

A Rarity Study for 1873-CC Half Eagles

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All early Carson City half eagles are rare and difficult to obtain in high grade, but I believe that the 1873-CC half eagle is the most underrated Carson City issue of this denomination. Despite a mintage of only 7,416 pieces there are three known die varieties for this date with dramatically different relative rarities. These three varieties were struck from two obverses and two reverses. The obverses can be distinguished by the placement of their dates while the reverses can be distinguished by the location of their mintmarks. The standard reference book for Carson City gold is *Gold Coins of the Old West, The Carson City Mint 1870-1893* by Douglas Winter and Lawrence Cutler that was published in 1994. They describe all three of the known varieties in this reference book so I will use their identification codes in this article. A listing of the coinage dies for this issue is given below:

Obverse Dies

Obverse 1: Digit 3 equally spaced between the denticles below and the truncation above.

Obverse 2: Digit 3 much closer to the denticles below than to the truncation above.

Reverse Dies

Reverse A: The right “C” is much closer to the branch stem than it is to the left “C”.

Reverse B: The right “C” is much closer to the left “C” than it is to the branch stem.



Closeup of the date on an 1873-CC gold half eagle Variety 2A. Closeup of the “CC” mintmark on an 1873-CC half eagle, Variety 2A.

Both obverse dies have a Closed “3” in the date and the placement of the digit “3” is the easiest way to distinguish these dies. On Obverse 2 the digit “3” is almost twice as close to the denticles as it is to the truncation. Both reverse dies have Small “CC” mintmarks and Reverse A is the die that was used to strike all known 1870-CC half eagles. All four dies are clearly illustrated by Winter and Cutler in their reference book on the series. The three known die combinations are 1-A, 2-A and 2-B. The relative frequency of appearance for these varieties is about thirty percent for variety 1-A, ten percent for variety 2-A and sixty percent for variety 2-B. The three varieties will be discussed in the order of their relative rarity for this rare issue.

1873-CC Variety 2-B

This is the most common of the three known varieties and it can easily be identified by the close “CC” mintmark with the right “C” distant from the branch stem. There are two Mint State examples for this date and both of them are of this variety. The finest of these is the piece graded PCGS MS-62 from Part II of the Bass Collection that was sold by Bowers and Merena in October 1999. Another example of this variety appeared in the following lot of this sale and was graded PCGS AU-55. It was listed as the third finest certified example of this date and described as one of the nicest examples

ever to appear on the market. The second Mint State example is from the Tuppen Collection and a coin that has been graded PCGS MS-61.

1873-CC Variety 1-A

This variety is scarce among coins of this issue but examples do appear at auction from time to time. This variety is most easily identified by the placement of the digit “3” that is equally spaced between the denticles below and the truncation above. There are no known Mint State examples of this variety. The finest I have seen is the piece graded PCGS AU-55 from Part III of the Bass Collection that was sold by Bowers and Merena in May 2000.



High grade circulated example of an 1873-CC half eagle, Variety 2A.

1873-CC Variety 2-A

This variety is a great rarity among coins of this issue and is almost never available at auction. I can account for only four examples of this variety and in my opinion it is an R7 rarity with only eight to ten specimens in existence. There are no known examples that would

grade AU or better. The finest example that I have seen is the piece certified as PCGS XF-40 that was sold by Heritage in the 2007 FUN auction in January 2007. This piece has the Closed “3” in the date that is closer to the denticles than to the truncation and the wide “CC” mintmark with the right “C” closer to the branch stem than to the left “C”. This is an example of an extremely important variety whose rarity is not yet fully appreciated.

If you own an 1873-CC half eagle you might want to take the time to identify its variety. Very few examples of this issue have been attributed by variety and several more examples of the 2-A die marriage are likely to be identified in the coming years. You may even have one locked away in your bank vault.

(Images Courtesy of Heritage Auctions)