

Capped Bust Half Dollars – 1807 through 1836

Designed by John Reich, the Capped Bust Half Dollars were produced from 1807 through 1839 with 3 distinct varieties. During the years 1807 through 1836 it was the largest denomination struck by the US Mint. In Al C. Overton's book Early Half Dollar Die Varieties, he refers to this design as the "Turban Head" Variety.

Variety 1 had a design change in 1809 that lasted through 1836. Both the Portrait on the obverse and the Eagle on the reverse were remodeled. Also in 1809 there were 2 Experimental edge letterings. 1 used xxxx between words and the other used IIII between words.

The obverse of the Variety 1 had a bust of Lady Liberty facing left with 7 stars on the left and 6 stars on the right. The date directly is located below her. The word LIBERTY is on the headband of her cap referred to as either a Phrygian or Freedom Cap.

On the reverse is an Eagle with its wings lifted and an Olive branch and 3 arrows grasped in its claws. There is a border that reads "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" below it is a ribbon inscribed "E PLURIBUS UNUM". Below the Eagles claws to the right is the denomination "50 C."

The Capped Bust Half Dollars issued for the majority of the series included a lettered edge. From 1807 to 1814, the lettering reads "FIFTY CENTS OR HALF A DOLLAR". For the years 1814 to 1831, a single star was added between "DOLLAR" and "FIFTY", and for 1831 to 1836, a vertical line was used. As with the obverse and reverse there are Overton varieties for the edge lettering. His book lists these as E-1 through E58. The varieties all relate to spelling errors to the phrase "FIFTY CENTS OR HALF A DOLLAR".

For all years when the lettered edge was used, the coins were struck on planchets composed of 89.24% silver and 10.76% copper. The standard weight was 13.48 grams or 208 grains and the standard diameter was 32.5 mm.

This new design is plagued with weak strike problems on both the obverse and the reverse. The high spots on the obverse notably the hair and broach will have weak details and many issues also have flat stars. On the reverse weakness is found on the upper portion of the left wing and to the motto E PLURIBUS UNIM which often has blank spots.

Most years mintages exceed 1,000,000, the low in 1815 of just 47,150 and the high water mark in 1836 with 6,545,000. There are several years where the mintage exceeded that of the Large Cent for the same year. Examples where Half dollar production exceed Large Cent include 1808 1,368,600 halves to 1,007,000 cents, 1809 1,405,810 v. 222,867 and several other years including all of the years 1828 through 1836.

The Challenge for collectors will be in all of the different die varieties. There are over 450 different recognized varieties. The varieties were originally cataloged by Al C. Overton in his book Early Half Dollar Die Varieties 1794-1836. His numbering system is preceded with the letter "O" starts with number 101 as the first Obverse variety for each date and a lower case letter is added for any sub-varieties. Reverse varieties start with a capital A and proceed to A-v2, A-v3, etc.

Collecting Bust Half Dollars

As a collector, everyone has different criteria as to what is and is not included in their collection. The years 1807-1836 29 different dates were minted as none minted in 1816. Your collection could be just 1 coin or up to 4 coins to fill a type set. Other collectors may opt to get a date collection thus needing 29 coins. For more advanced collectors we get into the different varieties. The Coin dealer Newsletter includes 76 varieties.

As a variety collecting Bust Half's you need to become familiar with terms like over date, Large Stars, Small Stars, Square Base, Curl Base, and others.

The series has many over dates. 2 of the rarest are the 1817/4 and the 1815/2. The 1815 has its entire mintage listed as an over date. On the 1812/1 over date you have 2 sub varieties in the Small 8 and Large 8 on the date.

For the 1823 year there are several varieties related to the "3" in the date. Here you can find a Broken 3, Patched 3, Large Well Formed 3, 3 Reworked, Perfect 3, The Ugly 3, and the Extra Tall 3. You will need to accumulate a total of 17 different Obverse varieties for this issue alone.

The year 1827 is the High water mark for varieties. You will find O-101 through O-147 along with the subvarieties of O-112a and O-140a. As of now there are 453 known varieties for the years 1807- 1836 lettered edge Capped Bust Half Dollars.

For the years 1820 through 1836 extremely small amount of proof coins were minted estimated mintages are 5, 10, or 15 for the year.

Those that require MS-65 coins will find this series a Great challenge. For the years 1807 – 1819 there are few know true Uncirculated examples. The majority of the coins remaining fall in the good to About Uncirculated range. Here you should have no problem finding examples grading fine to very fine. As you would expect, the years 1820 through 1836 will offer a great amount of Mint State coins. The earlier years will be scarcer in Mint State than the later years. As with many other series, there seems to be gradeflation relating to Key and Semi-key date coins. Other problems related to grade that a collector needs to be aware of are rim bruises and graffiti.

The price you will pay for these coins is relatively inexpensive when you figure in the age of the coins you are buying. There are only 6 issues listed in the grey sheet in Very Fine that exceed \$1,000 with most at \$350 or less. Many of the common dates can be obtained in Extra fine for around \$150.

As with any other collectable that has value, the risk of counterfeits exists. Even though the Letter edge type ended in 1836, there are examples of lettered edge counterfeits dated 1837, 1838, and as late as 1841.

There are several resources available in print and on the internet. Groups include the Bust Half Nut Club, and the John Reich Collectors Society is just 2.

References;

Overton, Al C. Early Half Dollar Die Varieties 1794-1836, Revised Edition.

NGCCoin.com

PCGS.com

A Guide Book of United States Coins (Red Book), by Richard (R. S.) Yeoman 57th Edition

Bowers, Q. David UNITED STATES COPPER COINS An Action Guide for the Collector and Investor

Bowers & Merena Galleries 1984.