

The President's Letter

By Chris Pilliod

This is my 55th President's Letter.

Hope your summer has been a good one, and you were able to find comfort in the heat that engulfed our nation. For me it seemed like after a thousand casts the fish weren't biting at our cabin in Michigan. After ten rounds, my golf scores were closer to the high temperatures of July's heat wave than what the card said par was. My car's A/C broke down, and then its transmission, then the rear struts, now it's time to shop for a new vehicle. What's this have to do with numismatics??? Well, coins are always a great getaway. I might not be catching fish or making many pars but I seem to always find a nice coin while not having to worry about the heat outside.

One recent purchase that ultimately turned the wheels in my brain was an interesting off center piece. It was a windy and hot May afternoon when I headed off for a long lunch to West Chester, PA, and to a coin shop right in the center of town. West Chester is a quaint town about 30 miles away in Chester County, one removed from Berks. It's a very old city, close enough to Philadelphia to be a big part of colonial Americana. It is home to West Chester University, a popular school for many local students with a nice clean campus right off downtown. So as I'm shopping for coins, it's not unusual to see a gaggle of students roam by.

Not surprisingly, Tom Werner, the proprietor, has seen a great number of old collections and estates come through his door. I never met a man who came across so much interesting numismatics: old contemporary counterfeits, Civil War tokens, and other oddball stuff. This spring when I walked in he showed me an off center Indian cent. Although considerably off center and with no date I immediately informed him what the date was. Not only that but once I took some restoration chemicals to the surfaces, it blazed as a lovely piece; easily MS64 Brown or better.

"How do you know what date it is?" he quizzed me. Now

here's a guy that has been in the business 50 years and he didn't have a clue what date it was.

"Well, it just has that look," I replied. Then it got me thinking—what is that look???. Even though I was positive of the date, exactly what is "that look"? And can an Indian cent aficionado quantify what that look is? By quantify, I mean put into words what one sees visually. Why could I know the date?



Some of the best artists in the nation work at the Mint as designers, whereas in the day of the Indian cents they would employ their crafts to produce a Galvano or plaster approximately 12 inches in diameter as the starting point of die making. Today they use computer imaging for their artistry but, back in the Indian cent days, it was often plaster or something soft for rendering their work. Hubs are used as a Master Hub and are employed to produce working hubs. The Master Hub is what is used to make Working hubs through a high-tonnage slow strain rate press. Then the working hubs produce the dies used to strike Indian cents. And man, did they ever require a lot of dies. So not surprisingly, the working hubs would wear out or crack and then, after some years of use, so would the Master Hubs.

Now each time a new Master Hub was made, it would be essentially from scratch, so although they may have started with the same portrait of Miss Liberty or a painting, each Master Hub has distinctive differences since they would manually add details



to the hub's design. Just as when we sign a check, the signature looks the same but each one is slightly different.

What are the differences? Well for the various hubs of the Indian cent series, it can be stated with great certainty that the differences are much subtler than they are for the various obverse designs of the early Large cents. Nonetheless, there are some pick-up points, and I'll summarize my observations as follows.

1859-1860 Pointed Bust. These two years had their own Hub and is a single year type. These are the only two years in the entire series that exhibit a pointed Bust with no "L" on Miss Liberty's ribbon. One little mystery I have uncovered in the various hubs is that it appears the very first bead (the farthest left) on Miss Liberty's necklace appears to have been hand punched into the hub, as each is slightly different.

1859 - 1860 Pointed Bust style. This bead is like a semi-circle or half circle, only about half the size of the other beads. The hub transitioned into the rounded bust style during the production year of 1860. The pointed bust is rarer but not scarce and only carries a slight premium. In addition, the lower eyelid on Miss Liberty is diffuse and almost blends in with the eyeball.



1859 - 1860 Pointed Bust Hub



Pointed Bust Hub - Lower Eyelid

1860 - 1864 (CN & Bronze) Rounded Bust. Now the first bead is more like a sideways "U" or "V" with the letter's base to the left. For this hub, the lower eyelid is much more distinct. As compared to the With "L" variety, the outline of the feathers are smooth, especially the top feather. The letters of LIBERTY are thicker on this hub than the 1864-L and later hub.



1860 - 1864 (CN & Bronze) Rounded Bust Hub



Rounded Bust Hub - Lower Eyelid

1864 With L - 1886 Type I. The first bead on Miss Liberty's necklace is much stronger than on previous hubs and now is almost a full 100% bead. The letters of LIBERTY are thinner, most notably the shafts of the "L" and the "I." The chin of Miss Liberty juts out past the lower lip, whereas on the No "L" hub, the chin and lips line up vertically. Also the alignment of the lips is different on this hub as compared to the No "L" hub — If you draw a line from the upper lip of Miss Liberty on the No "L" variety across the front of the lower lip, the extended line passes in front of the "1" in the date. Whereas for the With "L" variety, this line crosses the "1" or even passes to the right of the "1." These diagnostics will come in handy when trying to figure out low grade 1864 Bronze issues.



1864 With L - 1886 Type I Hub

1886 Type II - 1908. The famous go-to diagnostic for this hub is the last feather tip pointing towards the final "A" of AMERICA instead of the "C." This diagnostic all collectors know. But other differences exist. Many issues from this hub come with weak feather tips, notably on the first three feathers. The first bead has a larger diameter now, but is tucked back into the neck of Miss Liberty further. Miss Liberty's chin no longer protrudes beyond the lower lip but remains in vertical alignment with the lower lip.



1886 Type II - 1908 Hub

1908 - 1909 and 1909-S. Many Indian cent collectors don't realize that a new hub was made in 1908. Why? Mainly to alleviate the growing demand for coinage for commerce. The cent mintage for 1907 alone matched what was produced from 1866 through 1879. So the Master Hub was likely plain worn out. To facilitate die making production, the date was added to the hub mid-way through 1908 — my guess is it happened late in the production year, with most 1908 dated issues having the date hand punched on each Indian cent die, the date was punched prior to final heat treatment and hardening.



1908-1909 and 1909-S Hub

Curiously, the main diagnostic is the "L" on the ribbon of Miss Liberty. I am not sure why this was changed, but the serif of the "L" for these issues has a slope instead of being straight up-and-down. Additionally, the "L" is taller on these issues as well. It's always important to study the details of a particular numismatic series, as it is essential for counterfeit detection, general attribution, and numismatic interests.



Pre-1909 "L"

1909 "L"