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Often misattributed, this overdated nickel is known in five varieties —and often overlooked by collectors.

The 1883/2 Shield Nickel

by Howard Spindel ANA 207000

FROM ITS VERY BEGINNING in 1866, production of Shield nickels was problematic for the U.S. Mint. The composition of this new coinage was 75-percent copper/25-percent nickel, a much harder alloy than had typically been struck by the Mint. The only coin of the same composition was the nickel 3-cent piece, first issued in 1865, but it was much smaller and thinner and did not present as many production challenges.

The Mint rapidly discovered that the thick, hard Shield nickel planchets caused the dies to deteriorate so quickly they could not be used to strike more than 10,000 to 15,000 coins on average. (Contrast this to the hundreds of thousands of Morgan dollars struck from a typical die.) With the Mint under pressure from commerce to produce many nickels for circulation, dies became a valuable resource.

In 1883 the Mint had several dies leftover from 1882. Rather than discard them, Mint employees ground off the 1882 date and re-impressed the dies with 1883. On at least some dies, the 1882 was not completely removed. When the dies were re-impressed with the new date, the 1883/2 overdate nickel was created.

Today numismatists know of five different dies responsible for 1883/2 Shield nickels. They differ radically in the positioning of the 1883 date relative to the underlying remnants of the previous numerals.

The 1883/2 nickel is one of the most frequently misattributed U.S. coins. The confusion surrounding it can be likened to that of the 1922 “no D” Lincoln cent or the frequently heard

"I have this really rare silver 1943 penny." The majority of Shield nickels offered as 1883/2 overdates that I have encountered are in fact not the true overdate at all. To help you avoid getting burned by buying one of these misattributed coins, I offer the following descriptions of the five true 1883/2 Shield nickels, as well as the coin most frequently misattributed as such.

1883/2 Shield Nickel Varieties

The five varieties are known by catalog numbers from different standard reference books. The most commonly found attributions for Shield nickels are the "FS" numbers assigned by Bill Fivaz and J.T. Stanton in their book *The Cherrypickers' Guide to Rare Die Varieties*, the "F" numbers given by Edward L. Fletcher in his *Shield Five Cent Series* and the "B" numbers assigned by Walter Breen in his *Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins*. Occasionally, you may encounter "PM" numbers taken from Gloria Peters' and Cynthia Mohon's book *The Complete Guide to Shield and Liberty Nickels*.

In the cross-reference of catalog numbers (below, right) notice that no single reference lists all five varieties. Suffix letters on the Fletcher numbers denote different die stages. (By studying markers on dies, a numismatist can arrange coins in the sequence they were struck by a particular die. An early die-stage coin, for example, might be free of markers, while a late die-stage piece might exhibit evidence of die cracks or breaks.)

In my discussion, I will refer to the first four 1883/2 Shield nickel varieties by their *Cherrypickers' Guide* numbers. I will denote the fifth variety as "F-07," as the Fletcher book is the only reference to include it.

It is important to note that unlike the process used today, dates on Shield nickels were punched individually into each die. Therefore, the numerals vary in position, permitting the creation of differing 1883/2 Shield nickel dies.

Variety FS5c-013

This is the most dramatic of the five 1883/2 Shield nickel varieties. Attribution, therefore, is easy, and you will always know one when you see it. A nearly complete 2 is visible between the second 8 and the 3 in 1883; the left base of the 2 is approximately halfway between the two numerals.

Variety FS5c-013.1

While not as dramatic as FS5c-013, this variety also is usually easy to attribute. Generally, a nearly full underlying 2 is visible, but most of it is overlapped by the 3. The left base of the 2 is slightly to the left of the 3.

The coin illustrated here exhibits a die break, a secondary diagnostic for this variety. It extends from the rim through the top right portion of the 3 and up through the ball at the base of the shield. However, lack of a die break does not mean a coin is not FS5c-013.1, as early die stages without a break exist.

Variety FS5c-013.2

This is the subtlest of the 1883/2 Shield nickel varieties and therefore easily overlooked. A typical specimen shows only the base of the underlying 2, neatly centered between the second 8 and the 3. Additionally, a ▶

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▲ 1883/2 FS-013: Underlying 2 clearly visible to left of 3.

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▲ 1883/2 FS-013.1: Underlying 2 clearly visible slightly to left of 3; die break from rim through 3 and ball.

Attributions of 1883/2 Shield Nickel Varieties

Fivaz/Stanton	Fletcher	Breen	Peters/Mohon
FS5c-013	F-08	B2524	PM-18V.4
FS5c-013.1	F-09a, F-09b, F-09c	B2525	PM-18V.2
FS5c-013.2	F-10a, F-10b, F-10c, F-10d	B2526	PM-18V.3
FS5c-013.3	not listed	not listed	not listed
not listed	F-07	not listed	not listed

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▲ 1883/2 FS-013.2: Remnants of underlying 2 between second 8 and 3; sliver of underlying 8 between primary 8's; retained cud below 18.

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▲ 1883/2 FS-013.3: Faint remnants of underlying 2 between second 8 and 3.

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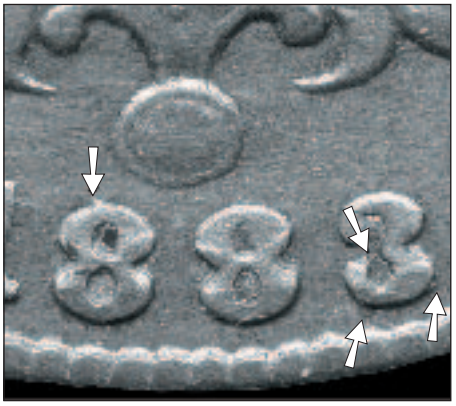

▲ 1883/2 F-07: Curve of underlying 2 within 3, and left and right "feet" of 2 below 3; "flag" of underlying 1 at top of first 8.

sliver of the left base of an underlying 8 can be seen to the left of the second primary 8. More of the underlying 2 will show on very early die stages.

The coin illustrated here is a classic example and exhibits a typical retained "cud" below the 18 in the date. This can be a secondary diagnostic of the variety. Lack of a die break does not preclude a coin from being an FS5c-013.2, as early die stages without the cud are known.

Variety FS5c-013.3

The placement of the underlying 2 is quite similar to that of FS5c-013, but its relief is much lower. Often the underlying 2 is not visible unless the coin is tilted under a light source.

A major difference between FS5c-013.2 and FS5c-013 is that the ball above the date on the former is full and round, while on the latter it is incomplete and the bottom has a scalloped appearance. The 1883 date was punched in slightly higher on FS5c-013, forcing some metal moved by the date punch into the cavity of the die that formed the ball.

Variety F-07

Compared to the other four varieties, F-07 is a bit of an oddball. Prior to its discovery, one could say that all genuine 1883/2 overdate coins show at least some piece of an underlying 2 between the second 8 and 3. But with the F-07, the 2 is directly underneath the 3. Points of attribution include the curve of the 2 within the arms of the 3, the left foot of the 2 visible below the left base of the 3, and the right foot of the 2 visible below the right base of the 3. Additionally, a "flag" at the top of the first 8 may be the top of a 1 from the underlying 1882 date.

I have seen other 1883 Shield nickels that show what looks like the flag at the top of the first 8, but nothing else. The date positioning appears to be the same as F-07. It is possible but unproven that these are late die stages of the F-07 variety.

Misattributed Nickels: The 1882 "Filled 2"

All true 1883/2 Shield nickels were struck in 1883, not earlier. The Mint did not strike 1883 coins in advance, so differentiating the 1883 nickels from earlier dates is key to determining whether a coin can be an 1883/2.

The coin most often mistakenly offered as an 1883/2 Shield nickel is an 1882 with a poorly defined numeral 2, the result of a filled die. Looking at the coin, you might think you see the rounded back of a 3 underneath. In the more extreme case, you can imagine almost any overdate you wish.

However, it is easy to prove that these are not 1883/2 Shield nickels by establishing that they were not struck in 1883. That year, the Mint switched to a different logotype for the date punch. The spaces between the numerals in the date of an 1883 Shield nickel are much wider than those of nickels struck in 1882 and earlier.

Comparing the "filled 2" specimen with an 1883 piece, it is evident that the former exhibits the narrower logotype of 1882. Hence the coin could not possibly have been struck with 1883 dies, and therefore cannot be an 1883/2 overdate.

1883/2 Shield Nickel Rarities

Are genuine 1883/2 Shield nickels rare? It depends on the variety. All are, at the very least, pretty darn scarce. The true rarity of 1883/2 Shield nickels is masked by the large number of coins incorrectly attributed as such.

The table at right lists rarity ratings of the five 1883/2 Shield nickel varieties as assessed in four reference books. These ratings are estimates only—no one knows for certain how many of each variety exist. In my experience, the FS5c-013 and FS5c-013.1 varieties are about equally rare, and both of those are rarer than FS5c-013.2. The FS5c-013.3 is a fairly new discovery, and its rarity is really

PHOTO: ANA MUSEUM/JOHN NEBEL

1883/2 Shield nickel, variety FS-013.

uncertain. Several additional specimens have been discovered since the 4th edition of *The Cherrypickers' Guide to Rare Die Varieties* was published, so the Universal Rarity Scale (URS)-1 rating obviously is wrong. I personally know of a collector who has several examples of the F-07, and more undoubtedly are unrecognized and unattributed.

Final Thoughts

Shield nickel varieties, especially the 1883/2, are my particular passion. The fact that the 1883/2 is poorly understood has always been a pet peeve of mine. I believe that the rarity, numismatic story and beauty of the 1883/2 Shield nickel are masked by the large number of improperly offered 1882 "filled 2" coins, and I will continue to spread knowledge and educate collectors about this fascinating variety.

▲ 1882 "filled 2" (typical).

▲ 1882 "filled 2" (heavy).

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▲ Normal 1882 and 1883 logotypes.

▲ 1882 "filled 2" and 1883 logotypes.

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Fletcher, Edward L. *The Shield Five Cent Series: A Complete Listing of Known Varieties*. Ormond Beach, FL: Dead End Publishing, 1994.

Peters, Gloria, and Cynthia Mohon. *The Complete Guide to Shield and Liberty Nickels*. Virginia Beach, VA: DLRC Press, 1995.

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Rarity of 1883/2 Shield Nickel Varieties

Attribution	Fivaz/Stanton (3rd Ed.)	Fivaz/Stanton (4th Ed.)	Fletcher	Peters/Mohon
FS5c-013	URS-6 (17 to 32 known)	URS-8 (65 to 125 known)	URS-8 (65 to 125 known)	R5 (31-75 known)
FS5c-013.1	URS-7 (33 to 64 known)	URS-4 (5 to 8 known)	URS-6 (17 to 32 known)	R5 (31-75 known)
FS5c-013.2	URS-7 (33 to 64 known)	URS-11 (501 to 1000 known)	URS-5 (9 to 16 known)	R6 (13-30 known)
FS5c-013.3	Not listed	URS-1 (one known)	Not listed	Not listed
F-07	Not listed	Not listed	URS-3 (3 or 4 known)	Not listed

URS = Universal Rarity Scale R = Rarity