

In Pursuit of a Dream – The 1873-CC Liberty Seated Dollar

By Bob Brock

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Like most coin collectors, I got interested at a fairly young age. Ah, those evenings sitting on the floor going through rolls and rolls of pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and halves, looking to fill yet another spot in those little blue Whitman coin books. That was a lot of fun because once in a while you would get lucky and find a rare coin or two. Over the years there were periods in my life when collecting coins was kind of put on the back burner, but I never really lost interest in the hobby.

I started attending a few coin shows and renewed my interest in Morgan Dollars. I purchased my first “CC” coins and remembered paying \$85 each for nice Mint State 1882, 1883, and 1884 “CC” dollars in GSA hard packs. I eventually got hooked on Liberty Seated dollars. I did not have any real plan and before long I began feeling like I was hopping in my car to go on a vacation without really knowing where I was headed.

I purchased a few AU and Mint State Seated dollars, and in April of 1984 was offered an 1870-CC Seated dollar in what was then graded AU-50. This was a nice coin, but like many collectors, you find yourself buying and selling coins trying to make a small profit here and there. I sold that wonderful coin a short time later, taking a profit of a little over a hundred dollars. Needless to say, I did not receive *The Mental Giant Award* that year. Ouch! Well, I guess we all have to learn our lessons as we go along in life. I bet many who are reading this article might be smiling, remembering similar experiences over their years of collecting coins.

Back in the 1980s, I obviously did not appreciate the rarity of high-grade Mint State Seated dollars, especially those minted at Carson

City. Fewer than 6.5 million Seated dollars were minted over the 34-year lifespan (1840-1873) of this series. During those 34 years, the Carson City Mint would only provide 19,288 Seated dollar coins (1870-1873)! In discussing silver dollars, Liberty Seated dollars fall far into the shadows of most collectors, as conversations are mainly focused on either Morgan or Peace dollars, or even the revered Flowing Hair and Draped Bust dollars.

Collecting Liberty Seated dollars has been most enjoyable, but also extremely challenging. I had no idea of trying to build a “Mint State” collection, especially since the 1870-S would turn this attempt into *Mission Impossible*. I accepted the fact that my best effort would be to try and complete 43 of the 44 regular issues that were coined. (Actually, I would have to say 45 regular issues since mint records show that 700 1873-S Seated dollars were minted, but no examples are known to exist. Most likely all were melted.)

Well, here I am almost 30 years later, and I still have a few to go. You learn a lot as you go along, and only a short time passed from the time I started until I realized the enormous task I would be faced with in finding the four Carson City coins of 1870, 1871, 1872, and 1873, in WHAT?! MINT STATE? Maybe it was time for another reality check. Even most major collections, over the last hundred years or so, did not contain all four “CC” Seated dollars in Mint State. From what I have researched, only within the last twenty years or so has there been assembled a set with the four in Mint State condition. The most famous Liberty Seated dollar collection is the *Legend Collection*, which is, to my knowledge, the only complete (all 44) Mint State set of Liberty Seated dollars ever assembled.

Now that I have rambled on, let’s get to the subject at hand: that specifically being the 1873-CC Liberty Seated dollar. As Rusty Goe points out in his (must read) wonderful book, *The Mint on Carson*



*Bob Brock's 1873-CC Liberty Seated silver dollar,
graded MS-61 by PCGS.*

Street, 1873 was a pivotal year in the history of the Carson City Mint. A lot of things happened that year including the death of Abraham Curry who, if it were not for him, I would not be writing this article, and there would be no *Curry's Chronicle*.

The mintage of the 1873-CC Liberty Seated dollar was 2,300. Of this total, 1,000 pieces were minted in January of 1873 and 1,300 more minted in March, according to mint records. The Coinage Act of February 12, 1873 would end the silver dollar as a denomination; however, this did not go into effect until April 1, 1873. The weights

of silver coins were redefined, and also adopted was a new Trade dollar, which was to be used mainly for exporting, especially to China. The standard weight of silver dollars up to this time was 412.5 grains. The new Trade dollar had a newly established weight of 420 grains. Section 21 of the Coinage Act stated, “*That any owner of silver bullion may deposit the same at any mint, to be formed into bars, or into dollars of the weight of 420 grains, troy, designated in this act as Trade dollars....*” With the price of silver dropping, most numismatic historians suggest that the last 1,300 1873-CC Seated dollars, and maybe some of the remaining 1,000 minted in January, were melted in favor of the new Trade dollar.

With that in mind, one can understand why there is a fewer total of 1873-CC Seated dollars in existence than the 1871-CC dollar, which has a lower mintage of just 1,376. In Mint State condition, both dates appear very close in rarity to each other. Years can pass before either of these coins appears for sale in Mint State.

My first attempt at obtaining the coin pictured in this article was in September 1998, but unfortunately, I was runner-up in the bidding. Surprisingly, this same coin came up again in an auction in November of 2004. This time I was successful. The coin now resides in a PCGS MS-61 holder. Previously it had been in two other Mint State slabs—so much for the population reports. Like so many other silver coins minted at Carson City, this coin has quite a bit of toning. Since my photos were taken a number of years ago, the coin has continued to take on additional toning. After reading Weimar White’s book on *Coin Chemistry*, I have now taken steps to better protect this coin from further exposure to oxidation. Frankly, I prefer “white” coins, but as one dealer told me years ago, if you are looking for “white” Carson City Seated dollars, forget it. Well this coin is not the prettiest coin in my set, but sometimes I guess we have to

appreciate the coin for its rarity and not its looks. Regardless, I'm pleased to be the caretaker for this wonderful coin.

To my knowledge, there are two other 1873-CC Liberty Seated dollars graded MS-61, and the beautiful, and colorfully toned, MS-65 coin in the *Legend Collection*. Who knows how many others may be hidden away somewhere? Walter H. Breen noted that three brand new 1873-CC Seated dollars were found in a Carson City cornerstone in 1973. Perhaps the coin in the *Legend Collection* could be one of those. I wonder what may have happened to the other two. 1973 does not seem that long ago, but it is unlikely that the “real” story will ever be revealed.

I have one final note to share concerning my motivation for hunting down this great coin. My great grandmother lived with our family from the time I was born until her death in 1962. She was born in January of 1873. I am fascinated that I hold a coin that was minted about the time of her birth.

(Image courtesy of Bob Brock)

Longtime member **John Tinney** converted his regular membership to a life membership in August 2011, **at the age of 79**. Thanks John, for your continued show of support for the C4OA. (FYI—John becomes the second-oldest member to sign up for life membership. Don Guidici, who signed up at age 82, is our reigning elder life member.)