

An Interesting 1854-O Half Dime

by

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For the last 10 years I have collected Liberty Seated half dimes and have found that the quality of my purchases has increased with my gradual understanding of the nuances involved in evaluating a coin. During this process I had purchased some lower grade coins which I would later try to upgrade now that I had developed a more comprehensive method of judging the quality of my purchases.

Over the last couple of years I have become more interested in die varieties in the half dime series. To assist in the attribution of my collection, I have purchased Valentine's book on half dime varieties and Al Blythe's excellent reference book on the Liberty Seated series. This year I purchased all four collective volumes of the journal for my library and found that they contain a wealth of information on all of the Seated series.

During this time, I had tried many times to attribute the coins in my collection. I found that I became more successful in my efforts as the amount and quality of the information at my disposal increased. But looking back on my attribution studies, I now realize that the handful of lower grade coins in my collection often got little or no attention. After all, they were listed for upgrade in my coin ledger and not likely worth my trouble to attribute by variety. I quickly discovered that this assessment was in error when a weakly struck, darkly toned, lower grade 1854-O half dime revealed an interesting set of diagnostic obverse characteristics.

The diagnostics for this variety are many. The date is weakly struck with the 4 being the only well struck digit. The date is placed high in the field, but only the tip of the flag



**Late Die State 1854-O V-1 Half Dime with
Obverse Die Scratch in Shield**

of the 5 touches the base of the rock. The arrow barbs do not touch the base of the rock and their tips are close but do not touch the denticles. The upright of the 1 has shield line measurement SL-8 and the pendant is centered over the flag of the 5. The denticles are weak clockwise from 12 o'clock to 7 o'clock as are the right side stars. Stars 8 through 12 also show strike doubling as does the hand and cap.

The most distinctive feature of this obverse is a long curving die scratch that runs completely across the shield. Starting in the rock on the left, it runs the entire width of the shield disappearing into the banner, briefly appearing in the lower part of the T and reappearing in the skirt above the Y. This is a much longer scratch and it is in a different position than the scratch described for the V-6 variety pictured on page 88 of Al Blythe's book, *The Complete Guide To Liberty Seated Half Dimes*. There is also a die file line on my coin connecting the foot at the arch to the rock base.

I can find no die cracks on the obverse of this coin. However, die clash marks can be seen to the left of the head. This obverse appears to have been paired with the V-2 reverse as described by Valentine. The die cracks he described for this reverse match those seen on my coin.

I originally thought that this coin might be an example of a new variety. I based this opinion on the date position and the presence of the long die scratch running through the shield on the obverse. At the time that I purchased the coin, I owned a copy of the 1984 Valentine reprint. I studied the pictures of all the 1854-O half dimes in this book and could not find an arcing die scratch on any of the coins illustrated.

Several months later I sent the coin to Bill Harmon for an opinion. To my surprise he identified it as a late die state example of the V-1 variety. By this time I had acquired a copy of Valentine's original monograph. A careful inspection of the illustration of the 1854-O V-1 variety in this book clearly showed the arcing die



Late Die State 1854-O V-1 Half Dime with Die File Line through Foot

scratch across the shield and the die file line from Liberty's foot to the rock base. The position of the date on my coin does not match the position of the date illustrated in the Valentine reference book for the V-1 variety but this discrepancy can be explained.

We know that the obverse die for the V-1 variety was damaged early in its life as shown in the illustration in the original Valentine monograph. This picture shows a strong well struck date that touches the base of the rock. In the late die state the date is very weak and the digits are moved away from the rock base. I believe that heavy die polishing is the most likely cause for this apparent change in position of the date. I believe that the loss of metal expanded the gap between the rock base and the digits in the date. The 1 and 8 are the weakest digits and they are separated from the rock base in this late die state.

I have been searching for examples of the early die state of the 1854-O V-1 half dime in recent months but have not been able to find one. However during this same time period I have located six examples of the late die state of this variety, all with the weak date that has been separated from the rock base. I would also strongly recommend purchasing a copy of the original Valentine monograph to anyone who is serious about attributing half dimes. The quality of the pictures in the original monograph is vastly superior to the quality of the pictures in the 1984 Valentine reprint.

I wish to thank Tom Mulvaney for the pictures of my 1854-O half dime that were presented with this article.

References

Valentine, Daniel W. - The United States Half Dime, originally published by the American Numismatic Society, New York, New York, 1931