

Contemporary Counterfeit Shield Nickel Families

— Winston Zack —
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Version 4.0
Update April 2017

Prior Versions

Version 1.0 (2016) – 12 pages

- Family 1 = 9 varieties (6 obverses, 5 reverses)
- Family 2 = 4 varieties (3 obverses, 2 reverses)
- Family 3 = 11 varieties (7 obverses, 6 reverses)

Version 2.0 (2016) – 17 pages

Attribution page

Families named

Updated variety descriptions

X cancel marks analysis

- Ducks Family = 9 varieties (6 obverses, 5 reverses) (no change)
- Stooges Family = 6 varieties (3 obverses, 3 reverses)
 - Two additional varieties, 1869 2-P and 1869 2-H
 - New reverse die, 'P'
- Maniacs Family = 11 varieties (7 obverses, 6 reverses) (no change)

Version 3.0 (December 2016) – 17 pages

Updated variety descriptions with identifiable features

Improved photographs of many varieties

- Ducks Family = 9 varieties (6 obverses, 5 reverses) (no change)
- Stooges Family = 6 varieties (3 obverses, 3 reverses) (no change)
- Maniacs Family = 11 varieties (6 obverses, 7 reverses)
 - One fewer obverse die – 1875 obverse 1 and 3 in Fletcher are the same obverse, and obverse attribution codes updated accordingly
 - New reverse die, 'Q'
 - New variety – 1875 1-Q (11 reverse stars)
 - Old 1875 3-N is now 1875 1-N
 - Old 1875 4-O is now 1875 3-O
 - Old 1875 4-N is now 1875 3-N
 - Old 1875 5-O is now 1875 4-O

Version 4.0 (April 2016) – 19 pages

Prior versions summary of changes

Families table

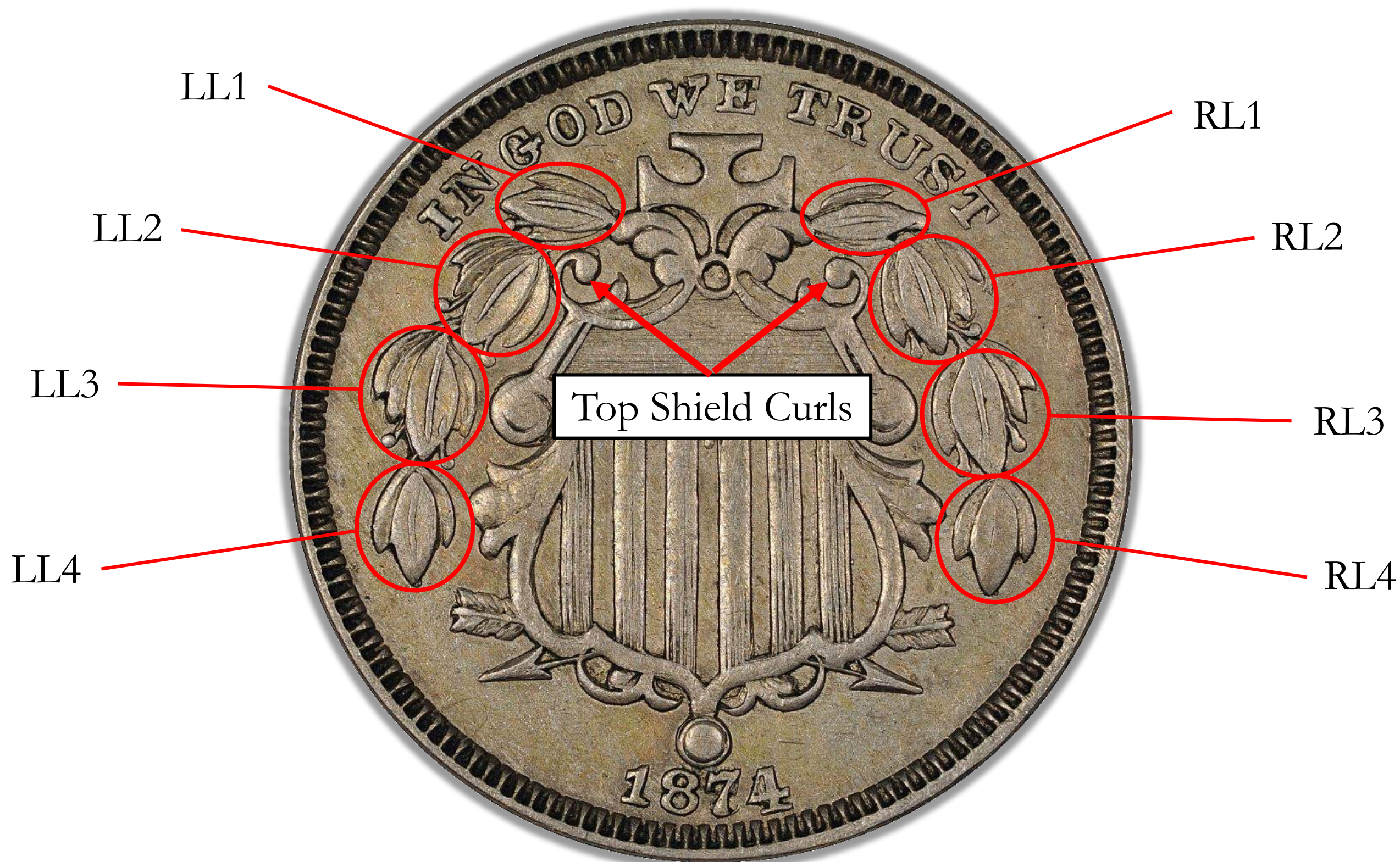
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Attribution

The Obverse is designed with a central Shield with a cross-design on top, a left and right pointed arrow at the bottom, and four sets of left and right leaves on the side. The top also has the motto, and the bottom has the date. The left (L) and right (R) leaf bundles are numbered 1 to 4, with 1 starting at the top, and abbreviated as 'LL#' for 'left leaf #' or RL# for 'right leaf #'.



The Reverse is designed with the denomination '5' in the center, surrounded by 13 six-pointed stars, and the outside reads UNITED STATES OF AMERICA with CENTS at the bottom. The stars are numbered 1 to 13, starting with star 1 at 12 o'clock and progressing clockwise. It is easiest to attribute reverse dies based on the different star and letter orientations.



Families

	Ducks	Stooges	Maniacs
1867	1-A		
	1-B		
	2-C		
	3-D		
	3-E		
1868	1-B		
	2-B		
	1-C		
1869	1-B		
	2-P		
	2-G		
	2-H		
1870	1-G		
	1-H		
	2-H		
1874	1-J		
	2-K		
1875	1-K		
	1-L		
	1-N		
	1-Q		
	2-L		
	2-M		
	2-N		
	3-N		
	3-O		
	4-O		

Ducks Family

Counterfeit shield nickel varieties from the Ducks family are known with the dates 1867 (three known obverse dies), 1868 (two known obverse dies) and 1869 (one known obverse die), and four known reverse dies. They are characterized by a larger date, and a ‘Fancy’ style of 8 in the date (as opposed to the ‘Script’ style 8; see Figure 1) which some have attributed to a modified ‘S’ letter punch. Some reverse dies also have letters and devices boldly repunched.



Figure 1. Ducks family counterfeit with Fancy 8 (left), Stooges family counterfeit with script 8 (right)

This counterfeiter or gang appears to have continuously used dies one after another as they wore out since the hypothesized emission sequence (shown on pages 6-8) follows a common die sequence; it is unlikely that the emission order is reversed given die state analysis for some of the varieties. There is one gap in the die sequence between 1867 2-C and 1867 3-D or 1867 3-E which may suggest a discrete break in die use, but more likely there is at least one variety that has not been recorded which bridges this gap, such as a variety composed of the following die combination(s) 1867 2-D or 1867 2-E. Additional varieties may be found for the beginning or end of the die sequence.

The quantity of obverse dies for each date along with the 1870 newspaper article (Figure 2) almost certainly suggests these counterfeits were made around 1869; no earlier newspaper accounts could be found describing counterfeit shield nickels struck from dies – all were said to be cast. This counterfeiter likely targeted the most common date in circulation at the time, 1867, and diversified his production with the similarly common 1868 and new 1869 dates to reduce suspicion. The counterfeiter appears to have purposely avoided the Variety 1 reverse (with Rays) given the added complexity in die production, and they may have realized the dies would not last as long or the production would not be of such high quality with these added details. This counterfeiter clearly had a more sophisticated operation than most given how many dies were engraved and the ability to strike pieces with enough pressure. All of the analyzed planchets this counterfeiter used were made of a standard German silver (copper, nickel, zinc) alloy (data from Winston Zack x-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis). German silver also appears to have improved the overall quality of these counterfeit nickels and rarely, if ever, do these appear with heavy corrosion like many of the real coins exhibit.

Some of the varieties from the Ducks family exhibit a large 'X' cancel mark on each side (Figure 3), almost certainly identifying them as counterfeits. Could these pieces have been cancelled at the New York Sub-treasury where they were first identified in the newspaper article? More research is needed to answer this question.

Varieties are coded by date. Each unique obverse is given a number, and each unique reverse is given a separate letter; some sides (dies) were used to make more than one variety and thus share the same obverse number or reverse letter. Arrows between varieties represent a shared side, but the order presented does not necessarily represent the emission order. Not all varieties have likely been reported, and as such the variety codes currently listed may change to improve the chronological sequence of die marriage codes and die emission sequence.



Figure 3. Cancelled Ducks family counterfeit shield nickel.

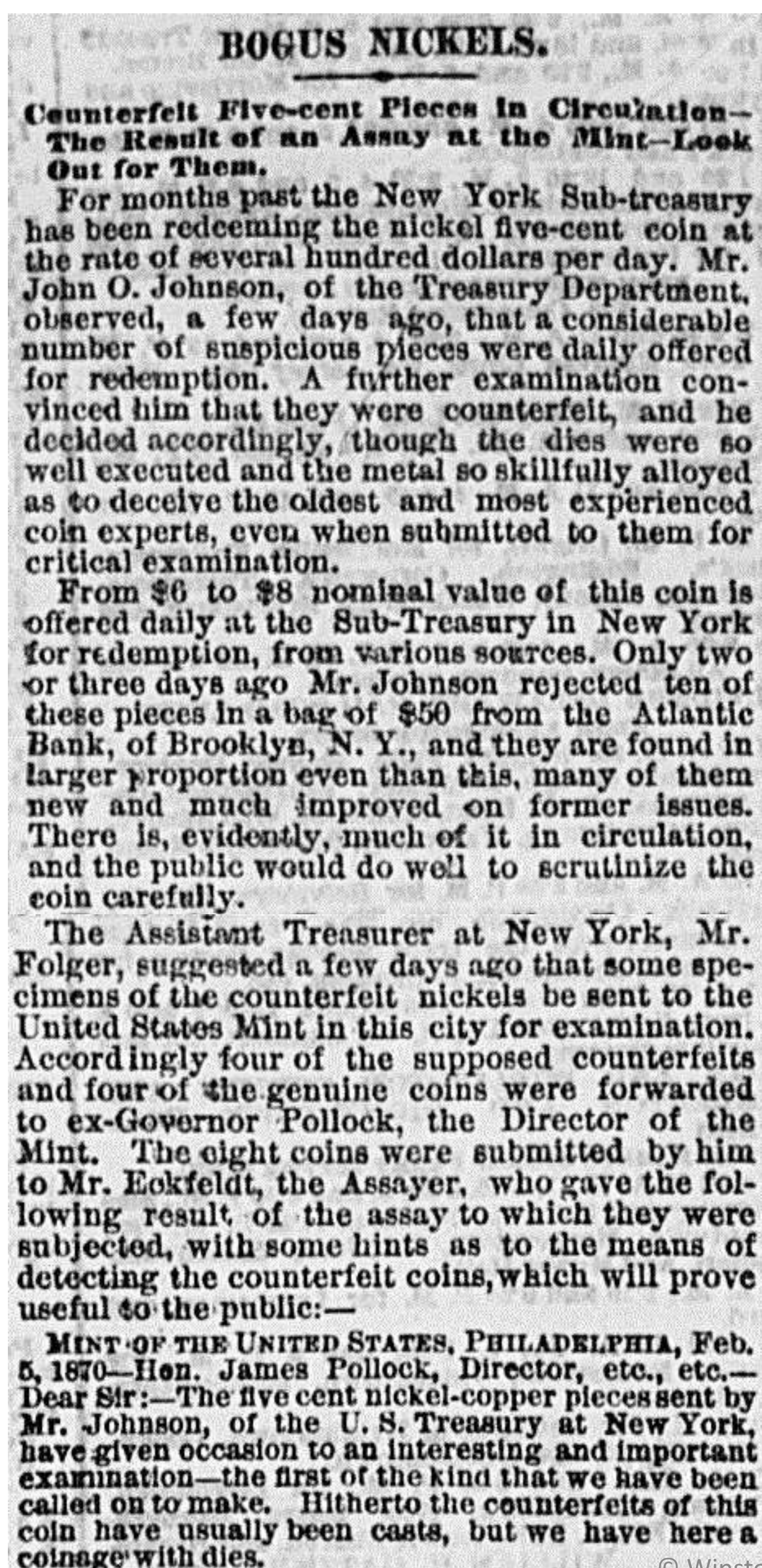


Figure 2. *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia, PA), February 12, 1870.

There were eight pieces. At first sight the general appearance as to engraving and color led to the belief that four were genuine and four counterfeit, which, on further trial, proved to be the fact. Our most ready test with all kinds of coin is the weight, which counterfeiters can seldom bring out right. The true weight is 77 1-8 grains. Three of the pieces were grossly in error, being under 70 grains; a fourth suspected piece happened to be just right. This last piece was subjected to assay, and proved to contain 14 per cent. nickel, instead of 25 per cent., the lawful proportion.

It also contained a large proportion of zinc; making in fact the usual "German silver." The dies were the same as in the other three, except the date, 1869; the others being '68 and '67. All these four pieces have a yellowish tint, and the engraving is false and coarse, but not sufficiently so to be detected by a hasty inspection. On the whole, it is a dangerous issue, and proves that, with more skill in engraving and alloying, great frauds could be practised.

The genuine pieces were close to the legal weight. In this respect we have always found an admirable conformity of our five-cent pieces, as often as we have had occasion to try it. The specific gravity of the good pieces is 8.98, or might be called 9.00, of the bad pieces, 8.72, which in the hands of a careful weigher would be a sure and conclusive test. The pieces, except the one assayed, are returned. Respectfully yours, J. R. ECKFELDT, Assayer.

Director Pollock, in forwarding the report of the Assayer to New York, wrote as follows:—

"In addition to what Mr. Eckfeldt has said, I may say as a further test, you will find the motto, 'In God we trust,' a good deal larger in the counterfeit than in the genuine. The yellow color of the counterfeit will also afford some test, etc. This appearance is caused by the presence of zinc, which is not in the genuine."

It is to be hoped that all persons through whose hands any considerable quantity of five-cent pieces pass will examine them in the light of the suggestions given above, and use their endeavors to trace the counterfeits to their source. The counterfeiting of five-cent pieces is about as small a piece of disreputable business that a man can engage in, and all who are engaged in the business should be brought to grief as soon as possible. There is doubtless quite as much of the bogus coin in circulation here as in New York.

Ducks Family



1867
1-A



Obv. WE close and doubled, US doubled in TRUST.
Shared by 1867 1-B
Rev. Repunched TED, T2, A2, S3, T4, Star 8.
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #1 and SNV S2-9000.



1867
1-B



Obv. WE close and doubled, US doubled in TRUST.
Shared by 1867 1-A.
Rev. Star 7 points to left half of T4.
Shared by 1868 1-B, 1868 2-B, 1869 1-B
Notes: Late die state obverse cud over TRU in TRUST. This variety is also known as Fletcher #3 and is not yet recorded in SNV.



1868
2-B



Obv. Berry below right side of N.
Rev. Star 7 points to left half of T4.
Shared by 1867 1-B, 1868 1-B, 1869 1-B.
Notes: This variety is known with an 'X' cancel mark. This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is not yet recorded in SNV.



1869
1-B



Obv. Repunched WE.
Rev. Star 7 points to left half of T4.
Shared by 1867 1-B, 1868 1-B, 1868 2-B.
Notes: This variety is known with an 'X' cancel mark. Shattered obverse die. This variety is also known as Fletcher #1 and SNV S5-9000.

(Continues below)



1868
1-B

Obv. Berry below left base of N. S1 repunched north twice.

Shared by 1868 1-C.

Rev. Star 7 points to left half of T4.

Shared by 1867 1-B, 1868 2-B, 1869 1-B

Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S2-9000. Known with clashed dies – the '5' can be seen outlined within the horizontal shield lines.



1868
1-C

Obv. Berry below left base of N. S1 repunched north twice.

Rev. Star 7 repunched, and points to right half of T4.

Shared by 1867 2-C.

Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #1 and is not yet recorded in SNV.



1867
2-C

Obv. WE wide.

Rev. S2 and Star 7 repunched.

Shared by 1868 1-A.

Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #4 and SNV S2-9003.



1867
3-D



Obv. Repunched 18 in date; top-left berry below center of N in IN.
Shared by 1867 3-E.
Rev. Star 3 below right base of A2.
Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S2-9004.



1867
3-E



Obv. Repunched 18 in date; top-left berry below center of N in IN.
Shared by 1867 3-D.
Rev. Star 3 below left base of M.
Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S2-9001.

Stooges Family

Counterfeit shield nickel varieties from the Stooges family are known with the dates 1869 (one known obverse die) and 1870 (two known obverse dies), and three known reverse dies. They are characterized and distinguishable by a small date and a thinner 7, smaller letters in the reverse legend, and the dates are occasionally weakly struck, especially for 1870 dated pieces. Many of the known examples are found in remarkably high grade possibly suggesting many were quickly removed from circulation.

This counterfeiter or gang may have continuously used dies one after another as they wore out since the hypothesized emission sequence (shown on pages 10-11) generally follows a common die sequence; one exception is a newly discovered variety, 1869 2-H, which shows that this counterfeiter did mix-and-match dies on occasion and did not strike all varieties in a regular emission order – it also appears that this may have been the last use of 1869 obverse die 2 since there is a die crack across the right side of the shield. Additional varieties may be found for the beginning, middle, or end of this die sequence.

The condensed period of dates on these counterfeits may suggest they were made around or shortly after 1870. No historical documentation has yet been found which may indicate when and where these counterfeits were made. All of the analyzed planchets this counterfeiter used were made of a standard German silver alloy (data from Winston Zack XRF analysis).

At least one variety, 1869 2-G, exhibits a large 'X' cancel mark on each side (Figure 4), almost certainly identifying them as counterfeits. Could these pieces have been cancelled at the New York Sub-treasury along with some of the Ducks family counterfeits? It seems nearly certain that both the Ducks and Stooges family counterfeits were cancelled by the same person or organization, and were probably made in or around the New York area. More research is needed to answer this question.



Figure 4. Cancelled Stooges family counterfeit shield nickel.

Stooges Family



1869
2-P



Obv. ST repunched south.
Shared by 1869 2-G.

Rev. Star 2 below left base of F, and Star 13 below left base of A1.

Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is not yet recorded in SNV.



1869
2-G



Obv. ST repunched south.

Rev. Repunched R and C, Star 1 points between E2 and S2, Star 2 below center of F, Star 13 below center of A.

Shared by 1870 1-G.

Notes: At least three examples of this variety are known with an 'X' cancel mark. This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S5-9001.



1870
1-G



Obv. Berry between ST in TRUST, S repunched.

Shared by 1870 1-G.

Rev. Repunched R and C, Star 1 points between E2 and S2, Star 2 below center of F, Star 13 below center of A.

Shared by 1869 2-G.

Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S1-9004.



1870
1-H



Obv. Berry between ST in TRUST, S repunched.

Shared by 1870 1-G

Rev. Repunched U, A2, S3, Star 5 points below center of C.

Shared by 1869 2-H, 1870 2-H.

Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #2 and SNV S1-9000.

(Continues below)

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1870
2-H



1869
2-H



Obv. Berry below T2 in TRUST.

Rev. Repunched U, A2, S3, Star 5 points below center of C. Star 10 points to left edge of N.

Shared by 1869 2-H, 1870 1-H.

Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #1 and SNV S1-9001.

Obv. ST repunched south.

Shared by 1869 2-P, 1869 2-G

Rev. Repunched U, A2, S3, Star 5 points below center of C.

Shared by 1870 1-H, 1870 2-H.

Notes: Obverse die crack through right half of shield. This variety is was not recorded in Fletcher #1 or SNV.

Maniacs Family

Counterfeit shield nickel varieties from the Maniacs family are known with the dates 1874 (two known obverse dies) and 1875 (four known obverse dies), and seven known reverse dies. They are characterized and distinguishable by unevenly set letters, dates and devices, as well as blocky reverse letters including a 'boxy' style 'S' punch with a flat top and bottom.

This counterfeiter or gang appears to have used dies at random. Die pairs appear to have been put into service for a period of time, and then once they were removed they were replaced with a new die sequence.

Finally, it is quite likely that the counterfeits from the Maniacs family are described in various 1875 and 1876 newspaper articles and a *American Journal of Numismatics* articles (Figure 5). Maniacs family counterfeits are only known dated 1874 and 1875, with most being 1875, and no other hand-cut die counterfeit shield nickels are known with these two dates. The use of these two dates is interesting in that the Philadelphia Mint production was not relatively high, thus potentially limiting the amount seen in general circulation. Further, the article describes the counterfeiters die work quite well, which matches that seen in this Family. From this information it is reasonable to deduce that this article describes the Maniacs family shield nickel counterfeits. Additional research is currently underway to see if the arrest of a group of four counterfeiters in 1875 is related to the counterfeits described below. The planchets this counterfeiter used were made of a standard German silver alloy (data from Winston Zack XRF analysis).

COUNTERFEIT NICKELS.

A COUNTERFEIT five-cent piece is in circulation in New York and probably elsewhere, which is worthless only because not made at the Government Mint. Some of the counterfeits were recently sent to the Superintendent of the Mint in Philadelphia by the Treasurer for the purpose of making inquiries and to test their value. The Superintendent says the counterfeits have been assayed and found to contain copper and nickel in the legal proportion, that the coins are of proper weight, size, and finish, and just as valuable as good coin. The execution of the work is poorly done. The circle beneath the cross in the genuine is well defined, in the counterfeit it is indistinct and touches the scroll work. The cross is entirely out of line, and the words, "In God we trust," are very irregular. The dates are nearly all 1875, a few are 1874. It is noticed that most of the coins are received from the west side of the city of New York, giving the impression that the factory is in that neighborhood or in New Jersey. Many come through the car conductors, and a number from the ferries.

Figure 5. The *American Journal of Numismatics*. July 1876.

Maniacs Family



1874
1-J



Obv. The 'W' in WE is closer to the center of the top shield cross.
Rev. Star 4 below left base of R.
Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S1-9003.



1874
2-K



Obv. The 'W' in WE is on the left edge of the top shield cross.
Rev. Star 4 below right edge of E3.
Shared by 1875 1-K.
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #1, and is also known as SNV S1-9000.



1875
1-K



Obv. Top Shield curls nearly touching top set of leaves.
Shared by 1875 1-L, 1875 1-N, 1875 1-Q.
Rev. Star 4 below right edge of E3.
Shared by 1874 2-K.
Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S1-9006.



1875
1-L



Obv. Top Shield curls nearly touching top set of leaves.
Shared by 1875 1-K, 1875 1-N, 1875 1-Q
Rev. Star 7 below center of T3 in CENTS, Star 1 below right base of E2.
Shared by 1875 2-L.
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #5 and SNV S1-9003.

(Continues below)



Obv. Top Shield curls nearly touching top set of leaves.
Shared by 1875 1-K, 1875 1-L, 1875 1-Q
Rev. Star 1 below center of E2, Star 10 below center of U.
Shared by 1875 2-N, 1875 3-N
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #4 and is not yet recorded in SNV. (Obverse 1 and 3, as listed in Fletcher, are the same.)



Obv. Top Shield curls nearly touching top set of leaves.
Shared by 1875 1-K, 1875 1-L, 1875 1-N
Rev. 11 stars.
Notes: This variety was not listed in Fletcher, and is not yet recorded in SNV.



Obv. Left leaf below right base of N.
Shared by 1875 2-M, 1875 2-N.
Rev. Star 7 below center of T3 in CENTS, Star 1 below right base of E2.
Shared by 1875 1-L.
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #3 and is not yet recorded in SNV.



Obv. Left leaf below right base of N.
Shared by 1875 2-L, 1875 2-N.
Rev. Star 3 below left base of M, Star 10 below space between UN,
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #1 and is not yet recorded in SNV.

(Continues below)



1875
2-N



Obv. Left leaf below right base of N.
Shared by 1875 2-L, 1875 2-M.
Rev. Star 1 below center of E2, Star 10 below center of U.
Shared by 1875 1-N, 1875 3-N.
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #2 and SNV S1-9001.



1875
3-N



Obv. Left leaf below center of N, right berry below S.
Shared by 1875 3-O.
Rev. Star 1 below center of E2, Star 10 below center of U.
Shared by 1875 1-N, 1875 2-N.
Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S1-9000.



1875
3-O



Obv. Left leaf below center of N, right berry below S.
Shared by 1875 3-O.
Rev. Star 5 between CA, Star 8 points to top left corner of E4 in CENTS.
Shared by 1875 4-O.
Notes: This variety is also known as Fletcher #6, and is not yet recorded in SNV.



1875
4-O



Obv. Left leaf below center of N, berry below left base of T2 in TRUST.
Rev. Star 5 between CA, Star 8 points to top left corner of E4 in CENTS.
Shared by 1875 3-O.
Notes: This variety was not recorded in Fletcher, and is also known as SNV S1-9002.

‘X’ Cancel Marks on Counterfeit Shield Nickels

Several counterfeit Shield nickels are known with a ‘X’ cancel mark on them. It is nearly certain that this ‘X’ marked these nickels as counterfeits for public awareness. Why these counterfeits were not immediately removed from circulation is unknown. And who, or what organization, marked these pieces with the ‘X’ is also elusive.

It would make the most sense that a bank or other financial institution marked these counterfeits with the ‘X’ in order to avoid a negative financial balance. We know that the New York Sub-treasury handled many counterfeit Shield nickels dated 1867, 1868 and 1869 based on the February 12, 1870 newspaper account in *The Evening Telegraph* (Figure 2). That newspaper account mentions that the New York Sub-treasury sent five questionable examples to the Philadelphia Mint for an examination of authenticity and assay. All five pieces were found to be counterfeit, one was destroyed during the assay process, and the remaining four were returned, rather than outright confiscated, to the New York Sub-treasury. Right now it is pure speculation that the New York Sub-treasury marked these pieces with the ‘X’, but it seems fairly certain that financial institutions were not willing to take a loss from receiving counterfeits coins, and the Philadelphia Mint had no authority to confiscate counterfeits coins.

The ‘X’ cancellation mark is known on at least three varieties of counterfeit Shield nickels, two from Family 1 and one from Family 2. The two varieties from Family 1 with ‘X’ marks are next to each other in the estimated emission sequence. Only one example with the ‘X’ mark is known from each of these varieties. So far, no earlier or later varieties from the emission sequence of Family 1 are known with this cancellation mark. Further, the only example with a complete ‘X’ mark, with all the feet of the ‘X’ intact, is known on 1868 2-B. In addition, three examples of 1869 2-G are known with the ‘X’ mark, but the ‘X’ mark used on these have some of their feet missing.

Questions still remain about these two families and why some varieties have the ‘X’ mark on them and others do not. Did the Family 2 counterfeiters produce more counterfeits per die marriage than Family 1 counterfeiters thus explaining why 1869 2-G is known by three examples with the ‘X’ versus 1868 2-B and 1869 2-B known by only one example? Were Family 2 counterfeits made closer to the source of the ‘X’ mark thus explaining why more examples from this family are known with the ‘X’ mark? Were Family 1 counterfeits made shortly before Family 2 counterfeits, thus explaining the Figure 2 newspaper account? Or were the ‘1869’-dated pieces from that newspaper account referencing varieties from Family 2 rather than the one known 1869-dated variety from Family 1, especially since it is presumed the 1869 variety from Family 1 shattered early in its production sequence? Did Family 1 and Family 2 counterfeiters know to each other and/or have the same German silver planchet supplier?

In another perspective, some counterfeit varieties may have been exclusively released into circulation in specific locations, and thus some varieties would not have easily circulated in the location where the ‘X’ cancellations marks originated. But all things being equal, if these counterfeit nickel varieties were quickly recognized by the public, which it appears they were, it could be expected that the ‘X’ marks were put on varieties made earlier in the emission sequence rather than later because pieces made earlier in an emission sequence would most likely be released into circulation before pieces made later in the emission sequence.

The emission sequences of the Family 1 and Family 2 counterfeit varieties with the ‘X’ marks were likely made at or around the same time, especially to be cancelled by presumably the same person or organization. Those counterfeit varieties from Family 1 and Family 2 without the ‘X’ mark from later in their estimated emission sequence may suggest the practice of using this ‘X’ cancellation mark was quickly abandoned. Although the sample size of counterfeits surviving with this ‘X’ mark is small (n=8) and the provenance for the ‘X’ mark speculative, the overall evidence may suggest that this ‘X’ cancellation mark was used for a limited time early in 1870 and possibly by the New York Sub-treasury.

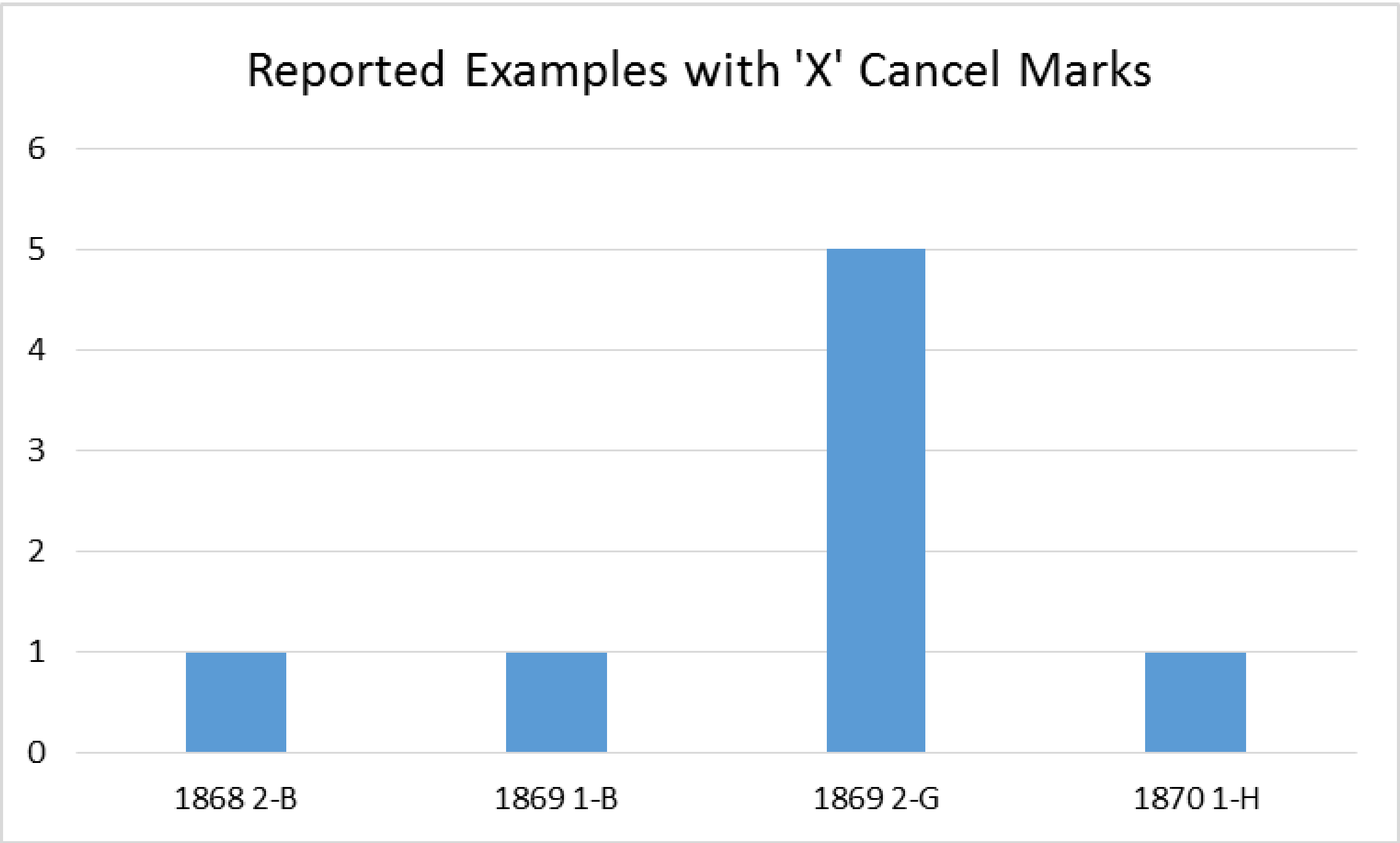


Photo References:

- Winston Zack: 1867 1-A, 1867 3-D, 1868 1-B, 1869 1-B, 1869 2-P, 1870 1-H, 1874 2-K, 1875 1-L, 1875 1-Q, 1875 2-L, 1875 2-N, 1865 3-N, 1875 3-O, 1875 4-O.
- Fletcher (1994): 1867 1-B, 1875 1-K, 1875 1-N, 1875 2-M.
- Dennnis Wierzba: 1867 2-C, 1868 1-C, 1870 2-H.
- Howard Spindel: 1867 3-E, 1874 1-J.
- ‘boredlisteningtoyou’: 1868 2-B.
- Bradley Meadows: 1870 1-H w/’X’ cancel mark.
- eBay: 1869 2-G, 1870 1-G.

**** If you have any examples which are higher grade and/or the photograph is in black-and-white (i.e. Fletcher photos), please let me know so that I can arrange to photograph them and update this document.**

Publications:

Fletcher, Edward L. 1994. *The Shield Five Cent Series*. Dead End Publishing. Ormond Beach, Florida.

Digest of Official Opinions of the Attorneys-General of the United States: Covering Volumes 17 to 25, Inclusive 1881-1906. (discussion of laws on counterfeiting, and forfeiture of said counterfeit coins; pp. 124)

“Treasury Stamp of Condemnation” – ‘X’ Cancel marks

Counterfeit Nickels. *American Journal of Numismatics* (New York) July 1876. Pp 12.

Bogus Nickels. *The Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia, PA) 12 February 1870. Pp 8.

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