



## The Curious Collector

by Len Augsburger, LSCC #1271

### Centennial Year Coinage of Carson City

As we greet the July 4th holiday, let's discuss a few Carson City Liberty Seated pieces from the 1876 Centennial year. Silver production was sky high in the mid-1870s, and, with the exception of the 1876-CC 20c piece, Liberty Seated coinage of this year is relatively available.

With the Mint running at full steam, production issues were inevitable. On June 23, 1876, M. F. Bonzano, New Orleans Mint Superintendent, wrote to the Mint Director Henry Linderman in Washington, "I herewith enclose ten dimes of the C.C. Mint. There are many in the bag of \$1000 as bad as any of these, about one third are defective more or less." Bonzano may well have received a bagful of 1876-CC F-108a dimes, a variety well-known as poorly produced. The illustration from [seateddimevarieties.com](http://seateddimevarieties.com) quickly reveals the whole story. This ostensibly uncirculated coin exhibits highly eroded dies and overall lack of definition. Is such a coin more "desirable" than a well-made piece? Apparently so, as Gerry Fortin suggests a premium of 25% - 50% for this die state (see image next page).

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**1876-CC F-108a Liberty Seated dime variety struck from highly eroded dies**

Moving to the 20-cent piece, this denomination failed to achieve traction almost from its introduction in 1875, and production in 1876 was minimal. The 1876-CC 20-cent piece is one of the great rarities of the U.S. series, with just a handful of examples surviving from the original production of 10,000 coins. Interestingly, most of these come in upper Mint State grades, indicating that they were set aside from the time of issue. Rusty Goe, in “The Confident Carson City Coin Collector” (a highly-recommended 3-volume series on Carson City coinage), notes 17 pieces total, with 13 coins in uncirculated condition. Such a coin is outside the range of most of us, but a curious alternative arrived a few years ago, as dies discovered in the Nevada State Museum were used to “restrike” 1876-CC twenty-cent pieces. These dies are in execrable condition, and there will be no confusing these crude pieces for originals. I’ve seen one of these restrikes marketed in the \$750 range.

Among half dollars, the 1876-CC issue represents a rich array of varieties, with the Bugert reference describing no less than 26 obverse dies, 26 reverse dies, and 36 total die marriages. The most interesting is the 1876-CC WB-33 so-called proof. Bugert shares an intriguing letter from the Philadelphia Mint coiner that recommends die polishing as a means to improve the aesthetic quality of the coinage. As a quarter collector, I’ve long noticed the P-L surfaces on 1876-CC and 1877-CC pieces, and the correspondence is consistent with this practice. Indeed, I have an 1876-CC quarter in my collection that is indistinguishable from a Philadelphia proof when viewed at an angle. The coin has clash marks, so I won’t claim “proof” status, notwithstanding the sharply defined reflectivity. Bugert allows the possibility that the Byers-Starr 1876-CC WB-33 half was produced as a Centennial commemorative, although there is no related documentation.

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The 1876-CC Trade Dollar is a better date within the series and attracts especially strong premiums at the Mint State level, reflecting its condition rarity. Variety collectors will pay attention to the I/I variety, which pairs the earlier style obverse and reverse dies. Joe Kirchgessner includes the four 1876-CC I/I die marriages for this year in his Top-37 Varieties, which were recently published in his excellent book “U.S. Trade Dollar: Rarity, Collection Types, and Top 37 Varieties”. The Type I/II distinctions are now recognized by the Guide Book of United States Coins, a significant recognition as this is by the far the most distributed guide to U.S. coins.

Wrapping up with quarters, we will include some eye candy from the August 2022 sale of the Tom Bender collection. This wonder coin, PCGS MS67 CAC, was sold by Heritage for \$18,000. Extensive die cracks cover both sides, with the obverse matching Briggs obverse 5. This die features a crack running through Liberty’s head. The reverse legend is nearly encircled by cracks running through or connecting the bases of the letters. One suspects that further analysis of 1876-CC quarter varieties might be accomplished by carefully documenting die crack progressions, similar to Bill Bugert’s work on the 1843 half dollar reverses.



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1876-CC  
Liberty  
Seated  
Quarter

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