

The Story of the Liberty Seated Design

Historical Coin Press No. 1 will operate from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 7, 2021, minting reproductions of the 1870 Liberty Seated half dollar. The 1870 CC Liberty Seated Half Dollar, sculpted by retired U.S. Mint engraver, Tom Rogers, will be a limited edition and minted with Nevada silver thanks to support from the Coeur Rochester mining company. The story of the CC half dollar, first minted on Coin Press No. 1 in April of 1870, is fascinating.

The original design was created by Christian Gobrecht, third Chief Engraver of the United States Mint. Born in 1785 in Hanover, PA, Gobrecht's ancestors on his mother's side went back to the Plymouth Colony in 1642. He apprenticed as a clockmaker and first worked as an engraver for a clockworks company in Baltimore, then later as an engraver of banknotes for a Philadelphia company. He was also an inventor and invented a tool to reproduce relief on a plain surface, something all engravers would have found useful. There is evidence that Gobrecht did some work for the U.S. Mint as early as 1823 after the death of the first chief engraver Robert Scot, though it was William Kneass who became the second chief engraver, a position Gobrecht sought. Gobrecht was performing work for the Mint when Kneass suffered a debilitating stroke in 1835, and was then made "Second" engraver. He would have created the Liberty Seated design during this period. Kneass died in 1840 and Gobrecht was appointed chief engraver of the U.S. Mint by President Van Buren on December 21, 1840. A position he held until his death in 1844.

The basic Liberty Seated obverse design was used on many coin denominations from 1839 to 1891 (125 dates and varieties) and consisted of the figure of Liberty clad in a flowing dress and seated upon a rock. Gobrecht based his design on sketches from the American painters, Thomas Sully and Titian Peale. Peale's father was Charles Wilson Peale, who constructed the first museum in the Western Hemisphere, yet another historical connection that enriches the meaning attached to this replica produced by this mint-museum. In her left hand, Liberty holds a pole topped by a Phrygian cap. This was a popular Neo-classical symbol that depicts a cap given to freed Roman slaves and represents the pursuit of freedom. Her right hand rests on a Union shield inscribed with the word "Liberty." The shield has 13 stripes for the original colonies and represents Freedom's defense. Though the figure of Liberty did not change, there were many design variations on both the obverse and reverse of the half dollar. The 1870 CC half-dollar was the fourth and last of these types and known as, "Motto Above Eagle," for the added banner above the eagle containing the phrase, "In God We Trust."

The coin was 90% silver and 10% copper, a common alloy at the time that made a mint-able yet sturdy metal. It was minted from 1870 to 1878, but the smallest coinage was the first in 1870 at 54,617 coins. This low number increases its value for collectors. Today, coins of average condition can be found for under a \$1,000. The very few existing mint condition coins can fetch upwards of \$70,000, with one collector paying \$172,500 at a 2011 auction. Interestingly, many coins even in good condition show low relief in some of the details, such as the drapery of Liberty's dress. Apparently, the dies were worn and received a lot of polishing causing weak

strikes to begin with. Our replica is one way to experience the beauty of Gobrecht's original design, and to connect with the phenomenal heritage marriage of the Carson City Mint and Coin Press No. 1.