

George Morgan's 1878 Dollars

"Tailfeather" varieties of this popular series and date

offer collectors plenty of bang for their buck.



THE FIRST YEAR of issue for any U.S. coin usually produces a number of varieties. Designed by U.S. Mint Engraver George T. Morgan, the dollar of 1878, with its 12 different reverse die and mintmark combinations, has more than most. If you include the major patterns, the number of die varieties jumps to 17. Let's take a look at the dollars authorized on February 28, 1878, of which more than 25 million were manufactured.

Patterns

In his landmark reference, *United States Pattern, Experimental and Trial Pieces*, J. Hewitt Judd cataloged hundreds of coinage prototypes. He assigned each a number.

Judd 1550a. Morgan's first prototype features his initial "M" on the truncation of Liberty's bust, but not on the wreath bow on the reverse. The olive branch in the eagle's grasp has just three leaves. This pattern was struck in silver from two, different obverse dies. According to *Walter Breen's Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Proof Coins, 1722-1989*, six specimens were struck on December 5, 1877, and many more at a later date. Copper examples also are known (*Judd 1550b*). Today, slightly more than a dozen of both 1550a and 1550b are thought to exist.

Judd 1550. The second prototype likewise was struck in silver from two, different obverse dies, each bearing Morgan's initial. The reverse features a notched or indented wing and three leaves on the olive branch. Additional specimens were produced in copper (*Judd 1551*). Less than two dozen

▲ Up to 17 die varieties of 1878 Morgans have been documented.

specimens are known in both metals.

Judd 1552. A third example, struck in silver and copper (*Judd 1553*), is similar to *Judd 1550/1551*, but lacks the designer's initial. All were made on February 25, 1878. Breen reported that three were struck in silver; the last, documented auction appearance was in the 1954 sale of the King Farouk collection.

Business Strikes

All business strikes carry Morgan's initial "M" at the base of Liberty's bust and on the left loop of the wreath bow.

Eight Tailfeathers (8TF). This variety is the most common of the 1878 Morgans, with the eagle's tail showing eight, distinct feathers. Specimens generally are well struck and lustrous. Breen noted that 699,300 were made between March 12 and 25, 1878, while Wayne Miller, in his *Analysis of Morgan and Peace Dollars*, believes the number is closer to 750,000.

Seven Tailfeathers (7TF), Reverse of 1878. Reported mintage was 7.8 million. Miller catalogs this variety as Type II, "Eagle with Flat Breast." Several minor varieties are known with doubled obverses.

7TF, Reverse of 1879. Mintage is thought to have been 1.5 million, though Miller contends that 2 million

were struck. (Miller, Type III, "Eagle with a Rounded Breast.")

7TF (Carson City Mint), Reverse of 1878. All have a flat-breasted eagle and small "CC" mintmark, although wide-spread mintmarks sometimes are seen. With a mintage of 2.2 million, specimens often are well struck with good luster.

7TF (San Francisco Mint), Reverse of 1878. All 9.7 million have a flat-breasted eagle and small mintmark.

Doubled Tailfeathers (7/8TF). Existing 8TF dies were overstruck with the 7TF hub, creating numerous reverse sub-varieties easily visible under low magnification. Between March 26 and April 4, 1878, 544,000 were struck. Several minor doubled-obverse varieties are known. Leroy Van Allen lists 16 in his *Comprehensive Catalog and Encyclopedia of Morgan and Peace Dollars*, and more probably exist. ☉



▲ Eagle tails on 1878 Morgan dollars can exhibit eight feathers (top left), doubled feathers (top right) or seven feathers (bottom).

Proofs

8TF. Breen reported 500 struck, as did R.S. Yeoman in his *Guide Book of United States Coins*, while Miller states 600. Regardless, no more than 150 are known in all grades.

7TF, Reverse of 1879. Breen reported a mintage of 50; Miller and Yeoman made no mention of this proof. Currently, the known population is less than a dozen. (Miller, Type III.)

7TF, Reverse of 1878. Breen reported 200, and Miller indicates 250. No more than 60 coins exist in all grades. (Miller, Type II.)

The Morgan dollars of 1878 offer collectors plenty of bang for their buck, even if their interest in varieties is limited. Take time to explore this intriguing series.

In next month's installment, I'll look at Morgan dollar proofs and specimen coins produced at the various branch mints.