

Third Obverse Die Identified for Proof 1867 Rays Nickel

by John Dannreuther

In 1996, when given a chance to evaluate a group of PCGS graded Proof 1867 With Rays nickels, the author was ecstatic at the opportunity to examine multiple examples of this legendary rarity. At the time, most estimates placed the mintage at around 25, with some experts estimating the surviving population at as few as 15 examples. As it turns out, these estimates were too low, but at the time they seemed accurate – a wrong assumption, to be sure. In fact, the 1996 article about this elusive issue has been updated on several occasions. In 1996, it was a real surprise to find that there was more than one obverse die used for the Proof 1867 Rays Nickel. It was unthinkable that the original data seemed to indicate that there were three different obverse dies. So, the data was “bent” to indicate that only two dies were used, although it was noted that the appearance and disappearance of a lump on the ball

above the date was troubling on the perceived “states” of Obverse 2. There were other inconsistent criteria that can be seen in the accompanying chart of Obverses 2 and 3. There are three different obverse dies used for Proof 1867 With Rays nickels. It seems impossible that three different obverse dies could be used for such a rare

issue, but today we know these were likely struck over a number of years. Now the estimate of surviving examples has been raised to 65, spread among these three varieties.

Even in 1996, it was easy to line up the emission sequence, as the reverse used on all Proof 1867 With Rays nickels is a Proof-only die that was lapped nearly every time it was used. That these coins were struck on numerous occasions became obvious, as some of them looked “more Proof” than others – in fact, the reason for the examination of the group of coins in 1996 was to determine if the coins were all actual Proofs! It is well-documented that the Mint under Director Dr. Henry Linderman (1867-1869 and 1873-1879) had certain “friends” who obtained favors on occasion. Numerous Restrikes of many coins appeared during this era and some of these nickel Proofs are undoubtedly among them.



Lapping on the Reverse Used to Strike 1867 With Rays Proofs
State e, the loss of detail of the rays under the first S of STATES is not seen in State d

As illustrated and as can be analyzed from the charts, these coins range from obvious Proofs (Dannreuther-1 variety with Obverse 1, State a, which has frosted devices and deeply reflective fields) to coins that have little frost on the devices

and shallow prooflike fields (as seen on D-2 variety with Obverse 2, State b and D-3 variety with Obverse 3, States a and b). From the die states of Obverse 1 and Reverse A, we can see why some of these coins have frosted devices and deeply mir-

rored fields (D-1, K-1, and early state K-2 coins), while others have these features less intense. The multiple lappings reduced the reflectivity and the cameo effect on later state D-1, later state K-2, and most D-2 and 3 examples.



Dannreuther-1 With Rays Proof
1867 Nickel
Obverse 1(a), Reverse A(a)



Dannreuther-3 With Rays Proof 1867 Nickel
Obverse 3(a), Reverse A(d)



Obverse 3, State a
Lump on the Ball above the Date (Diagnostic)

EMISSION SEQUENCE

DATE/VARIETY		OBVERSE	STATE	REVERSE	STATE	EST. MINTAGE
1867 With Rays	Dannreuther-1	1	a	A	a	10-15
1867 No Rays	Kurz-1	1	a	Pattern (J-507)	a	Up to 25
1867 No Rays	Kurz-2	1	b	B	a	200+
1867 With Rays	Dannreuther-1	1	c	A	b	10-15
1867 No Rays	Kurz-2	1	c & d	B	b	400+
1867 With Rays	Dannreuther-2	2	a	A	c	10-15
1867 With Rays	Dannreuther-3	3	a	A	d	5-10
1867 With Rays	Dannreuther-3	3	b	A	e	5-10
1867 With Rays	Dannreuther-2	2	b	A	f	5-10

Much information in the original 1996 article and subsequent updates is not included here because of space limitations. Here, only the brief history of why the With Rays Proofs of 1867 even exists is explored. When the order of January 21, 1867 was issued to suspend coinage of With Rays nickels, supposedly no 1867 With Rays Proof nickels had yet been struck. Chief Coiner Archibald Loudon Snowden is quoted (per R. W. Julian's research in the National Archive) as having "refused to make any Proofs of this type for sets." As can be seen from the Emission Sequence table above, that likely was not true, since the With Rays D-1 coin pictured here is the earliest known stage of State a of Obverse 1 and was struck before the No Rays Proofs. Most likely, the 25 Proofs reported delivered on February 5, 1867 are the ones with the Pattern reverse, as determined by specialist Douglas Kurz. These No Rays Pattern reverse Proofs have a very slightly different (but later) stage of State a, indicating that some With Rays Proofs were probably struck in Jan-

uary or early February right before the No Rays Proofs with the Judd-507 Pattern reverse.

Today, however, we know that 1867 With Rays Proof Nickels were struck on numerous occasions. Dr. Henry Linderman was appointed for his first term as Mint Director on April 2, 1867, so multiple striking periods should come as no surprise (although the first With Rays Proofs undoubtedly were made before he arrived). The fact that three obverse dies were used to strike the 1867 With Rays Proofs indicates that demand for this issue among collectors of the day was high. Linderman was reappointed Mint Director in 1873, after serving from 1867 to 1869. Perhaps, the original obverse die was destroyed, thus leading to the use of Obverses 2 and 3 with the still existing Reverse A die. This reverse die's repeated lapping indicates the multiple occasions these were struck, at least six as the distinct states show.

The second obverse die (Obverse 2 herein, but this is the only obverse Breen reported in his 1977 book on Proof coinage and later in his

1988 Encyclopedia) is from the same master die/hub and probably was prepared in 1867, or shortly thereafter. The third die (Obverse 3) also is from the same master die/hub and likely was prepared about the same time, as this obverse master die/hub was used for nearly all Shield nickel dies from 1866-69, both Mint State and Proof. The second and third obverse dies could have been prepared at a later date, although probably not much later than 1869 when the new obverse hub was introduced, unless they were dated from unused dies.

Since Obverse 1 was used for all No Rays Proofs (K-1 and 2) and with some With Rays Proofs (D-1), while Reverse A is a Proof-only reverse and is found on all 1867 With Rays Proofs (D-1, 2, and 3), the following charts are arranged in emission sequence order. (The Pattern reverse No Rays Proof is not included in the charts.) The first two states of Reverse A are with Obverse 1, while its last four states are with the charts for Obverse 2 and 3.

OBVERSE 1
QUICK FIND CHART
1867 With Rays and No Rays

Dannreuther-1 State a	Dannreuther-1 State b	Kurz-2 State c	Kurz-2 State d
1) Left base of lower right part of dentil; 7 recut; lower shield clear; full "detached" leaf.	Same.	Recutting on the 7 no longer visible.	Same as State c.
2) "Detached" lower right part of the left arrow feather.	Medium size lump, after first lapping.	"Detached" part fades to a dot.	Extremely tiny dot.
3) All leaves complete, berries attached.	A few outer leaves have "hollow" areas.	Quite a few "hollow" leaves, but all berries with stems.	Several lower leaves are nearly completely "hollow" with several berry stems now detached.
4) Area below right arrow shaft directly behind the arrowhead clear.	Same.	Same.	Same.
5) Upper top outside left of shield to nearest leaf has small polish lines.	Same.	Same.	Same.
6) Tiny die line through two leaves below the "detached" leaf continuing into the leaf below.	Same.	Line becomes weaker.	Same as State c.
7) Die line from 7th horizontal stripe angling down through several stripes. Curly die line from 10th horizontal stripe down through left side of shield ending in the circle or ball.	Same.	Shield die line barely visible. Curly line much weaker, especially in the circle.	Same as State c.
8) Strong inner left bar to W in WE.	Same.	Same.	Same.
9) Inner right berries recut with tiny polish line from the lower berry to the adjacent leaf.	Same.	Recutting and polish line much weaker.	Same as State c.

REVERSES A (With Rays) & B (Regular No Rays)
QUICK FIND CHART

Reverse A, 1867 With Rays		Reverse B, 1867 No Rays	
Dannreuther-1 State a	Dannreuther-1 State b	Kurz-2 State a	Kurz-2 State b
1) Slightly weak center ray below the 2nd T of STATES.	Slight lapping has thinned the center ray below the 2nd T of STATES.	1) Recut stars below E of STATES and OF.	Same.
2) Dentils at 3:00-5:00 full and rounded with no space between them.	2) Dentils at 3:00-5:00 slightly weak and attenuated.	2)- Dentils full and complete.	Dentils thinned by lapping.

Obverse 1



State a



State d

Detached Left Arrow Feather
Obverse 1, 1867 No Rays (with Pattern reverse,
State a and regular reverse, State d)

OBVERSE 2 & 3 QUICK FIND CHART

1867 With Rays

Dannreuther-2 Obverse 2 - State a	Dannreuther-3 Obverse 3 - State a	Dannreuther-3 Obverse 3 - State b	Dannreuther-2 Obverse 2 - State b
1) Left base of 1 over left part of dentil; die polish in lower part of shield; full "detached" leaf with no polished out area.	Left base of 1 over right part of dentil; heavy die polish in lower part of shield; full "detached" leaf with no polished out area.	Now with lower left leaves missing detail, "detached" leaf slightly hollow, lowest left berry detached.	Now with hollow "detached" leaf with spine that has more open area than Obverse 3.
2) Area below right arrow shaft directly behind the arrowhead full of die polish.	Area below right arrow shaft directly behind the arrowhead full of die polish.	Area below right arrow shaft directly behind the arrowhead now mostly clear of die polish, as are other areas directly below shield.	Same as Obverse 2, State a.
3) Upper top outside left of shield to adjacent leaf is full of die polish.	No die polish from upper top outside left of shield to leaf.	Same.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
4) No die line through 2 leaves below "detached" leaf.	No die line through 2 leaves below "detached" leaf.	Same.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
5) No die lines in horizontal shield lines.	No die lines in horizontal shield lines.	Same.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
6) Weak inner left bar to W of WE.	Strong inner left bar to W of WE.	Same.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
7) Inner right berries not recut; surrounding area full of polish.	Inner right berries not recut; surrounding area full of polish.	Same.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
8) Left arrow feather complete.	Left arrow feather complete.	Same.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
9) Tiny die line in clear area at top between rightmost vertical stripes.	No die line in clear area at top between rightmost vertical stripes.	Same.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
10) Two distinct die lines below "cross" at top of shield.	"Rough" die polish area below "cross" at top of shield.	Diminished area of roughness at "cross."	Same as Obverse 2, State a
11) No polish lines around date.	Tiny die line connects "1" and "8" of date plus others.	6 now open as die polish gone that "closed" it.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
12) No lump at "ball."	Large lump on left side of the "ball" at shield bottom.	Small lump on left side of the "ball" at shield bottom.	Same as Obverse 2, State a
13) No line at right arrowhead.	N/A	N/A	Thin, curved die line from the back of the right arrowhead.

REVERSE A QUICK FIND CHART

1867 With Rays

Dannreuther-2 State c	Dannreuther-3 State d	Dannreuther-3 State e	Dannreuther-2 State f
1) Center ray below 2nd T of STATES is weaker.	Center ray below 2nd T of STATES is weaker; full ray below 1st S of STATES.	Center ray below 2nd T of STATES is weaker with part of central area gone, its right ray missing bottom; ray below 1st S of STATES now missing detail.	Center ray below 2nd T of STATES is nearly missing, right ray missing more detail. Ray below 1st S of STATES is missing about the same amount of detail.
2) Dentils from 3:00-5:00 are now obviously attenuated.	Dentils are weaker, some nearly gone.	Dentils weaker, lapping evident in early stages of this state.	Dentils are extremely weak with many completely missing.



1867 No Rays Proof with Obverse 1, State a and Pattern Reverse

John Dannreuther co-founded the Professional Coin Grading Service in 1986 and is a prolific author and numismatic researcher. He is considered one of the top rare coin experts of all time.

