-	1	-
1857	79	5	5	8	10	13	22	15	-	1	-	-
1857-0	48	2	6	5	2	7	19	6	1	-	-	-
1857-S	43	3	9	4	4	6	10	7	-	-	-	-
1858	99	7	9	7	8	14	35	15	4	-	-	-
1858-0	119	15	16	10	8	14	38	14	3	1	-	-
1858-S	64	7	8	6	5	4	20	13	1	-	-	-
1859	58	5	4	5	2	6	20	12	3	1	-	-
1859-0	78	6	18	2	8	10	16	13	3	2	-	-
1859-S	56	8	6	3	7	6	17	9	-	-	-	-
1860	49	3	4	3	3	4	17	13	2	-	-	-
1860-0	61	7	9	6	5	6	15	11	1	1	-	-
1860-S	60	4	10	7	4	7	19	5	3	1	-	-
1861	85	4	8	5	7	8	27	17	6	2	-	1
1861-0	71	6	6	5	6	12	21	12	1	1	1	-
1861-S	65	7	9	8	8	4	18	7	2	2	-	-

Liberty Seated Half Dollars by Frequency and Grade

Date	Total	G 4-7	VG 8-11	F 12-19	VF 20-29	VF 30-39	XF 40-49	AU 50-59	MS 60	MS 63	MS 65+	PF 60+
1862	48	2	6	4	7	3	8	13	3	1	-	1
1862-S	97	8	14	13	12	13	24	13	-	-	-	-
1863	48	-	9	8	6	3	12	8	-	1	-	1
1863-S	71	5	9	8	6	8	20	11	3	1	-	-
1864	51	2	3	6	8	9	12	9	1	-	-	1
1864-S	64	5	11	5	4	9	22	6	1	1	-	-
1865	50	2	5	2	3	5	15	11	3	-	-	4
1865-S	68	6	8	5	5	6	24	12	1	1	-	-
1866-S No Motto	38	3	4	9	4	7	8	2	1	-	-	-
1866	56	4	10	6	3	5	16	9	2	-	-	1
1866-S	60	4	11	7	9	9	16	4	-	-	-	-
1867	43	4	4	2	4	6	9	9	-	2	1	2
1867-S	66	1	7	4	11	10	20	12	-	1	-	-
1868	34	1	7	2	2	2	13	5	1	-	-	1
1868-S	58	5	8	7	7	9	14	7	1	-	-	-
1869	59	4	10	6	4	5	17	7	3	1	1	1
1869-S	56	7	7	5	6	12	11	6	2	-	-	-
1870	54	8	8	5	4	4	10	7	3	1	1	3
1870-CC	37	10	9	1	4	4	4	5	-	-	-	-
1870-S	54	7	7	5	9	6	15	5	-	-	-	-
1871	61	8	7	7	5	4	19	8	2	1	-	-
1871-CC	38	5	10	4	4	4	8	3	-	-	-	-
1871-S	72	9	12	6	4	9	20	11	1	-	-	-
1872	54	9	7	3	3	4	14	8	2	-	-	4
1872-CC	55	12	11	3	5	9	11	4	-	-	-	-
1872-S	43	4	4	2	6	3	13	8	2	1	-	-
1873 NA C3	54	7	6	3	5	5	18	7	2	-	-	1
1873 NA O3	11	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	-	-	-	1
1873-CC NA	37	8	7	3	4	4	9	2	-	-	-	-
1873 Arrows	68	6	11	4	8	6	21	10	1	-	-	1

Liberty Seated Half Dollars by Frequency and Grade

Date	Total	G	VG	F	VF	VF	XF	AU	MS	MS	MS	PF
		4-7	8-11	12-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60	63	65+	60+
1873-CC Arrows	40	10	6	3	1	5	8	6	-	1	-	-
1873-S	40	6	6	2	1	4	16	5	-	-	-	-
1874	79	16	15	7	4	9	16	8	1	2	-	1
1874-CC	31	4	8	5	2	2	7	3	-	-	-	-
1874-S	48	6	6	3	5	4	16	6	1	-	1	-
1875	65	11	5	6	5	7	19	7	2	1	1	1
1875-CC	60	11	7	5	7	9	11	7	-	2	1	-
1875-S	74	7	7	11	6	10	15	12	3	3	-	-
1876	93	17	6	12	5	11	19	20	2	-	-	1
1876-CC	71	13	8	6	1	3	24	8	4	3	1	-
1876-S	68	7	6	5	3	10	21	12	3	1	-	-
1877	76	10	10	13	7	9	12	12	2	-	1	-
1877-CC	72	8	11	4	6	6	15	13	6	2	1	-
1877-S	86	11	14	8	5	8	18	17	3	1	1	-
1878	57	8	6	6	5	2	15	11	3	1	-	-
1878-CC	32	8	8	3	1	3	4	3	2	-	-	-
1878-S	8	-	1	-	-	1	3	1	-	2	-	-
1879	44	1	7	2	-	4	7	9	6	1	-	7
1880	40	1	8	3	3	8	5	6	1	-	-	5
1881	34	-	3	6	2	2	5	7	2	1	-	6
1882	39	1	3	3	4	2	8	8	2	1	1	6
1883	37	1	5	3	1	3	8	11	-	2	-	3
1884	32	1	5	1	1	2	5	13	-	-	-	4
1885	36	2	4	4	2	1	6	10	3	2	-	2
1886	29	1	2	4	2	1	5	5	1	3	1	4
1887	32	2	5	1	-	1	8	5	5	3	-	2
1888	38	1	5	3	6	2	6	10	3	-	-	2
1889	33	2	5	2	1	4	7	10	-	-	1	1
1890	33	2	3	5	2	1	10	5	2	-	-	3
1891	60	3	8	8	7	6	10	10	4	2	1	1

Table 2

Philadelphia Mint Issues

Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade	Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade
1.	1873 NA 03	11	VF-38	30.	1865	50	XF-45
2.	1840 Lg Lt	23	VF-38	31.	1864	51	VF-38
3.	1852	26	XF-45	32.	1870	54	VF-35
4.	1886	29	XF-48	33.	1872	54	XF-42
5.	1851	31	XF-45	34.	1873 NA C3	54	XF-42
6.	1850	32	XF-45	35.	1849	55	XF-45
7.	1887	32	XF-48	36.	1866	56	VF-38
8.	1884	32	AU-52	37.	1878	57	XF-42
9.	1889	33	XF-45	38.	1847	57	XF-45
10.	1890	33	XF-45	39.	1859	58	XF-42
11.	1868	34	XF-42	40.	1869	59	XF-42
12.	1881	34	XF-48	41.	1891	60	VF-38
13.	1885	36	XF-48	42.	1871	61	VF-38
14.	1883	37	XF-48	43.	1855	61	XF-42
15.	1888	38	XF-42	44.	1844	61	XF-45
16.	1841	39	XF-45	45.	1842 Lg Dt	64	XF-45
17.	1882	39	XF-48	46.	1875	65	VF-38
18.	1880	40	VF-35	47.	1873 Arr	68	VF-38
19.	1867	43	XF-42	48.	1840 Sm Lt	73	XF-42
20.	1879	44	AU-52	49.	1877	76	VF-28
21.	1842 Sm Dt	45	VF-38	50.	1843	76	XF-42
22.	1856	46	VF-35	51.	1874	79	VF-25
23.	1839 No Dr	47	VF-35	52.	1857	79	VF-38
24.	1848	47	XF-45	53.	1846	83	XF-42
25.	1863	48	VF-32	54.	1861	85	XF-45
26.	1862	48	XF-42	55.	1876	93	VF-38
27.	1860	49	XF-45	56.	1854	95	VF-35
28.	1845	50	XF-42	57.	1858	99	XF-42
29.	1839 Drap	50	XF-45	58.	1853 Arr	118	VF-38

Table 3**New Orleans Mint Issues**

Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade	Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade
1.	1853-0 NA	0	-	13.	1860-0	61	VF-35
2.	1842-0 Sm Dt	21	VF-35	14.	1846-0	66	VF-38
3.	1852-0	31	VF-38	15.	1844-0	67	VF-35
4.	1842-0 Lg Dt	42	XF-42	16.	1861-0	71	XF-42
5.	1851-0	43	XF-42	17.	1853-0 Arr	74	VF-28
6.	1857-0	48	XF-42	18.	1840-0	76	XF-42
7.	1848-0	50	VF-35	19.	1859-0	78	VF-35
8.	1843-0	50	XF-42	20.	1856-0	84	XF-42
9.	1850-0	51	VF-38	21.	1845-0	85	VF-38
10.	1849-0	51	XF-42	22.	1855-0	89	VF-35
11.	1847-0	55	XF-42	23.	1854-0	103	VF-38
12.	1841-0	59	VF-38	24.	1858-0	119	VF-38

Table 4**San Francisco Mint Issues**

Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade	Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade
1.	1878-S	8	XF-45	14.	1860-S	60	VF-38
2.	1855-S	34	VF-22	15.	1864-S	64	VF-38
3.	1866-S NM	38	VF-28	16.	1858-S	64	XF-42
4.	1873-S	40	XF-42	17.	1861-S	65	VF-32
5.	1856-S	42	VF-28	18.	1867-S	66	VF-38
6.	1857-S	43	VF-32	19.	1865-S	68	XF-42
7.	1872-S	43	XF-42	20.	1876-S	68	XF-42
8.	1874-S	48	VF-38	21.	1863-S	71	VF-38
9.	1870-S	54	VF-28	22.	1871-S	72	VF-35
10.	1869-S	56	VF-32	23.	1875-S	74	VF-35
11.	1859-S	56	VF-35	24.	1877-S	86	VF-38
12.	1868-S	58	VF-32	25.	1862-S	97	VF-32
13.	1866-S	60	VF-28				

Table 5

Carson City Mint Issues

Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade	Rank	Date	Number Reported	Median Grade
1.	1874-CC	31	F-18	6.	1873-CC Arr	40	VF-25
2.	1878-CC	32	VG-10	7.	1872-CC	55	VF-22
3.	1870-CC	37	VG-10	8.	1875-CC	60	VF-32
4.	1873-CC NA	37	VF-22	9.	1876-CC	71	XF-42
5.	1871-CC	38	F-18	10.	1877-CC	72	XF-42

The rarest dates are clearly the 1853-O NA, 1878-S and 1873 Open 3. This is consistent with the literature and with my experience. The high median grade for the 1878-S is also consistent with my experience. I was surprised by the number of 1873 Open 3 coins reported. I have never had one of these pieces offered to me, but have had a few 1878-S coins offered. Other rarities include 1840LL, 1852, 1851, 1842-O SD, 1852-O, 1842-O LD, 1851-O, 1855-S, 1866-S NM, 1874-CC, 1878-CC, and the Philadelphia half dollars of the 1880's. The scarcity of the 1851, 1851-O, 1852, and 1852-O is probably caused by the melting of silver coins in 1853.

The half dollars reported in this survey are of a slightly higher grade than usually available. LSCC members appear to prefer higher grade examples. Most collectors appear to be collecting nice VF-30 to XF-40 pieces. It is interesting to note that no mint state examples were reported for many dates. It should also be noted that the Carson City half dollars had the lowest reported median grades.

The results of the opinion poll will be reported in the next issue of the *Journal*.

Conclusion

I hope that this article will be useful to those collecting Seated half dollars and that it adds to the rich body of knowledge published in past issues of the *Journal*. The reader is encouraged to study other half dollar articles and previous surveys to get a balanced opinion concerning the rarity of any half dollar date. Because of biases and changing availabilities of some dates, their apparent rarity can change. Changing availabilities can occur because of hoarding by an individual or by the discovery of a new hoard.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank all the LSCC members who kindly responded to our survey. Without their efforts this article could not have been possible. I would also like to thank John McCloskey for his excellent job as editor. His efforts greatly improved the presentation of the information collected in the survey.