

Collecting Liberty Seated Quarters

by Thomas Coulson



1838 Liberty Seated Quarter

The Liberty Seated Quarter first appeared in 1838 as the third coin in the new Liberty Seated series after the Half Dime (1837) and Dime (1837). It was produced for fifty-three years and its sphere of recognition has stretched far beyond that span. Some of the first recipients of the newly designed quarters were alive before the Revolutionary War when the United States were still colonies of the British Crown. Many of the last to be born when these coins were produced lived to witness men landing on the moon; the United States Bicentennial, and beyond. Some accounts place worn specimens of the Liberty Seated coinage being plucked out of circulation as late as the 1940's; over a century after the first ones were minted. The Liberty Seated Quarter, alongside the dime and half dollar, has covered a truly remarkable period of American history!

At the time the earliest Seated quarters were released in the 1840's the Nation was growing. At 17 million, the population had nearly quintupled since the first census in 1790. The annexation of the Republic of Texas, war with Mexico, and discovery of gold in California rapidly pushed the populace Westward. The invention of the railroad and the telegraph made it easier and faster to travel and communicate across the vast continental distance.

The U.S. Mint was growing too; though not without its pains. New machinery was introduced in the 1830's to mechanize the coining process. Three branch mints were added in 1838 to add further capacity to the Nation's minting ability. Production was not yet uniform, though. Coins would still have varying features from one issue to another. In many areas, foreign coins still circulated as a matter of convenience; since distribution channels for United States Mint coinage were still undeveloped.



*1840-O Liberty
Seated Quarter
Reverse*

Liberty Seated Quarters were struck in moderate quantities throughout the 1840's. No single issue exceeded a mintage of a million coins until 1853. Dimes and half dollars were the 'workhorse' denominations of the time. Several of the quarter emissions from the New Orleans Mint were small including the very scarce 1849 issue. The coins that were issued in the 1840's generally went into circulation and stayed there. Uncirculated and high-grade circulated specimens are few and far between.

The 1848 discovery of gold in California radically changed the pattern of circulating coinage in the United States. The massive inflow of gold into the economy changed the value dynamic between gold and silver. Silver became more valuable in relation to gold, which in turn, drove silver out of circulation. All Liberty Seated coinage, including quarters, disappeared from circulation within a few years. Quarters were minted in tiny numbers in the early 1850's as there was little point in producing large numbers of coins that would not circulate or be melted down. The 1851, 1852, and 1853 No Arrows Liberty Seated Quarters are all very scarce.



*Arrows & Rays
Reverse*

Legislators recognized the problem affecting coinage at this time and took measures to correct it. In 1853, the quarter's weight was reduced to make its value commensurate with an equal amount of gold. Arrows and Rays were added design features to denote the change in weight. Liberty Seated Quarters once again circulated for a handful of years. In 1854, the new branch mint at San Francisco was opened to facilitate delivery

of coinage to growing amounts of Western settlers. The first San Francisco Mint Liberty Seated Quarters were issued in 1855.

While the Republic continued to grow during the 1850's, discord over the issue of slavery was dividing the nation. The expanding nation was divided bitterly into northern and southern halves. Citizens began to anticipate the upcoming war and many of them hoarded any coinage they could find to build a safety net of 'hard currency' for the hard times coming. By the eve of the Civil War, most silver and gold coinage was once again out of circulation.

Throughout the Civil War and shortly thereafter, mintages of Liberty Seated Quarters, along with all silver and gold denominations were miniscule. The Government suspended the payment of all specie (hard money, coinage) at the end of 1861 as hoarding made for difficult control the amount of coinage in circulation. Suspension of specie payments also aided in the financing of the War since it allowed the Government to print large sums of money without any backing of gold or silver. The issuance of all this paper money made redeeming it for gold or silver difficult after the war because of the sheer amount of it in circulation. The economy needed to grow to fit the amount of money in circulation to resume payment of specie. (Of course, there needed to be enough precious metals to cover the bulk of that paper, too.)



1860 Liberty
Seated Quarter

These challenges were resolved in the decade after the Civil War. Rebuilding of war torn states aided the economy. The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 was a great facilitator of commerce, too. Population growth through immigration began to accelerate. Despite several contractions in economic activity, including the particularly severe one in 1873, the economy grew enough to support the money issued in the decade before.



1873 Liberty
Seated Quarter



1877-CC Liberty
Seated Quarter
Reverse

Another major driving force in the production of the Liberty Seated Quarter and the United States economy was the massive Comstock Lode silver discovery. The silver bonanza was first found in 1859 and gradually large amounts of silver found its way to market. A mint was added at Carson City, Nevada to help process the silver coming from the find in 1870. The Carson City mint was never an efficient producer of coinage and as a result, most Carson City Liberty Seated Quarters are very rare.

In 1873, the weight of the Liberty Seated Quarter was increased slightly to 6.25 grams to emulate a world metric silver standard of 25 grams per unit or dollar. This standard seemed to be used first by the French during the Napoleonic era and adopted by many countries around the world in the ensuing decades. Arrows were added to the date area of the quarter in 1873 and 1874 to denote this change.

From 1875 to 1877, large numbers of Liberty Seated Quarters were produced at all mints from the surplus silver available in the market in an effort to retire the fractional paper currency that had been in circulation since the Civil War. These dates are among the most plentiful Liberty Seated Quarters available today.

The Bland-Allison act of 1878 had a major effect on the Liberty Seated Quarter as well. The act mandated the coining of the massive quantities of surplus silver being mined at the time. However, the law dictated that the majority of this silver be used to produce silver dollars. Because production was focused on dollar coins, there was little time or minting capacity to make quarters or half dollars. Mintages of both plummeted during the 1880's. The large number of 1875 to 1877 quarters (over 59 million were minted) in commerce also kept mintages low, as there was little need for additional quarters. Aside from a few issues,

mintages of most dates were just a little north or south of 10,000 pieces. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 changed the terms of coinage once again and Liberty Seated Quarters were minted in larger quantities in the series' final year, 1891.



1891 Liberty
Seated Quarter

The growth of the United States during the Liberty Seated era was incredible. The Republic that welcomed the Liberty Seated Quarter in 1838 bore little resemblance to the emerging juggernaut the United States had become by the end of the series in 1891. Manufacturing and transportation transformed the country. Advancements in communication made the United States much simpler to travel and more efficient. Population grew to over 62 million by 1891; a 350 percent increase since 1838. The "Frontier" as it has once existed was an obsolete concept in 1891. The growth of San Francisco, California is one example of this. It had become the 8th largest city in the United States in 1890! (In 1840 the city had fewer than 200 residents!)

The Liberty Seated Quarter series is fascinating because the coins were recognized by such a wide swath of the 19th century United States populace. Collecting the series recalls many milestone events in the maturation of our great nation.

View Our Inventory of Liberty Seated Quarters for Sale [Here](#).



1840-O Liberty Seated
Quarter MS62 PCGS

How to Collect Liberty Seated Quarters – Three Different Ways

1. The Basic Collection

Completing a Liberty Seated Quarter collection is a nearly impossible task. Outside of a few dates commonly encountered, most coins in the series are scarce; many are rare; and some prohibitively so for all but the wealthiest and most patient collectors. So long as the prospective collector realizes this before starting, this is probably not an issue. A collection with only three-quarters of all the varieties would still be very impressive and challenging regardless of the grade. So long as one is attempting to collect as many dates as possible; they should also try for original, problem-free specimens rather than the oft cleaned pieces encountered in holders.

Liberty Seated Quarters can be acquired in tiers of relative scarcity as detailed below just like the other Liberty Seated series'. As with other Seated coinage, attractive, original problem free coins in middle circulated grades (Fine to Extremely Fine) are optimal to collect. The coins are beautiful with a little wear and patina. Accumulating matching coins in these grades will make for an impressive display! Below are all the Liberty Seated Quarters in a complete collection grouped together in tiers of relative scarcity.

Below are all the Liberty Seated Quarters in a complete collection grouped together in tiers of relative scarcity.

- **The Common Dates** – There are only about 20 or so Liberty Seated Quarters that are regularly encountered. Locating nice examples of these coins will form a good basis for a collection.

1853, Arrows & Rays	1858	1876-CC
1854	1859	1876-S
1854-O	1860	1877
1855	1861	1877-CC
1856	1862	1877-S
1856-O	1875	1891
1857	1876	1891-S



1877-S Liberty Seated Quarter



1876-CC Liberty Seated Quarter

- **The Semi Common Dates** – These dates are encountered occasionally, but not nearly so often as the common coins above. Many of these dates can be acquired inexpensively and they represent excellent value when found.

1838	1857-O	1873, Arrows
1839	1858-O	1874
1840-O, No Drapery	1860-O	1878
1842-O, Lg. Dt.	1871	1888-S
1853-O	1873, Open 3	



1840-O Liberty Seated Quarter, No Drapery



1853-O Liberty Seated Quarter, Arrows & Rays



1839 Liberty Seated Quarter



- **The Scarcer Dates** – This group of coins is found less frequently than the former group. Most of these are also inexpensive in fine to extremely fine grades if found. Many survivors are cleaned as well. Finding nice, original circulated specimens will be tough.

1840, Drapery	1846	1870
1841	1847	1872
1841-O	1848	1873-S
1842, Lg. Dt.	1849	1874-S
1843	1850	1875-CC
1843-O	1850-O	1875-S
1844	1851	1878-CC
1844-O	1855-O	1878-S
1845	1859-O	1890



1846 Liberty
Seated Quarter



1843 Liberty
Seated Quarter

- **The Rare Dates I** – These coins are downright difficult to locate. Some dates are legitimately rare. Others might be hoarded by collectors. The 1891-O is an interesting issue because it is the only New Orleans Mint 'With Motto' Seated coin. (The 1858 Date was only issued as a proof strike. It is not part of a circulation issue collection. Some consider it to be part of the collection as the only coin available for that date.)



1866 Liberty
Seated Quarter

1840-O, Drapery	1859-S	1867
1847-O	1861-S	1867-S
1851-O	1862-S	1868
1852	1863	1868-S
1853, 3 over 4	1864	1869
1854-O, Huge O	1864-S	1869-S
1855-S	1865	1871-S
1856-S	1865-S	1873, CL3
1857-S	1866	1891-O
1858-S	1866-S	

- **The Rare Dates II, the 1880's** – The coins in this group, mostly from the 1880's, all have low mintages. Though rare, enough were saved (and proof coins are also available) to ensure that none of them cost a fortune. This grouping of Liberty Seated Quarters might make an interesting sub-collection. All the dates are quite scarce in mint state grades, yet considering their scarcity, they are surprisingly affordable. Gems (MS-65 graded coins) can be had for most dates for less than \$2,000.00. The run of dates is short and over time, a collection of them can be assembled by determined collectors.

1879	1883	1887
1880	1884	1888
1881	1885	1889
1882	1886	



1879 Liberty
Seated Quarter

- **The Very Rare Dates** – These coins are incredibly difficult to locate. Once found, expect to pay a handsome sum for any of them. The Carson City issues are popular because of their Western origin. This makes them more sought after than might otherwise be the case. For original, problem free coins throw away the pricing guides.



*1840-O Liberty Seated
Quarter, Drapery, Large O*

1842-O	1871-CC
1849-O	1872-CC
1852-O	1872-S
1860-S	1873-CC, Arrows
1870-CC	1840-O, Drapery, Large O

- **Legendary Rarity** – The 1873-CC No Arrows Liberty Seated Quarter is easily the rarest coin of the Liberty Seated Quarter series and also the rarest overall United States quarter issued for circulation. With only 5 known specimens, it is rarer than the 1870-S Seated Dollar and the 1876-CC Twenty Cent piece. It rivals the 1853-O No Arrows Seated Half Dollar for rarity. The 1873-CC No Arrows Dime, which is unique is the only regular issue Seated coin that is rarer. This coin will be the stopper for any serious collector of Seated Quarters. Because of its extreme rarity, simply having the means to buy one will not necessarily result in an acquisition. This date has crossed the auction block only seven times in the past twenty years.

1873-CC, No Arrows

Click [Here](#) for a free Collector's Checklist to Help You Get Started!

2. The Liberty Seated Quarter Type Set

A more reasonable option for the collector with limited time or money would be to acquire a type set or type-mint set of all the major varieties of the Liberty Seated Quarter series. These coins could be collected in a nice middle to upper level circulated grade or even in mint state. A far more challenging option would be a proof type set. Listed below is a table detailing the different Liberty Seated Quarter types available:

Type I - No Drapery Obverse / No Motto Reverse
(1838-1840)



*1840-O Liberty Seated
Quarter, No Drapery*

- **Type II** - Drapery Obverse / No Motto Reverse
(1840-1853)



*1843 Liberty Seated
Quarter, Drapery*

- **Type III** - Arrows at Date Obverse / Rays Reverse
(1853)



*1853 Liberty Seated
Quarter, Arrows & Rays*

- **Type IV** - Arrows at Date Obverse / No Motto Reverse
(1854-1855)



*1854 Liberty Seated
Quarter, Arrows*

- **Type V** - Drapery Obverse/No Motto Reverse, reduced weight
(1856-1865)



*1856-O Liberty Seated
Quarter, Drapery*

- **Type VI** - Motto Reverse
(1866-1873)



*1866 Liberty Seated
Quarter reverse*

- **Type VII** - Arrows at Date / Motto Reverse
(1873-1874)



*1873 Liberty Seated
Quarter, Arrows*

- **Type VIII** - Reduced weight / Motto Reverse
(1875-1891)



*1891 Liberty Seated
Quarter reverse*



Table of Liberty Seated Quarter Types issued by mintmark

Type	Philadelphia	New Orleans	San Francisco	Carson City
I	✓	✓		
II	✓	✓		
III	✓	✓		
IV	✓	✓	✓	
V	✓	✓	✓	
VI	✓		✓	✓
VII	✓		✓	✓
VIII	✓	✓	✓	✓

Proof Liberty Seated Quarters exist for all types, but types one through four are very rare to excessively rare as proofs. Perhaps only five total proof Seated Quarters were struck of the no drapery type in 1838 and 1839 combined. Needless to say, this type seldom comes up for sale. Having the money to purchase one is secondary to having time to find one! Proof Quarters of the type 2 variety are also very rare, but they were issued in enough different years that it is possible to locate one. Proof specimens of the type 3 Quarter (Arrows and Rays) are excessively rare and prized as a one -year type. Type 4 Proof Seated Quarters are very rare as a two -year type;



*1865 Liberty Seated
Quarter J-425
PR65 NGC*



*1881 Proof
Liberty Seated
Quarter*



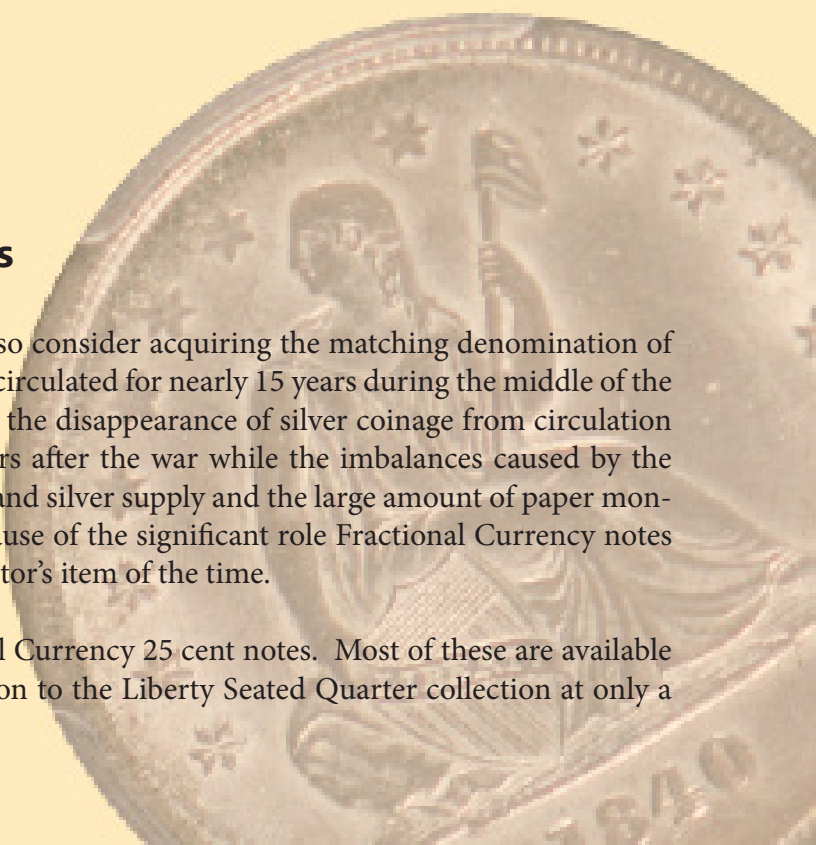
*1883 Liberty Seated
Quarter PR64 PCGS
CAC*

but are available at a price. The final four types (5 through 8) exist as proofs in abundant quantities. Each of the latter types is quite affordable in comparison to the earlier issues.

3. Fractional Currency 25 Cent Notes

Any collector of Liberty Seated coinage might also consider acquiring the matching denomination of Fractional Currency notes. Fractional Currency circulated for nearly 15 years during the middle of the Liberty Seated era. It was issued as a response to the disappearance of silver coinage from circulation during the Civil War. It remained for many years after the war while the imbalances caused by the changing dynamic between the amounts of gold and silver supply and the large amount of paper money issued to finance the war were resolved. Because of the significant role Fractional Currency notes played during this time, they are a relevant collector's item of the time.

Below is a type set and complete set of Fractional Currency 25 cent notes. Most of these are available and inexpensive. They make an excellent addition to the Liberty Seated Quarter collection at only a modest extra cost.



First Issue, (1862-1863)

- Five Thomas Jefferson stamps, Perforated edges with American Bank Note Company Monogram on reverse, FR.#1279 (Freidberg)
- Perforated Edges without American Bank Note Company Monogram on reverse, FR#1280
- Straight Edges with ABNC Monogram, FR. #1281
- Straight Edges without ABNC Monogram, FR# 1282



FR#1281

Second Issue, (1863-1867)

- Washington, without overprint, FR# 1283
- With overprint, 18-63 and letter, FR# 1284-1288
- With overprint on fiber paper, FR# 1289-1290



FR#1283

Third Issue, (1864-1869)

- William p. Fressenden, Red Back, FR# 1291-1292
- Green Back, FR# 1294-1300



FR#1294

Fourth Issue, (1869-1875)

- Washington, Red Seal, Watermarked Paper, FR# 1301
- No watermark, with silk fibers FR# 1302
- Same, with blue stain FR# 1303
- Same, but with smaller seal FR # 1307



FR#1307

Fifth Issue, (1874-1876)

- Robert Walker, long key in seal, FR# 1308
- Same, but short key in seal, FR# 1309



FR#1309

Read more about Liberty Seated Quarters

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Hessler, Chambliss. The Comprehensive Catalog of U.S. Paper Money, 7th Ed., BNR Press, Port Clinton , OH, 2006.

