

Collecting Half Dimes

by Thomas Coulson



1795 Flowing Hair Half Dime

The Flowing Hair Half Dime first entered circulation in 1795 along with the Half Dollar and Silver Dollar of the same type. Though the first coins were dated 1794, none were released that year. Over the next decade, a paltry 250,000 or so Half Dimes of all types were minted; more than a quarter of those were dated 1795. A tiny group of the Small Eagle/ Draped Bust Half Dimes were made in 1796 and 1797. The Draped Bust/ Heraldic Eagle type was struck for a few more years following that issue. These miniscule issues are a testament to the struggles faced by the new United States Mint. Yellow Fever outbreaks occurred on an annual basis; often closing the Mint for months. Public sentiment of the coins issued by the Mint was decidedly unfavorable. Foreign coinage was still widely accepted by the populace and the small number of Federal coins may have gone largely unnoticed in most locales. Lackluster demand for the denomination and the Mint's hardships caused production to cease in 1805.

Coinage resumed with the Capped Bust Half Dime in 1829. This was one of the earliest United States coins to be struck in a close collar, which made it more uniform in size and appearance. There must have been some demand for the denomination at the time since so few early Half Dimes were made and even fewer were still circulating. In contrast to the small number of early coins, nearly 13 million of the Capped Bust type were struck over nine years. There were many combinations of different sized punches for dates and denominations which resulted in lots of different varieties.



1830 Bust Half Dime

The Liberty Seated Half Dime series has a rich history. Over a period of 36 years (1837-1873) these coins circulated (and sometimes did not circulate) under a wide range of conditions. Originally the Half Dimes circulated throughout the country in a normal fashion. In parts of the South (and later the West) Liberty



*1857 Liberty Seated
Half Dime - Obverse*

Seated Half Dimes circulated at par with Mexican and Spanish Half Reales which were valued at 6 ¼ cents. The discovery of Gold in California in 1848 distorted the world value of silver. All silver coins, including Half Dimes had an intrinsic value exceeding their face value. This caused coins to be removed from circulation and melted. This imbalance was remedied for a time by reducing the weight of the Half Dime. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Half Dimes were again removed from circulation by hoarders and exporters cashing in on the discrepancy in value. Copper-Nickel 5 cent coins were introduced in 1866.

These gained acceptance in the East and quickly displaced the Half Dime as the circulating medium. Half Dimes did continue to be used in the West where they still traded alongside Half Reales at the rate of 6 ¼ cents. Despite this unique status in the West, by 1873, the Liberty Seated Half Dime was considered expendable and the Mint ended production of the coin.



*1853 Liberty Seated
Half Dime - Reverse*

There are many interesting idiosyncrasies to the series. The design was modified several times. No fewer than five artists (Thomas Sully, Christian Gobrecht, Robert Hughes, Anthony Paquet, and James Longacre) collaborated to produce the varying designs! The Paquet design is interesting as it was produced only on the 1859 Philadelphia Mint Liberty Seated Half Dime. (Paquet was also the designer of the distinctive and popular 1861 Double Eagle Reverse that bears his name.) Aside from different designs, there are many fun varieties to collect, too. There are overdates (1849/8, 1849/8/6, 1861/0, 1865/3), doubled and tripled dates, an inverted date (1858) large and small dates (1848), arrows and no arrows types, and mintmarks inside and outside of wreaths. It is also interesting to note that Canadian 5 Cent Silvers are made to the same specifications as U.S. Half Dimes. For those wishing to extend the collection further, collecting the Canadian versions would be a way to do so.

Due to their small size and relative obscurity, Half Dimes are overlooked by most collectors. This neglect is undeserved since these small coins carry with them a rich history and variety that makes them entertaining to study.

View Our Inventory of Half Dimes for Sale [Here](#).



*1839 Liberty Seated Half
Dime PCGS Certified*

How to Collect Half Dimes – Two Different Ways

1. The Basic Collection

Half Dimes can be collected in three different groups. There are the early dates (1794-1805), the Capped Bust type (1829-1837) and the Liberty Seated Type (1837-1873). There are albums that contain spaces for all dates from 1794 to 1873. The entire run of half dimes could be collected in this manner, but completing the early portion of the set will take patience and money. For most collectors it would make sense to focus on one of the three groups and consider expanding to the other groups once the first group is complete.



*1837 Bust Half Dime
Reverse*



1795 Half Dime Reverse

The early dates consist of three principal types: Flowing Hair, Draped Bust/

Small Eagle and Draped Bust/Heraldic Eagle. With the exception of the Flowing Hair Half Dimes (a hoard of about 100 mint state coins once existed), all are rare. Any of the 1796-1805 Half Dimes will cost as much as a new or lightly used car for a nice (Extremely Fine to Mint State) specimen. The 1802 is the true stopper, which will cost as much as a house if you can find one. Even if you have the resources to collect these coins by date or variety, they are not commonly encountered in auctions. Most collectors will settle for a type specimen or low grade pieces in this series.

Capped Bust Half Dimes are an interesting collection. A date set consists of only nine different coins and none of them are very rare. Most coins circulated extensively and many were bent or otherwise damaged because of their thinness. It will be a challenge to find nice middle grade coins, but they represent decent value when found. A nice extremely fine set might be assembled for less than \$2,000.00. There are many interesting varieties that can expand the collection. These include the 1834 and 1836 3 over inverted 3 Half Dimes, and the various date/denomination size combinations. Mint State coins are available for all dates and are not so expensive. A complete mint state set is expensive, but can still be assembled for less than the cost of many single early date specimens.



*1859 Liberty Seated Half
Dime Paquet Design*

Liberty Seated coinage has become highly popular over the last several years. The Half Dimes are probably the least popular of all the denominations. This presents an excellent opportunity for collectors to work on the Liberty Seated series in a more affordable way. For the higher denominations, there are only a handful of dates that are readily found with the rest being difficult. While nice Liberty Seated Half dimes are difficult to locate, there are a greater variety of dates that are commonly encountered. And, although there are many issues in the series that are elusive, there is only one extreme rarity – the 1870- S Half Dime – which is unique. (In fact, it was not known to exist until the late 1970's.) There are also the 1859 and 1860 transitional designs which are very rare, but really just patterns. The key dates of the series which often represent great value given their scarcity to price ratio. They include the 1844-O and 1846 Liberty Seated Half dime; the 1853-O no arrows Half Dime, and the 1863 and 1864, 1865, 1866 and 1867 Liberty Seated Half Dimes. Other dates in the 1860's are scarce, but can be found with some patience.

Liberty Seated Half dimes are best collected in a mid level circulated grade such as very fine or extremely fine. Coins in these grades are attractive, yet reasonably priced. It will take some discipline to hold out for nice, original problem free pieces, but the reward will be a very pleasing, matched collection. Nice Mint State Liberty Seated Half Dimes are affordable as type coins. However, there are several dates in the series that are rare or nearly non-existent in mint state; so it would be difficult to assemble a complete set.

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2. The Type Set

For those wanting to collect just a representation of Half Dimes rather than the entire series, a type set is a great option. Purchasing one of each type is more affordable than collecting a set; especially for the earlier coins which can be expensive and difficult to find. For later issues, collecting the type may allow you to purchase a nice mint state example instead of many lower grade pieces. A type set of Half Dimes might consist of the following:

➤ The Early Types

Flowing Hair (1794-1795)

Draped Bust, Small Eagle (1796-1797)

Draped Bust, Heraldic Eagle (1800-1805)



1795 Half Dime

➤ Capped Bust Half Dime (1829-1837)

➤ Liberty Seated Half Dime

No Stars Obverse (1837-1838)

Stars, No Drapery Obverse (1838-1840)

Stars, With Drapery Obverse (1840-1853, 1856)

Arrows at Date (1853-1855)

Stars, Redesigned Obverse (1857-1859)

Stars, Paquet Obverse (1859)

Legend Obverse (1860-1873)



1833 Half Dime



1839 Liberty Seated
Half Dime



1844 Liberty Seated
Half Dime



1853 Liberty Seated
Half Dime



1857 Liberty Seated
Half Dime



1859 Liberty Seated
Half Dime



1867 Liberty Seated
Half Dime

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