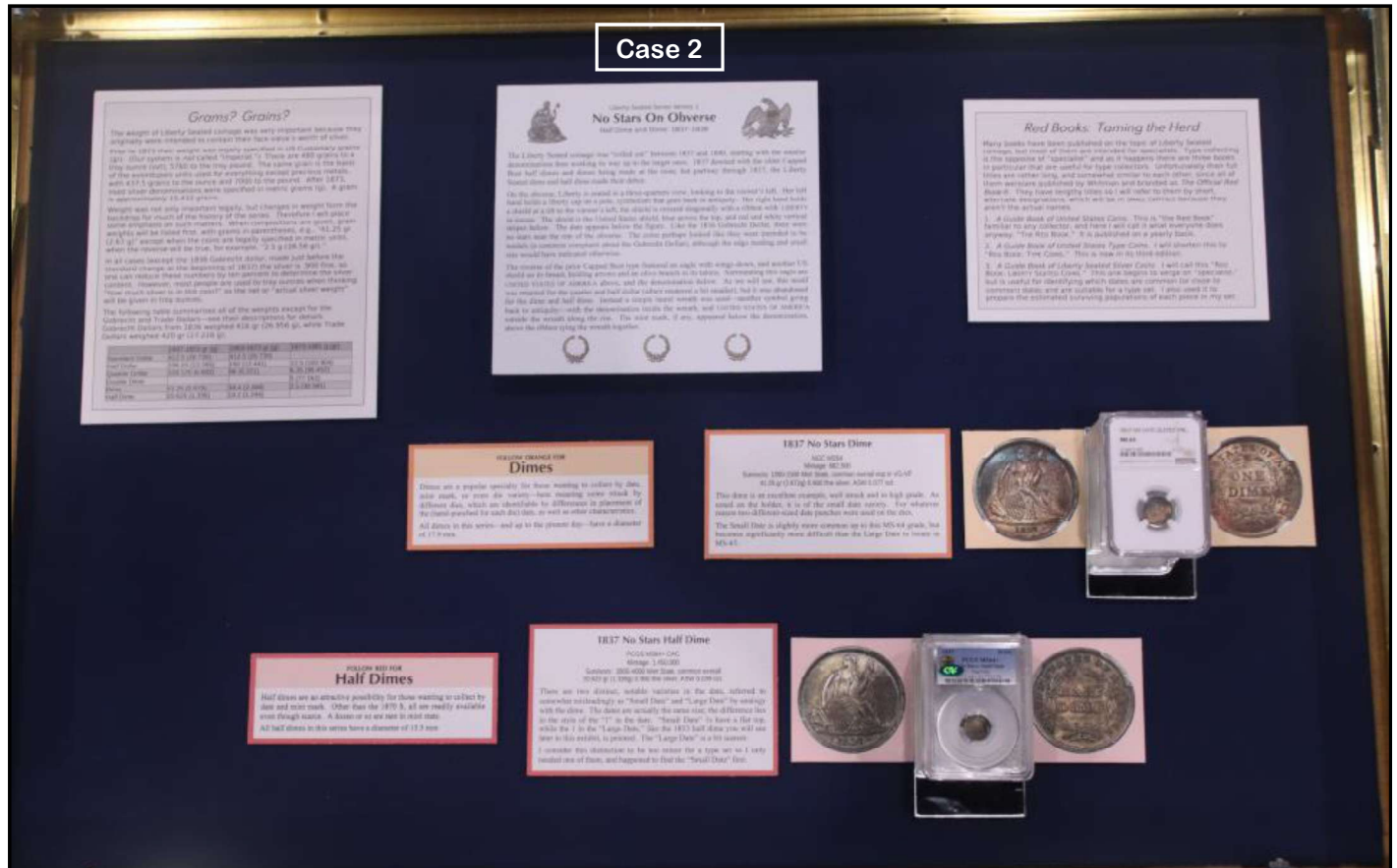


A Collector's Exhibit on Liberty Seated Coins (Part II)

by Steve D'Ippolito, LSCC #2294



Liberty Seated Series Variety
No Stars On Obverse
 Half Dime and Dime: 1837–1838

The Liberty Seated coinage was “rolled out” between 1837 and 1840, starting with the smaller denominations then working its way up to the larger ones. 1837 dawned with the older Capped Bust half dimes and dimes being made at the mint, but partway through 1837, the Liberty Seated dime and half dime made their debut.

On the obverse, Liberty is seated in a three-quarters view, looking to the viewer’s left. Her left hand holds a liberty cap on a pole, symbolism that goes back to antiquity. Her right hand holds a shield at a tilt to the viewer’s left; the shield is crossed diagonally with a ribbon with liberty in incuse. The shield is the United States shield, blue across the top, and red and white vertical stripes below. The date appears below the figure. Like the 1836 Gobrecht Dollar, there were no stars near the rim of the obverse. The coins perhaps looked like they were intended to be medals (a common complaint about the Gobrecht Dollar), although the edge reeding and small size would have indicated otherwise.

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Grams? Grains?

The weight of Liberty Seated coinage was very important because they originally were intended to contain their face value's worth of silver.

Prior to 1873 their weight was legally specified in US Customary grains (gr). (Our system is not called "Imperial.") There are 480 grains to a troy ounce (ozt), 5760 to the troy pound. The same grain is the basis of the avoirdupois units used for everything except precious metals, with 437.5 grains to the ounce and 7000 to the pound. After 1873, most silver denominations were specified in metric grams (g). A gram is approximately 15.432 grains.

Weight was not only important legally, but changes in weight form the backdrop for much of the history of the series. Therefore I will place some emphasis on such matters. When compositions are given, grain weights will be listed first, with grams in parentheses, e.g., "41.25 gr (2.67 g)" except when the coins are legally specified in metric units, when the reverse will be true, for example, "2.5 g (38.58 gr)."

In all cases (except the 1836 Gobrecht dollar, made just before the standard change at the beginning of 1837) the silver is .900 fine, so one can reduce these numbers by ten percent to determine the silver content. However, most people are used to troy ounces when thinking "how much silver is in this coin?" so the net or "actual silver weight" will be given in troy ounces.

The following table summarizes all of the weights except for the Gobrecht and Trade Dollars - see their descriptions for details. Gobrecht Dollars from 1836 weighed 416 gr (26.956 g), while Trade Dollars weighed 420 gr (27.216 g).

| | 1837-1853 gr (g) | 1853-1873 gr (g) | 1873-1891 g (gr) |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Standard Dollar | 412.5 (26.730) | 412.5 (26.730) | |
| Half Dollar | 206.25 (13.365) | 192 (12.441) | 12.5 (192.904) |
| Quarter Dollar | 103.125 (6.682) | 96 (6.221) | 6.25 (96.452) |
| Double Dime | | | 5 (77.162) |
| Dime | 41.25 (2.673) | 38.4 (2.488) | 2.5 (38.581) |
| Half Dime | 20.625 (1.336) | 19.2 (1.244) | |

Red Books: Taming the Herd

Many books have been published on the topic of Liberty Seated coinage, but most of them are intended for specialists. Type collecting is the opposite of "specialist" and as it happens, there are three books in particular that are useful for type collectors. Unfortunately, their full titles are rather long, and somewhat similar to each other, since all of them were/are published by Whitman and branded as The Official Red Book®. They have lengthy titles so I will refer to them by short, alternate designations, which will be in SMALL CAPITALS because they aren't the actual names.

1. A Guide Book of United States Coins. This is "the Red Book" familiar to any collector, and here I will call it what everyone does anyway: "THE RED BOOK". It is published on a yearly basis.
2. A Guide Book of United States Type Coins. I will shorten this to "RED BOOK: TYPE COINS". This is now in its third edition.
3. A Guide Book of Liberty Seated Silver Coins. I will call this "RED BOOK: LIBERTY SEATED COINS." This one begins

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to verge on "specialist," but is useful for identifying which dates are common (or close to common) and dates suitable for a type set. I also used it to prepare the estimated surviving populations of each piece in my set.

FOLLOW ORANGE FOR

Dimes

Dimes are a popular specialty for those wanting to collect by date, mint mark, or even die variety - here meaning coins struck by different dies, which are identifiable by differences in placement of the (hand-punched for each die) date, as well as other characteristics.

All dimes in this series - and up to the present day - have a diameter of 17.9 mm.



1837 No Stars Dime

NGC MS64

Mintage: 682,500

Survivors: 1050-1500 Mint State, common overall especially in VG-VF
41.25 gr (2.672g) 0.900 fine silver, ASW 0.077 ozt.

This dime is an excellent example, well struck and in high grade. As noted on the holder, it is of the small date variety. For whatever reason, two different-sized date punches were used on the dies.

The Small Date is slightly more common up to this MS-64 grade, but becomes significantly more difficult than the Large Date to locate in MS-65.

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FOLLOW RED FOR
Half Dimes

Half dimes are an attractive possibility for those wanting to collect by date and mint mark. Other than the 1870 S, all are readily available even though scarce. A dozen or so are rare in mint state.

All half dimes in this series have a diameter of 15.5 mm



1837 No Stars Half Dime

PCGS MS64+ CAC

Mintage: 1,450,000

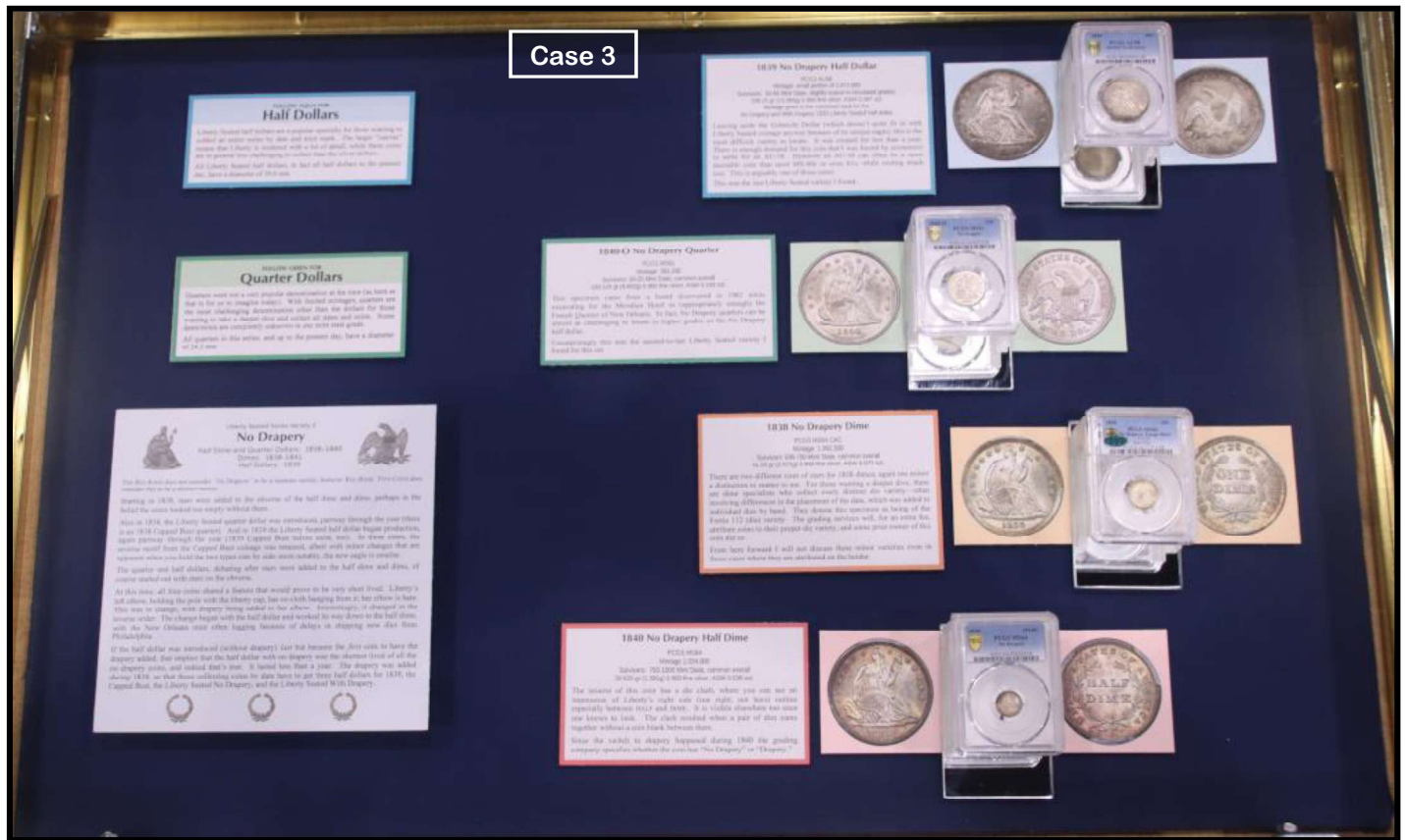
Survivors: 2800-4000 Mint State, common overall
20.625 gr (1.336g) 0.900 fine silver, ASW 0.039 ozt.

There are two distinct, notable varieties in the date, referred to somewhat misleadingly as "Small Date" and "Large Date" by analogy with the dime. The dates are actually the same size; the difference lies in the style of the "1" in the date. "Small Date" 1s have a flat top, while the 1 in the "Large Date," like the 1853 half dime you will see later in this exhibit, is pointed. The "Large Date" is a bit scarcer.

I consider this distinction to be too minor for a type set so I only needed one of them, and happened to find the "Small Date" first.

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Liberty Seated Series Variety 2
No Drapery

Half Dime and Quarter Dollars: 1838–1840

Dimes: 1838-1841

Half Dollars: 1839

THE RED BOOK does not consider “No Drapery” to be a separate variety, however *RED BOOK: TYPE COINS* does consider this to be a distinct variety.

Starting in 1838, stars were added to the obverse of the half dime and dime, perhaps in the belief the coins looked too empty without them.

Also in 1838, the Liberty Seated quarter dollar was introduced, partway through the year (there is an 1838 Capped Bust quarter). And in 1839, the Liberty Seated half dollar began production, again partway through the year (1839 Capped Bust halves exist, too). In these cases, the reverse motif from the Capped Bust coinage was retained, albeit with minor changes that are apparent when you hold the two types side by side - most notably, the new eagle is smaller.

The quarter and half dollars, debuting after stars were added to the half dime and dime, of course started out with stars on the obverse.

At this time, all four coins shared a feature that would prove to be very short lived. Liberty’s left elbow, holding the pole with the liberty cap, has no cloth hanging from it; her elbow is bare. This was to change, with drapery being added to her elbow. Interestingly, it changed

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in the reverse order: The change began with the half dollar and worked its way down to the half dime, with the New Orleans mint often lagging because of delays in shipping new dies from Philadelphia.

If the half dollar was introduced (without drapery) *last* but became the *first* coin to have the drapery added, that implies that the half dollar with no drapery was the shortest lived of all the no drapery coins, and indeed that's true. It lasted less than a year. The drapery was added *during* 1839, so that those collecting coins by date have to get three half dollars for 1839, the Capped Bust, the Liberty Seated No Drapery, and the Liberty Seated With Drapery.

FOLLOW AQUA FOR

Half Dollars

Liberty Seated half dollars are a popular specialty for those wanting to collect an entire series by date and mint mark. The larger "canvas" means that Liberty is rendered with a lot of detail, while these coins in general are less challenging to collect than the silver dollars.

All Liberty Seated half dollars, in fact all half dollars to the present day, have a diameter of 30.6 mm.



1839 No Drapery Half Dollar

PCGS AU58

Mintage: small portion of 1,972,000

Survivors: 50-65 Mint State, slightly scarce in circulated grades.

206.25 gr (13.365g) 0.900 fine silver, ASW 0.387 ozt.

Mintage given is the combined total for the No Drapery and With Drapery 1839 Liberty Seated half dollar.

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Leaving aside the Gobrecht Dollar (which doesn't quite fit in with Liberty Seated coinage anyway because of its unique eagle), this is the most difficult variety to locate. It was created for less than a year. There is enough demand for this coin that I was forced by economics to settle for an AU-58. However an AU-58 can often be a more desirable coin than most MS-60s or even 61s, while costing much less. This is arguably one of those cases.

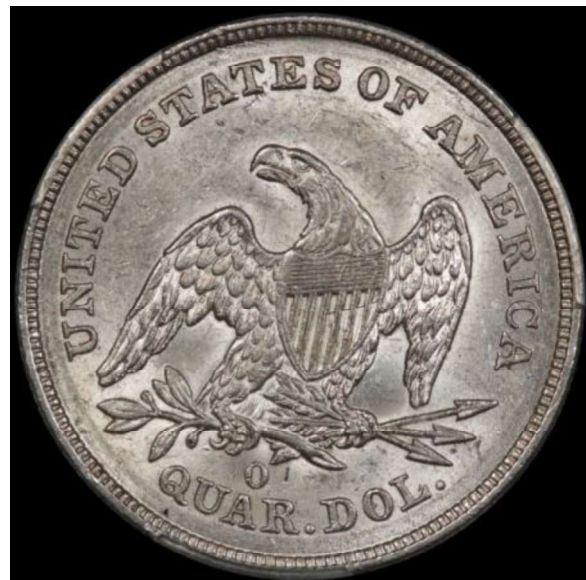
This was the *last* Liberty Seated variety I found.

FOLLOW GREEN FOR

Quarters

Quarters were not a very popular denomination at the time (as hard as that is for us to imagine today). With limited mintages, quarters are the most challenging denomination other than the dollars for those wanting to take a deeper dive and collect all dates and mints. Some dates/mints are completely unknown in *any* mint state grade.

All quarters in this series, and up to the present day, have a diameter of 24.3 mm



1840-O No Drapery Quarter

PCGS MS61

Mintage: 382,200

Survivors: 20-25 Mint State, common overall

103.125 gr (6.682g) 0.900 fine silver, ASW 0.193 ozt.

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This specimen came from a hoard discovered in 1982 while excavating for the Meridien Hotel in (appropriately enough) the French *Quarter* of New Orleans. In fact, No Drapery quarters can be almost as challenging to locate in higher grades as the No Drapery half dollar.

Unsurprisingly this was the second-to-last Liberty Seated variety I found for this set.



1838 No Drapery Dime

PCGS MS64 CAC

Mintage: 1,992,500

Survivors: 590-750 Mint State, common overall
41.25 gr (2.672g) 0.900 fine silver, ASW 0.077 ozt.

There are two different sizes of stars for 1838 dimes; again too minor a distinction to matter to me. For those wanting a deeper dive, there are dime specialists who collect every distinct die variety - often involving differences in the placement of the date, which was added to individual dies by hand. They denote this specimen as being of the Fortin 112 (die) variety. The grading services will, for an extra fee, attribute coins to their proper die variety, and some prior owner of this coin did so.

From here forward, I will not discuss these minor varieties even in those cases where they are attributed on the holder.

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1840 No Drapery Half Dime

PCGS MS64

Mintage 1,034,000

Survivors: 750-1000 Mint State, common overall
20.625 gr (1.336g) 0.900 fine silver, ASW 0.039 ozt.

The reverse of this coin has a die clash, where you can see an impression of Liberty's right side (our right, not hers) outline especially between HALF and DIME. It is visible elsewhere too once one knows where to look. The clash resulted when a pair of dies came together without a coin blank between them.

Since the switch to drapery happened during 1840, the grading company specifies whether the coin has "No Drapery" or "Drapery."

To be continued in Part III and beyond...



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