

Classic Head Quarter Eagles

The *Coinage Act of 1834* reduced the standard weight of gold coins to promote coinage and circulation of the coins, previously valued at more than face value. The specifications of the Act took effect on August 1, 1834. William Kneass created a new design to ease the identification of the new tenor gold pieces.

John McCloskey's initial study of the half eagle varieties appeared in the 1980s, while the quarter eagle varieties have enjoyed no similar publication. McCloskey's work on the half eagles has proven accurate, with only one new variety discovered in over 20 years.

The present study represents an examination of the quarter eagle varieties that Walter Breen previously studied in the 1960s. Breen's work has proven entirely inadequate with many errors. Today we know of 28 individual die varieties of the Classic Head quarter eagles that were minted from 1834 to 1839, including branch mint issues from Charlotte in 1838 and 1839, Dahlonega in 1839, and New Orleans in 1839.

Armed with a working knowledge of the individual varieties, the Heritage Permanent Auction Archives were examined for actual appearances of these varieties. The Heritage Archives provide a database of over 2,500 auction appearances of individual coins in the series. Auction appearances from 1993 to 1998 have no photos online, necessitating a study of the actual auction catalogs. Those appearances beginning in 1999 usually include online photos, easing the burden of study and attribution. Where available, certification serial numbers were tracked to eliminate reappearances, resulting in a net study of 1,348 individual coins. It is that data that indicates the initial rarity factors.

Each issue in the following record includes known varieties, basic attribution notes, and estimated rarity.

The author thanks John McCloskey and Rory Rea for their additional comments, and also for photographs of 1836 Variety 10 and 1837 Variety 17.

1834 Quarter Eagles

There are four known varieties produced from a combination of two obverse dies and four reverse dies. The two obverse dies are distinctive and easily identified.

Attribution Guide



Variety 1 Small Head; straight line of curls at back of head



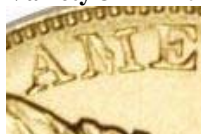
Variety 2 Large Head; interrupted line of curls at back of head



Variety 2 AM widely spaced



Variety 3 AME close; perfect M



Variety 4 AME close; broken M

Variety 1



Obverse 1. Small Head. The straight vertical line of curls at the back of Liberty's head provides immediate identification. The 4 is approximately centered between the lowest curl and border, and that digit is right of center below the curl.

Reverse A. UNITED STATES OF are all well spaced with no letters touching others. AMERICA has AME and RI joined, with the right base of the first A minutely above the left base of M. The lowest arrow solidly joins the right base of the final A. The stem tip is over the right upright of the D, and the lowest arrow feather is over the outer right curve of the primary 2.

Common. This is an extremely common die variety. The Heritage auction study included 165 examples of this variety from a total of 286 appearances of 1834 quarter eagles (58%). The Small Head variety is listed first as it is stylistically different from all others to follow.

Die States:

I. Perfect dies.

II. Perfect obverse. The reverse has a short crack from the wing tip to the border at 2 o'clock.

Variety 2



Obverse 2. Large Head. The indentation in the vertical line of curls at the back of Liberty's head provides immediate identification. The 4 is very close to the lowest hair curl, and is left of center below that curl. Star 2 is boldly recut, while other stars show evidence of minor recutting.

Reverse B. Wide AM. No letters in the legend touch other letters, and the A and M in AMERICA are widely spaced, the A much closer to the right wing. The lowest arrow tip is below the inside left base of the final A. The stem tip extends slightly past center of the D, and the lowest arrow feather is over the right curves of the primary 2.

Common. This common variety appears 65 times in the Heritage study, representing 23% of the 286 appearances of 1834 quarter eagles.

Die States:

I. Perfect dies.

Variety 3



Obverse 2. Large Head.

Reverse C. Perfect M. The A and M in AMERICA are closely spaced, and the M is perfect, including its right diagonal. No letters in the legend touch other letters, although AMERI are all very close. The lowest arrow ends below the inside right base of the final A. The stem tip is over the center of the D, and the lowest arrow feather is over the inside right curve of the primary 2. The reverse has an elongated dentil at 6 o'clock.

Rare. This is the rarest 1834 variety, with only 18 auction appearances found among the 286 1834 quarter eagles studied (6%).

Variety 4



Obverse 2. Large Head.

Reverse D. Broken M. No letters in the legend touch other letters. The M in AMERICA is broken, missing its right diagonal. The lowest arrow ends below the inside right base of the final A. The stem tip ends just left of center above the D, and the lowest arrow feather is over the right curves of the primary 2.

Scarce. Variety 4 is seen more frequently than variety 3, although it is still elusive, with only 38 appearances out of 286 1834 quarter eagles (13%).

Die States:

I. Perfect dies.

1835 Quarter Eagles

Nearly all of the known 1835 quarter eagles are from a single die combination, although two other varieties exist. All three are from a single obverse die, paired with two reverse dies previously used in 1834.

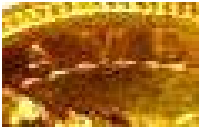
Attribution Guide



Variety 6 AM widely spaced



Variety 5 AME close, broken M



Variety 7 AME close, perfect M, no berry

Variety 5



Obverse 3. The only 1835 obverse die identified. Star 6 points to the curl at the top of the headband. The date is low with the 5 close to the border and far below and left of the lowest hair curl.

Reverse D. Broken M. Previously used for 1834 Variety 4 and described above.

Very Rare. Only two appearances are found in the Heritage Archives, or less than 2% of the 108 total appearances of 1835 quarter eagles.

Variety 6



Obverse 3. The only 1835 obverse die.

Reverse B. Wide AM. Previously used for 1834 Variety 2 and described above.

Common. The Heritage Auction Archives include 108 appearances of 1835 quarter eagles, including 102 appearances of Variety 6, or nearly 95% of all appearances.

Variety 7



Obverse 3. The only 1835 obverse die.

Reverse E. No Berry. The only new reverse die created for 1835 quarter eagles. The branch has no berry, an immediately identifying feature. All letters in the legend are separated, although RI are quite close. The lowest arrow has a point below the inside left base of the final A. The tip of the olive stem ends just right of the upright of the D. The lowest feather ends over the right curves of the primary 2.

Very Rare. Just four different appearances of this variety are found among the 108 1835 quarter eagles studied. That is only a little over 3% of the total.

1836 Quarter Eagles

Three distinct head styles are known as Head of 1834, Head of 1835, and Head of 1837. Once the features of each head style are understood, attribution of the 1836 quarter eagles is greatly simplified. Each individual obverse die of 1836 has a slightly different head style as will be seen below.

The Head of 1834 has a prominent front curl over the L in LIBERTY with star 6 distant from that curl. The upper hair ribbon opposite star 12 is mostly visible below a hair curl. Two variations of the Head of 1834 are identified.

The Head of 1835 has a prominent front curl over the L in LIBERTY with star 6 very close to that curl. The upper hair ribbon opposite star 12 is mostly hidden by a hair curl, with only its end visible.

The Head of 1837 has a shallow or absent front curl. Instead, the hair over the L in LIBERTY sweeps back into a curl over the I, resulting in only three prominent curls at the top of the head, instead of four. Two variations of the Head of 1837 are identified.

The Heritage auction survey provides data that corrects past errors regarding the rarity of each head style, and the varieties of each that are known. The Heritage survey includes 410 different 1836 quarter eagles, including examples of seven different varieties out of eight known varieties.

Attribution Guide



Variety 8 Large Head of 1834



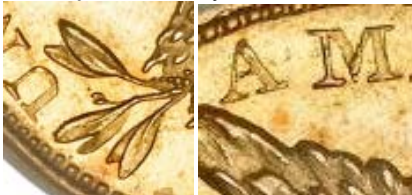
Variety 9 Small Head of 1834



Head of 1835 (usually with a die crack through star 6 and front of headband)



Variety 11 No berry in the branch



Variety 12 With berry; AM widely spaced



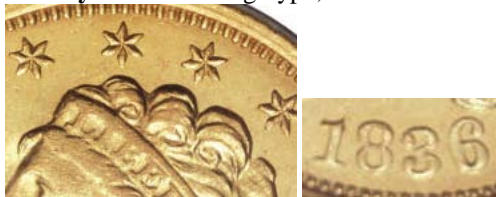
Variety 13 With berry; middle arrowhead entirely left of C



Variety 10 Script 8 logotype; First Head of 1837 (note position of star 6 at corner of headband)



Variety 14 Block 8 logotype; First Head of 1837



Variety 15 Block 8 logotype; Second Head of 1837 (note position of star 6 far from headband)

Variety 8



Obverse 4. Large Head of 1834. Block 8. The combination of the 1834 head style and the block style 8 in the date is sufficient to identify this obverse die. The date is closely spaced with the 36 slightly wider, and the 6 is left of center below the curl. Star 6 points to the lower corner of the headband. This die most closely resembles the Large Head of 1834 with an indentation along the upper curls at the back of the head.

Reverse F. All letters in the legend are separated. The D in UNITED is slightly low. The lowest arrow point is below the inside right base of the final A and is separated from that letter. The stem tip is over the center of the D, and the lowest feather end is entirely right of the primary 2.

Common. This variety appeared 53 times out of the 410 1836 quarter eagles, or nearly 13% of all appearances.

Variety 9



Obverse 5. Small Head of 1834. Script 8. The date is evenly spaced with the 6 slightly left of center below the lowest hair curl. The 3 is slightly low and it has a long center arc that nearly touches the upper left knob of that digit. Star 6 points to the center of the headband. This die most closely resembles the Small Head of 1834 with a vertical line of curls at the upper back of the head.

Reverse B. Wide AM. Previously used for 1834 Variety 2, and described there. Also used for 1835 variety 6. Now in its third use, this reverse die was resurrected in 1836 to create a variety that may only exist in proof. It was also used for 1836 Variety 12.

Extremely Rare. We have only handled one example of this variety, and that appearance is a proof.

Variety 10



Obverse 6. Head of 1837, Script 8. The date is wide with 18 closer than 836. The 1 and 8 are closer to the border than the 3 and 6, with the 6 close to the low curl. The 6 is left of center below the curl. Stars 1, 2, 6, 7, and 10 are each extremely close to the border, and some may touch the border.

Reverse E. No Berry. This die was created in 1835 for variety 7, and is described there.

Extremely Rare. John McCloskey is credited with the discovery of Variety 10. This variety has never been plated in an auction catalog, according to McCloskey's research. He owns the discovery coin and has seen one other.

Variety 11



Obverse 7. Head of 1835. Only one Head of 1835 obverse die is known. The date has a Script 8 with the 6 left of center below the lowest hair curl. Star 6 points to the front hair curl above the headband. There is usually a die crack from the southwest point of star 6 to the headband, lower hair curls, ear, and in late states crossing the curl just below the upper hair ribbon toward star 12.

Reverse E. No Berry. This die was created in 1835 for variety 7, and is described there.

Common. With 175 appearances in the Heritage archives, this variety is seen more often than any other in the Classic Head quarter eagle series. It represents more than 40% of all 1836 quarter eagle appearances.

Variety 12



Obverse 7. Head of 1835.

Reverse B. Wide AM. Initially used for 1834 Variety 2 and described above.

Rare. This die combination is infrequently seen, with only 12 appearances out of 410 1836 quarter eagles, or about 3%.

Variety 13



Obverse 7. Head of 1835.

Reverse G. Wide AMERICA. The legend is widely spaced with all letters well separated. The lowest arrow point is below the outside left base of the final A, and the middle arrow point is below the space between I and C. The stem tip is past center over the D, and the end of the lowest feather is well right of the primary 2.

Scarce. This variety is seen from time to time, but it remains elusive. Only 30 examples were found among 410 1836 quarter eagles, or about 7% of the total.

Variety 14



Obverse 8. First Head of 1837. Block 8. Star 6 points to the hair above the headband. Compare to the other Head of 1837 obverse with star 6 pointing below the center of the headband.

Reverse E. No Berry. This die was created in 1835 for variety 7, and is described there.

Very Rare. This variety is infrequently encountered with only six appearances (five different coins) in the Heritage auction survey, or less than 2% of the 410 listings examined.

Variety 15



Obverse 9. Second Head of 1837. Block 8. Star 6 points below the center of the headband.

Reverse F.

Common. This is the second most common 1836 variety, with 132 appearances out of 410 listings, or about 30% of the total. It is also the third most common Classic Head quarter eagle variety. Breen incorrectly called the 1836 Head of 1837 quarter eagles rare.

1837 Quarter Eagles

Three die varieties are known of the 1837 quarter eagles including one common variety and two extremely rare varieties. The three varieties combine two obverse dies and three reverse dies, all new to the series.

Attribution Guide



Variety 18 Two lines in each shield stripe



Three lines in each shield stripe



Variety 16 Arrowhead joins final A



Variety 17 Arrowhead and final A separated

Variety 16



Obverse 10. The 7 is centered below the left edge of the lowest hair curl and close to that curl, distant from the border. Star 6 points to the top corner of the headband. Star 7 points to the right half of the first curl.

Reverse A. Reverse A of 1834 was brought back into use three years later for this die marriage. **Three Pale Gules.** UNITED STATES OF are all well spaced with no letters touching others. AMERICA has AME and RI joined, with the right base of the first A minutely above the left base of M. The lowest arrow solidly joins the right base of the final A. The stem tip is over the right upright of the D, and the lowest arrow feather is over the outer right curve of the primary 2.

Common. The Heritage auction survey of 86 coins includes 85 examples of this variety, no examples of variety 17, and one of variety 18.

Variety 17



Obverse 10

Reverse F. Three Pale Gules. All letters in the legend are separated. The D in UNITED is slightly low. The lowest arrow point is below the inside right base of the final A and is separated from that letter. The stem tip is over the center of the D, and the lowest feather end is entirely right of the primary 2.

Extremely Rare. The only appearance known at this time is from Bowers and Merena (3/1987), lot 42; reappearing in the 1992 ANA Sale (Heritage, 8/1992), lot 472. John McCloskey owns a second example, illustrated here.

Variety 18



Obverse 11. The 7 is centered below the left edge of the lowest curl, and about centered between the curl and the border. Star 6 points to the top of the headband, and star 7 points to the center of the front hair curl.

Reverse H. Two Pale Gules. All letters in the legend are separated, although several are close. The lowest arrow tip is below the inside right base of the final A. The stem tip is over the extreme left corner of the D, and the lowest arrow ends over the center of the primary 2.

Extremely Rare. Only three examples are known to us, and it appears that all three are proof, one damaged.

1838 Quarter Eagles

Only one die variety is known.

Variety 19



Obverse 12. The top of the 8 is very close to the lowest hair curl. Star 6 points to the top of the curl below the headband. Several stars are recut, especially stars 8, 9, and 10.

Reverse H. Two Pale Gules. This is the 1837 Variety 18 reverse die originally used for proofs of that date.

Common. The Heritage survey includes 68 examples of this issue.

1838-C Quarter Eagles

Only one die variety is known.

Variety 20



Obverse 13. Repunched C. The mintmark is boldly repunched and centered over the left half of the 3. The first cut touches the top of that digit. The date is well above the border, and the final 8 nearly touches the lowest hair curl. Star 1 is recut. Star 6 points to the lower half of the headband.

Reverse I. ME is solidly joined and all other letters in the legend are separated. The lowest arrow tip is below the inside right base of the final A. The stem tip is centered over the upright of the D, and the lowest arrow feather ends midway between the primary 2 and the numerator.

Common. The Heritage survey includes 59 appearances of this issue.

1839 Quarter Eagles

Only one die variety is known.

Variety 21



Obverse 14. The 8 and 9 in the date show evidence of repunching, leading some to call this an 1839/8 overdate, although it is actually an 1839/9. The 9 is very close to the hair curl, and distant from the border. Star 6 points to the bottom half of the headband, and stars 6 through 9 each show minor recutting.

Reverse F. Three Pale Gules. All letters in the legend are separated. The D in UNITED is slightly low. The lowest arrow point is below the inside right base of the final A and is separated from that letter. The stem tip is over the center of the D, and the lowest feather end is entirely right of the primary 2. This reverse was used for 1836 Variety 8, 1836 Variety 15, and 1837 Variety 17.

Scarce. The Heritage survey includes 48 examples of this issue.

1839-C Quarter Eagles

Three different varieties are known from two obverse dies and three reverse dies, one that was earlier used for 1838-C.

Attribution Guide



Variety 22 Mintmark is over space between 8 and 3



Variety 23 Mintmark is over left half of 3



Variety 23 Stem tip is over right upright of D



Variety 24 Stem tip is over left serif of D

Variety 22



Obverse 15. Mintmark over 83. The mintmark is nearly centered over the 8 and 3, farther left than on Obverse 15. The 3 is boldly repunched and the 9 also shows evidence of repunching. The recut star 6 points to the curl below the headband. Star 3 is also recut.

Reverse I. This die is reused after its use at Charlotte in 1838.

Common. The Heritage survey reviewed 111 examples of the 1839-C quarter eagles, including 75 appearances of this variety.

Variety 23



Obverse 16. Mintmark over 3. The mintmark is over the left side of the 3. The date is normal without repunching. Star 6 points to the top of the curl below the headband.

Reverse J. The first S is recut and ME are solidly joined. All other letters are separated. The lowest arrow tip joins the inside right base of the final A, and the middle arrow tip joins the C at its center. The stem tip is just right of the upright of the D. The end of the lowest arrow feather is over the outer right curve of the primary 2. The berry is small and detached.

Very Rare. Only eight appearances were among the 111 examples in the Heritage survey, representing just 7% of all 1839-C quarter eagles.

Variety 24



Obverse 16. Mintmark over 3.

Reverse K. No Berry. The branch is weak with all three leaf pairs detached. ME are lightly joined and all other letters are separated. TES are very close. The lowest arrow tip joins the center of the final A, and the middle arrow tip joins the C left of center. The stem tip is over the left serif of the D, and the end of the lowest arrow feather is over the outer right curve of the primary 2.

Scarce. 28 of the 111 auction appearances of 1839-C quarter eagles are this variety.

1839-D Quarter Eagles

This is the only appearance of the Classic Head design quarter eagles at the Dahlonega Mint. Two varieties are known from a single obverse die and two reverse dies.

Attribution Guide



Variety 25 Bold stem over left serif of D



Variety 26 Weak stem over left upright of D

Variety 25



Obverse 17. A large D mintmark is left of center of the 3. The 9 shows slight evidence of repunching; however, this is not an overdate. That digit appears to touch the lowest hair curl. Star 1 is recut. Star 6 points to the lower corner of the headband.

Reverse L. Bold Stem. The branch has a small berry. All letters are separated with a few close, and the D of UNITED is slightly low. The lowest arrow tip is solidly merged with the entire right base of the final A, and the middle arrow tip is solidly merged with the bottom of the C. The tip of the bold stem is over the extreme left serif of the D, and the lowest arrow feather ends between the primary 2 and the numerator.

Scarce. Just 22 of the 64 auction appearances of 1839-D quarter eagles are this variety, about one-third of the total.

Variety 26



Obverse 17.

Reverse M. Weak Stem. The branch has no berry. All letters in the legend are separated. The lowest arrow tip is below the inside right base of the final A, and just misses that letter. The middle arrow tip joins the bottom of the C left of center. The tip of the weak stem is over the left upright of the D, and the end of the lowest feather is midway between the primary 2 and the numerator.

Scarce. About two thirds of all 1839-D quarter eagles are this variety.

1839-O Quarter Eagles

These are the only Classic Head gold coins of either denomination that were minted at the fledgling New Orleans Mint. Two varieties are known from two obverse dies and two reverse dies.

Attribution Guide



Variety 27 Date high above border; wide fraction



Variety 28 Date close to border; close fraction

Variety 27



Obverse 18. High Date. The date is high in the field, with the 9 slightly closer to the hair curl than the border. The O is centered over the left half of the 3. Star 6 points to the top of the curl below the headband. Star 12 is boldly recut.

Reverse N. Wide Fraction. The fraction has the numerator and the denominator each distant from the fraction bar. ME are lightly joined with all other letters separated. The lowest arrow tip is below the inside right base of the final A. The arrow shafts are weak and incomplete. The weak stem tip is over the left serif of the D, and the lowest arrow feather ends over the outer right curve of the primary 2.

Common. A total of 108 appearances of 1839-O quarter eagles in the Heritage survey include 73 examples of this variety.

Variety 28



Obverse 19. Low Date. The date is low and closely spaced with the 9 closer to the border. The O is centered over the left half of the 3. Star 6 points to the lower corner of the headband.

Reverse O. Close Fraction. The numerator and denominator are both joined to the fraction bar. The olive branch has a small detached berry. All letters are separated, although AMERI are close. The lowest arrow tip is below the inside right base of the final A. The tip of the bold stem is over the left serif of the D, and nearly touches that letter. The end of the lowest arrow feather is minutely right of the primary 2.

Scarce. About one third of all 1839-O quarter eagles are this variety.