

Edge Reeding for Carson City Half Eagles

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#RM-0188

Studies on silver coins from the 19th century have shown that the collar dies used at the various branch mints often had different reeding gauges. This implies that edge reeding can therefore frequently be used to determine the mint of origin of an individual coin. Specifically, it was discovered that genuine early Carson City dimes had only 89 reeds, a wider reeding gauge than used at the other minting facilities during this period. This information was invaluable in identifying counterfeit specimens during the 1960s before the establishment of the grading services.

The collars used to strike Carson City half eagles have all but been ignored, but my studies with edge reeding have indicated that half eagle collars might contain some valuable information in authenticating coins from this series. I therefore counted the reeds on Carson City half eagles as well as half eagle coins from the other mints. I discovered that edge reeding separated the half eagles by mint of origin. There are a number of die markers that identify genuine Carson City half eagles, but edge reeding provides an additional feature that can be used to identify a suspect piece as a counterfeit.

The edge reeds on Philadelphia, San Francisco and Carson City half eagles were counted with the results given in the table below:

Half Eagle Edge Reeding from the Philadelphia, San Francisco and Carson City Mints – 1870 to 1884

Philadelphia Mint	Reeds
1870 to 1873	102
1878 to 1880	107

San Francisco Mint	Reeds
1870-S to 1874-S	98
1875-S to 1876-S	109
1877-S to 1879-S	123

Carson City Mint	Reeds
1870-CC to 1878-CC	137
1879-CC to 1884-CC	102

Philadelphia Mint half eagles from 1870 to 1873 have 102 edge reeds while those from 1878 to 1880 have 107 reeds. I did not have access to Philadelphia Mint coins from 1874 to 1877. They are very rare with a total reported mintage of only 6,252 pieces for all four years combined. However, I would expect that the collar die was changed sometime between 1873 and 1878, with one of the listed reeding gauges used during these four years. With a total mintage of over ten million pieces during the early 1880s, it is likely that several different collars were used during this period at the Philadelphia Mint. It would therefore be very difficult to accurately describe the Philadelphia collars for these issues without more extensive research. However, the reeding gauge for 1881 half eagles is different from the 1880 reeding that has been reported.

San Francisco Mint half eagles from the 1870-S to the 1874-S have only 98 reeds, the widest reeding gauge so far identified for half eagles. This reeding is very shallow with wide grooves and is very easy to identify. A new collar, with 109 reeds, was used on 1875-S and 1876-S half eagles. This is easy to distinguish from the earlier gauge by a simple comparison of two coins with the appropriate

dates. A new collar with 123 reeds has been seen on 1877-S to 1879-S half eagles. This reeding has much narrower grooves and is easy to distinguish from the previously used collars. Another different reeding gauge has been observed on 1880-S half eagles. However, more research will be needed to accurately describe the San Francisco collars from the early 1880s with a total mintage of over three million pieces for these years. It is not known whether the collars were changed between years or during production runs for one of the years at the end of each period.

The Carson City Mint began half eagle production in 1870 and it was found that 1870-CC to 1878-CC coins have 137 edge reeds. This collar has very narrow grooves and the reeding is typically quite strong on most high-grade specimens. A new collar with only 102 reeds was used to strike 1879-CC to 1884-CC half eagles. This collar has reeding that is easily distinguishable from the previous gauge and comparisons are easy to make. It is not known if the collar was changed between the production of 1878-CC and 1879-CC coins or during the striking of coins for one of these years. It is therefore possible that 1878-CC or 1879-CC coins will be identified with both reeding gauges.

Edge reeding for the three mints that produced half eagles is as follows for the years from 1870 to 1879:

**Summary of Half Eagle Edge Reeding
for the Years 1870 to 1879**

Date	Philadelphia	San Francisco	Carson City
1870	102	98	137
1871	102	98	137
1872	102	98	137

1873	102	98	137
1874	-	98	137
1875	-	109	137
1876	-	109	137
1877	-	123	137
1878	107	123	137
1879	107	123	102

The data shows that early Carson City half eagles have 137 edge reeds, a gauge that is much narrower than that used at the Philadelphia or San Francisco Mints during this period. A study of actual coins shows that this collar was used on 1870-CC to 1878-CC half eagles. A new collar with 102 reeds was used on 1879-CC to 1884-CC half eagles. This means that genuine Carson City half eagles beginning in 1879 will have a wider reeding than that used during the earlier years at the Carson City Mint. Therefore, the reeding gauge for 1879 to 1884 coins will not match that seen on the earlier Carson City dates.

The purpose of this study was to show that reeding can be used to identify genuine examples of early Carson City half eagles from the 1870s. More extensive studies will be required to extend the results to the later Carson City years because of large mintages at the Philadelphia and San Francisco Mints during these years.