

The 1831 Capped Bust Quarter; A Year in Transition

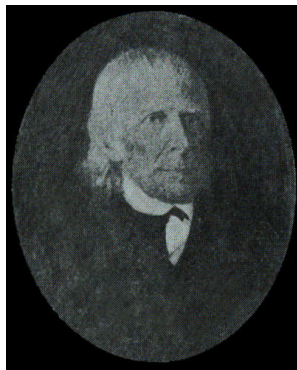
By Steve M. Tompkins

For the United States Bust Quarter series, 1831 is truly a year filled with transitions!

After a 13 year run, the Large Capped Bust Quarter, originally designed by John Reich in 1815, had come to an end, with the last 8,000 examples being delivered by the coiner on 12/19/1828 (warrant # 1184).⁽¹⁾ After an almost two and a half year drought from this ending, quarter production began once again, now incorporating the relatively new "close" collar die (The Mint was located in the first mint building, occupied since 1792, as the new second mint was still in the process of being built). This changeover from the "open" collar to the "close" collar technology had already been introduced in the dime series in 1828 (possibly even as early as 1827)⁽²⁾, and with the Quarter Eagle, Half Eagle and the Half-Dime series beginning in 1829.⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾ The Quarter denomination was the last to see these changes made.

For the quarter series, the introduction of the "close" collar die was not the only change made. Unlike in the dime series, the diameter was substantially reduced from 27 mm on the prior type to 24.3 mm, the same diameter found on the quarters we use today. The thickness was increased, but the weight remained the same as the previous type, 6.74 grams. The Quarter Eagles and Half Eagles were also slightly reduced in diameter during this technological transition, however not as much as in the Bust Quarter series.

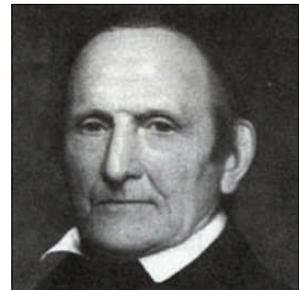
When the diameter was reduced, the obverse portrait and reverse eagle were reduced in size as well. Even with these central devices being smaller, the inclusion of the scroll and motto on the reverse, as in the previous type, would make it a bit crowded, or more likely, it was deemed unnecessary and unneeded and therefore was eliminated.



Adam Eckfeldt
Chief Coiner
1814 - 1839

The Players

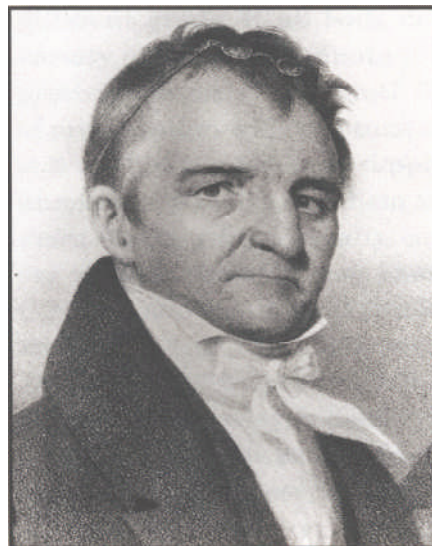
Mint Director Dr. Samuel Moore asked for permission to eliminate the scroll and motto, and it was given on January 28th, 1831 (a Friday).⁽⁵⁾ Striking of the new style quarters began almost immediately. In my opinion, Director Moore most likely anticipated this approval and had Chief Engraver William Kneass prepare several



Dr. Samuel Moore
5th Mint Director
1824 - 1835

dies before it was granted, as the first delivery of the newly struck reduced diameter quarters by Chief Coiner Adam Eckfeldt, was for 70,000 coins on 02/04/1831 (one week after permission was given, Warrant # 1281) and another 50,000 were delivered the following week on 02/11/1831 (Warrant #1282).⁽⁶⁾ This would have left no time for engraving the dies had Director Moore waited until approval was received. Two more deliveries were also made in February, totaling another 32,000 quarters. The scroll motto was also eliminated on the Quarter Eagles and the Half Eagles in 1834, but that elimination was to distinguish the change in weight, such as when the arrows were added to the dates in 1853 and 1873 for the Liberty Seated series.⁽⁷⁾

William Kneass was given his commission as Chief Engraver on January 29th 1824, replacing Robert Scot who had passed away on November 1st 1823. From the time he began his tenure with the Mint until the end of the Large Capped Bust Quarter type in 1828, Kneass continued to utilize the quarter master dies or hubs first prepared by former Assistant Engraver John Reich in 1815. Only with the transition to the new small diameter Bust Quarters, did Kneass engrave new obverse and reverse master dies for the series.⁽⁸⁾



William Kneass
Chief Engraver
1824 - 1840

The smaller Kneass interpretation of the previous John Reich design, produced a thinner, elegant and much more refined incarnation of Miss Liberty. The Eagle is also more sleek and slender as well. Four obverse and five reverse dies were employed in striking the seven known die marriages found with the 1831 date.

When Kneass prepared the first few working dies, evidently it was not yet decided what style punches would be used for all of the peripheral elements such as the date for the obverse and the legend and denomination on the reverse. Therefore, we see several different combinations of punch sizes and styles during the initial first year of the new reduced diameter Capped Bust Quarters. (*see Table 1 below*)

Table 1 - The 1831 Bust Quarters

Die Marriage	Obv. Die	Rev. Die	Date Numerals	Legend Letters	Denomination		
					2	5	C
B-1	1	A	Small 1's	Small Letters	Small Curl Base	Small Plain 5	Small
B-2	2	B	Small 1's	Small Letters	Small Square Base	Small Plain 5	Medium
B-3	2	C	Small 1's	Small Letters	Medium Square Base	Medium Fancy 5	Medium
B-4	3	C	Small 1's	Small Letters	Medium Square Base	Medium Fancy 5	Medium
B-5	4	D	Large 1's over Small 1's	Large Letters	Large Curl Base	Large Fancy 5	Large
B-6	3	D	Small 1's	Large Letters	Large Curl Base	Large Fancy 5	Large
B-7	4	E	Large 1's over Small 1's	Large Letters	Large Curl Base	Large Fancy 5	Large



Fig. 1
1831 B-1
Small Letters Reverse



Fig. 2
1831 B-5
Large Letters Reverse

The Coins

The first and foremost of these changes are the two different sizes of the letters in the reverse legend. These are known as the “Small Letters” and “Large Letters” respectfully (*see Fig. 1 & 2*). For the “Small Letters”, Kneass may have utilized punches from a set that were paid for on 12/31/1830 from longtime supplier Henry Starr, or perhaps they were from punches already in use on the Quarter Eagle series, as the small letter punches used for the reverse legend on the 1829 - 1834 Quarter Eagles seem to be the same ones used for the 1831 Small Letter reverses. The choice to utilize the smaller letters for the legend may have been to leave as much room as possible between the legend and the eagle, just in case the motto scroll elimination was not approved. Whatever the reason, once three reverse dies were produced with the small letters, Kneass changed over to the larger letters. These larger letter punches were perhaps included as part of the delivery of punches from Henry Starr that were paid for on 4/6/1831.⁽⁹⁾

It might be logical to assume that the very first reverse die produced by Kneass was **Reverse A**, employed in producing the **B-1** die marriage, based on it being the only one with an addition of berries (*see Fig. 1 & 3*). However, there is no evidence that it was struck before **B-2** or any other marriage, as neither the obverse or reverse die was used in striking any other die marriage.

The **B-1** die marriage has small numerals in the date and the denomination and small letters in the legend. The punches used in the denomination consisted of a small curl based 2, a small, plain, stubby, flat top 5 and a small C. (*see Fig. 1 & 3*)



Fig. 3
Small Curl Base 2
Small Plain 5
Small C



Fig. 4
 Small Square Base 2
 Small Flat Top 5
 Medium C

with a square base was used, along with the small 5 and small C in the denomination (see **Fig. 4**). The square base 2 punch seems to be the exact same size and shaped 2 that was used on the Quarter Eagle series up until 1829 (see **Fig. 5**; note: this picture is slightly enlarged). The date for **B-2** consisted of small numerals.

Still in conjunction with the small letters in the legend, a slightly different shaped, but still smaller, square base 2 was utilized on **Reverse C** in striking the **B-3** & **B-4** die marriages. The 5 was also a slightly different shape as well (see **Fig. 6**). All of the obverse dies used to create the first four die marriages for 1831, had small numerals in the date.



Fig. 6
 Small Square Base 2
 Small Fancy 5
 Medium C

The **B-6** die marriage is a combination of the earlier elements and those of the final design, as it shows small 1's in the date, reusing the obverse die found on the **B-4** die marriage, combined with the reverse die first used in creating the **B-5** (see **Fig. 2**), which show the large letters, large curl based 2, large fancy 5 and large C in the denomination.

Unique to this reverse die, was the addition of berries next to the olive leaves. Along with the addition of an Eagle's tongue, neither of these items were on the master die, but were hand engraved onto the working die. After their use on this one die, the berries were not added to any of the reverse dies produced through the rest of the Bust Quarter series. Also, the small curl based 2 was not used again on any other reverse die seen through 1838.

Next, on **Reverse B**, only used in creating the **B-2** die marriage, we again find small letters in the legend, but a small 2



Fig. 5
 1821 - 1829 Quarter Eagle
 Small Square Base 2

New larger letters in the reverse legend along with a larger curl base 2, larger fancy 5 and a larger C were employed on **Reverse D** for the **B-5** die marriage, and punches of this size were used throughout the rest of the series (see **Fig. 2** & **7**). Also for the obverse used on the **B-5** & **B-7** die marriages, we see larger 1's punched over previously punched small 1's. This was the only obverse die to show this feature (see **Fig. 8**). The new larger numerals may have been part of the delivery of punches from Henry Starr, paid for on 4/6/1831, along with the set of larger letters found on the last three marriages of the 1831 Bust Quarter. ⁽⁹⁾



Fig. 7
 Large Curl Base 2
 Large Fancy 5
 Large C

The **B-7** die marriage consists of the reuse of the **B-5** obverse showing large 1's punched over small 1's and a large letters reverse. The main difference in this reverse from the one used for the **B-5** & **B-6**, are small stubby arrowheads, as compared to large pointed ones (see *Fig. 9 & 10*). These differences show us that the arrowheads were not part of the master die and it was left up to the engraver to decide what style and shape to create on each working die, as they are different on each die produced.



Fig. 8
Large 1's
over
Small 1's

Along with the different punch types and sizes, Kneass continually re-engraved different areas of both the obverse and reverse working dies. Every eagle's wing tips, feathers, claws, etc., were subject to this re-working on the reverse, as were the liberty cap, ribbons, drapery and curls on the obverse. This was not unique to 1831, but is also seen in other years as well. Kneass was applying the same changes and techniques that he was trying on other denominations, such as those found in the half dollar series, to produce a better, more even, and pleasing strike.⁽¹⁰⁾



Fig. 9
Large
Arrowheads

As stated before, the eagle's tongue was added to some working dies, but was omitted on others, for reasons that shall remain a mystery to all but the engraver. The only thing we can say for certain is that the tongue and the arrowheads were not part of the master die and it was at the discretion of the engraver to engrave one or not. Both of these items fluctuate from die to die throughout the series not just in 1831.



Fig. 10
Small
Arrowheads

The New Technology

The new "close" collar die that contained the planchet and imparted the reeded edge of the coins, shows a finer reeding than in the earlier series. It may be possible to determine a probable striking order by counting these reeds and following any changes found, including measurement of the diameters to reveal expansion of the collar die.

Table 2

Collar Reed Count	Die Marriage Use
134	B-1, B-2, B-3
Both	B-4
150	B-5, B-6, B-7

There are two different collar dies used in 1831, one with a count of 134 reeds and another with 150 reeds. The collar with 134 reeds was used for the first 4 die marriages (see *Table 2*) and during the striking of the **B-4** die marriage, the collar die was changed to one with a larger reed count of 150 reeds. This transition occurred in the later die stages of the **B-4** dies and clearly separates the striking order of the seven die marriages found in 1831.

Once the 150 reed collar die was installed, it was only used until the end of 1831, as we see a new collar die with a count of 149 reeds starting in 1832. A collar die with 150 reeds was brought back late in 1835 however, and was used through 1837.⁽¹¹⁾

Conclusions

The 1831 year shows more distinct changes of styles and types of punches used than in any other year in the entire Bust Quarter series, particularly on the reverse dies. The transition from the larger diameter to the smaller diameter type most likely precipitated these changes, along with the economical reuse of previously used punches, even those found on other denominations. The lack of a spelled out set of rules as to dimension, style and shape of the elements such as letter and numeral punches that were to be used for each denomination, left an opportunity for the people involved to use any of those available at their discretion. For these reasons we see a very diverse and telling picture of the many things that were happening at this time. It is only through these observations that we can gain a small glimpse into this time period and the innermost workings of our early mint.

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END NOTES

- (1) National Archives, Bullion Journal D, pg. 233
- (2) *A Closer look at 1827 JR10*, Mike Sherrill, JRJ 13/2, July 2001 pg. 17
- (3) *Early U.S. Gold Coin Varieties*, John Dannreuther, 2007 pg. 107
- (4) *Federal Half Dimes 1792 - 1837*, Russ Logan, John McCloskey, 2001 pg. 57
- (5) National Archives, Correspondence Journal Vol. 2. (References by both Don Taxay in *U. S. Mint and Coinage* and Walter Breen in *Walter Breen's Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins* about this event are in error, as both cite that Moore was in contact with Secretary of the Treasury, Levi Woodbury about the transition to the small diameter quarter in 1831. Taxay states, without any source cited, that Moore sent an example of the new coin to Woodbury for approval on 1/29/1831. However, Woodbury was not even secretary until 1834! Breen also states that Moore went to Washington to justify the removal of the motto due to the Treasury departments action in trying to restore it. There is no source stated for this comment and I was unable to substantiate what Breen stated.)
- (6) National Archives, Bullion Journal D, pg. 421 & 422
- (7) *The Official Red Book A Guide Book of United States Coins*, R.S. Yeoman, 61st Edition 2008 pg. 161 & 163
- (8) *Early United States Quarters*, Steve M. Tompkins, 2008 pg. 139
- (9) National Archives, Blotter of Ordinary Accounts 1817 - 1835, pg. 131 & 132
- (10) *Bust Half Fever*, 2nd edition, Edgar Souders, 2006 pg. 300
- (11) *Early United States Quarters*, Steve M. Tompkins, 2008 pg. 393