

Shield Nickel Overdates: Fact or Fantasy?

U.S. COINAGE

Collectors of varieties and overdates find the Shield nickel series very accommodating, but confusing.

A COINAGE SERIES well known for its overdates—some real, some imaginary—is the 5-cent piece struck from 1866 to 1883, better known as the Shield nickel. The first supposed overdate in the series is the 1869/8 “narrow numerals” type, which is listed in several references, including Don Taxay’s *Comprehensive Catalogue and Encyclopedia of United States Coins* and Walter Breen’s *Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins*.

Others, however, doubt its existence. Q. David Bowers writes in his *United States Three-Cent and Five-Cent Pieces*, “all such ‘overdates’ seen by me have been recut dates and have not clearly shown an 8 under the 9.” Bill Fivaz states that “the 1869/8 Shield 5¢ is debatable—Taxay lists one (the ‘tall date’ 1869/8), but I’m not so sure it’s really a 9/8. There is also a ‘regular’ date (‘fatter’ 1869) that appears to be over an 8.” (The “tall date” and “fat date” descriptions refer to the two different date logotypes for 1869, similar to the “closed 3” and “open 3” of 1873.)

In his aforementioned book, Breen states: “1869/8 Narrow numerals . . . Ex. rare. Business strikes only; usually in low grades. Discovered by this writer, 1960. . . .” While he and others are convinced that this is a genuine overdate, because of the low grades of the specimens studied it is very difficult to discern whether the 1869/8 overdate is simply a repunched 1869/69. However, proof specimens have been rumored recently.

Just three years after the production of the 1869/8 variety, another overdate popped up, though of an unusual sort. The 1872 “small date over large date” variety was discovered by Kenneth R. Hill and reported in the Summer 1988 issue of *Nickel News*. At the time, the smaller date was thought to have been intended for a half dime. Later, it was concluded that it was meant for the quarter eagle gold piece.

by Michael Wescott
ANA 132605

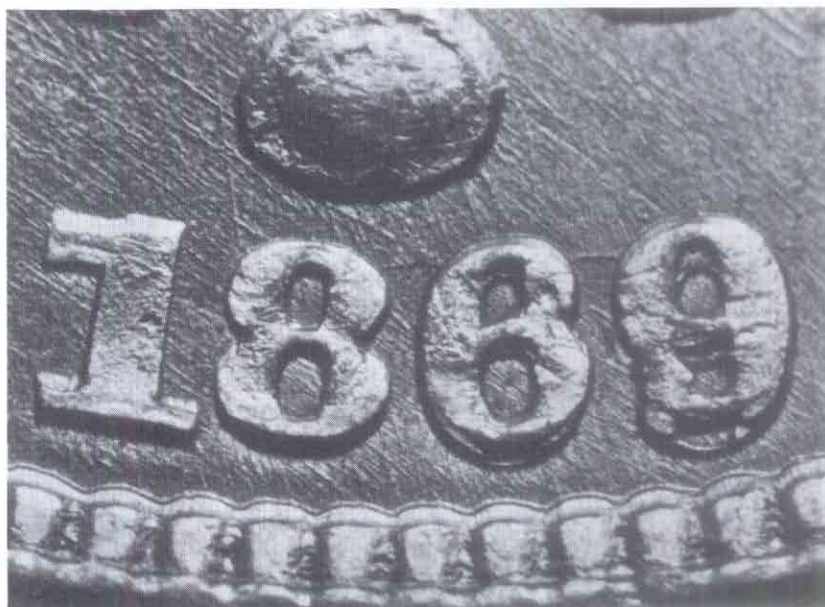


Designed by James B. Longacre, the Shield nickel was struck exclusively by the Philadelphia Mint from 1866 to 1883, although only proof specimens were produced in 1877 and 1878. The rays on the reverse were eliminated in 1867, creating two varieties for that year.

THE 1 AND 8 are doubled to the right, but the 7 and 3 are doubled to the left. The second date is clearly made up of smaller numerals, especially visible at the doubled 3.

According to Bill Fivaz, the existence of an 1869/8 Shield nickel is debatable. The specimen pictured is thought to be a repunched 1869/69/9.

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The supposed 1882/1 overdate has never been proved to be anything other than a repunched date or a "filled 2" variety, as illustrated by this enlargement.

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Much more obvious is a "large date over small date" variety of the 1873 Shield nickel discovered in 1987 by Bill Fivaz. The 1 and 8 are doubled to the right, but the 7 and 3 are doubled to the left. The second date is clearly made up of smaller numerals, especially visible at the doubled 3.

It is thought that the small punch was intended for the 1873 silver 3-cent piece. However, the small date on the nickel is of the "open 3" type; all 3-cent pieces of that year are the "closed 3" type. It is possible that an open-date punch was made for the 3-cent coin, but was never used (except mistakenly on the nickel).

Three, possibly four, examples of this variety are known at present: 1) a coin reported by Kenneth R. Hill; 2) a low-grade specimen owned by Michael Schmidt; 3) Bill Fivaz's coin, very early die state; and 4) a low-grade coin, very late die state, discovered by Delma K. Romines (although it is impossible to tell if it is the same variety).

It seems that 1872 and 1873 were good years for overdates, because Breen lists two 1873/2 varieties. The first, discovered by Breen around 1957, is listed as extremely rare. He writes in his *Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins*, "All digits show double punching at bases; the 1872 logotype was first entered low and slanting up to r., then the 1873

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BREEN ATTRIBUTES THE variety's discovery to Bill Fivaz; however, Fivaz states that "I've never seen an 1873 that convinced me it was a 3/2."

Open 3 logotype was repeatedly and heavily entered, to obscure traces of overdate." Four examples of this variety are thought to exist.

Verification of the second 1873/2 variety is much less certain. Breen attributes the variety's discovery to Bill Fivaz; however, Fivaz states that "I've never seen an 1873 that convinced me it was a 3/2." Another Shield nickel authority, Les LeRoy Smith, comments, "I have recently come to the conclusion that the 1873/2 (so-called) that Bill Fivaz and Jack Beymer have examples of is not an overdate . . . In that instance, I believe it is a 3/3 with the underdigit tilted sharply to the right (50 degrees or so)."

An 1875/874 variety is listed by Walter Breen, who states that it is uncertain if a numeral 4 is under the 5. He is sure, however, that it is not another 5.

A reported 1878/7 Shield nickel effectively combines the two rarest dates in the series. According to Breen, the shaft of a 7 is clearly visible in the lower loop of the 8, and he refers readers to a photograph in Bowers and Ruddy's *Rare Coin Review*, No. 38 (July 1981), p. 18. But Bowers reports that he personally has never seen an unequivocal 1878/7, and that he did not examine the specimen described by a staff member in 1981. All "1878/7" nickels observed by Bowers are, in his opinion, simply 1878 nickels with a trace of doubling of the "8" punch in the lower opening of the final digit.

An 1879/8 overdate is listed in a few references and is known as a "proof-only" variety (only two business strikes are known to exist). Breen cites the overdate as "very scarce," and Bowers reports that the coin is found only in proof condition and that it is about three times as rare as the regular 1879 proof, which would indicate an estimated mintage of about 800. It has been suggested by many specialists, including Bill Fivaz, that the overdate is perhaps more common than the regular proof, which would establish the mintage of the variety at somewhere over 1,600.

Bowers reports that the variety can be identified by the "fuzzy" section at the junction between the ball and its suspension. The reverse die is the same as that for the 1878 proof and can be discerned by a die chip inside the bottom portion of the "5" in the denomination.

Even though it has been listed in some editions of R.S. Yeoman's *Guide Book of United States Coins*, the supposed 1882/1 overdate has never been proved to be anything other than a repunched date or a "filled 2" variety. The closest to a genuine 1882/1 overdate likely is the 1882 nickel with the base of a 1 visible far to the right of the date, a variety discovered by Jack Beymer.



An 1879/8 overdate is listed in a few references and is known as a "proof-only" variety. Traces of an "8" can be seen in this enlargement of the "9" in the date.

ANA AUTHENTICATION BUREAU

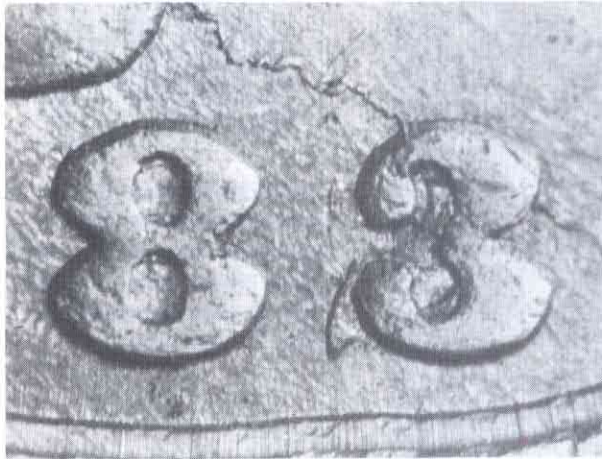


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RARE COIN REVIEW

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The most familiar overdate in the Shield nickel series is the 1883/2, of which six varieties are known.

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The most familiar overdate in the Shield nickel series is the 1883/2, of which six varieties are known (a proof variety also is said to exist). However, collectors should exercise caution, as many "filled 3" (or "blob 3") varieties are sold as genuine overdates. The different varieties of 1883/2 overdates were first detailed in "Collectors' Clearinghouse" in the November 14, 1973, issue of *Coin World*.

Shield nickel specialists seem to have a special fascination for overdates and varieties, and the series has been very accommodating. As interest in Shield nickels increases, new varieties are sure to surface.

Sources

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Eighteen-year-old Michael Wescott is founder of the American Nickel Collectors' Association and edits its quarterly journal, NICKEL NEWS. His reference book about U.S. nickels, THE UNITED STATES NICKEL FIVE-CENT PIECE: A DATE-BY-DATE ANALYSIS AND HISTORY, has been published by Bowers and Merena Galleries.