

In Retrospect

April 27, 2025

#4 Massachusetts Coppers

Since the mid-1980s, numismatic researcher Mike Packard has honed his expertise in the history and attribution of Massachusetts cents and half cents. Long the presumptive authority in the field, his September 1991 article in *The Colonial Newsletter*, “Rarity Ratings of Massachusetts Copper Coins,” was an early endeavor to organize the series. Packard asked for assistance from his fellow collectors to develop much-needed rarity estimates for the different varieties.

Packard has continued his work to the present day. Soon, it is expected that he and the Colonial Coin Collectors Club will publish an essential book on the series. Such a volume will further support C4’s mission in promoting the study of our eclectic and fascinating early American coinage and currency.



1787 Massachusetts Cent. Ryder 2a-F, W-6070. Rarity-6. Transposed Arrows. EF-45 (PCGS). Stack’s Bowers Galleries, Spring 2019, Baltimore, The Twin Leaf Collection of State Coinage, lot 8016. Cataloged as the “Famous 1787 Transposed Arrows Cent, Ex Parmelee-Mills-Jackman, The Crosby and Ryder Plate Coin, First Public Offering in 100 Years.” This variety was an R-6+ in Packard’s 1991 rating.

Rarity Ratings of Massachusetts Copper Coins

by
Mike Packard

The table on the following page gives my estimate, as of August 1991, of the rarity ratings of Massachusetts copper coins. The rarity numbers refer to the Sheldon rarity scale:

R-8	1 to 3 specimens known
R-7	4 to 12 known
R-6	13 to 30 known
R-5	31 to 75 known
R-4	76 to 200 known
R-3	201 to -?- known

Sheldon did not have a numerical value for the upper bound on the number of specimens in the R-3 category, nor did he have numerical values for his R-2 and R-1 categories. R-3 was described as "Scarce" and I believe that no variety of Massachusetts copper is more common than "Scarce" on his scale.

The starting point for my rarities were the rarity estimates of Robert Vlack (from his 1978 Massachusetts plates, converted to the Sheldon scale), and of Richard August. The refinements are based on auction appearances of Massachusetts coppers and the results of my own Massachusetts copper survey. Not all collectors and owners of Massachusetts copper coins have responded to my survey, so my rarities are not based on an exact population census.

The higher rarity varieties (R-6, R-7, and R-8) are based on the actual number of specimens reported to me. The lower rarity varieties are based on my surveys, the Vlack and August rarity estimates, and "gut" feeling. As more collections and specimens are reported to me, the rarity of some varieties, especially the high rarity varieties, will fall.

If you have not sent me a listing of your Massachusetts copper holdings, please consider doing so. All information on individual collections will be held in strict confidence. I only have information on the public collections of the ANS and the Smithsonian. If you are aware of holdings by other museums or organizations, please let me know. My address is: 4905 Village Drive; Fairfax, VA 22030

On the rarity ratings table I have separated out the four contemporary counterfeits with Ryder numbers. I have included the transposed arrows variety with the mint issued varieties even though it may not be an official mint product, because the obverse is certainly "original". The letter punches on the reverse die of the transposed arrows variety do not match those used on the dies of other varieties issued by the official mint..

It is fairly easy to construct a high grade date and denomination type set of Massachusetts copper coins, but is very difficult to put together a complete variety set of 45 coins and impossible to find all 45 coins in Extremely Fine grade or better. Varieties available in Mint State include:

1787 half cent -- 4-B, 4-C, and 5-A;	1787 cent -- 2b-A and 3-G; and,
1788 half cent -- 1-B;	1788 cent -- 1-D and 10-L.

Many other varieties are available in Extremely Fine or About Uncirculated grades. Varieties which are difficult to locate in grades above Very Good include:

1787 half cent -- 4-D;	1787 cent -- 2b-G, 4-J, and 8-G; and,
	1788 cent -- 9-M, 12-H, 12-K, 12-O, 13-I, 16-M, and 17-I.

For five of these varieties, specimens grading above Very Fine are unknown.

**1991
Rarity Ratings
for
Massachusetts Copper Coins**

1787**HALF CENTS**

Variety	Rarity	Comments
1-D	4+	
2-A	5	
3-A	5+	
4-B	6-	
4-C	3-	
4-D	8	3 known
5-A	3+	
6-A	6	
6-D	6-	

CENTS

Variety	Rarity	Comments
2b-A	3-	Horned eagle
2b-C	5	
2b-E	5	

2a-F	6+	Transposed arrows
2b-G	7+	4 known
3-G	3	
4-C	5	
4-D	4	
4-J	7+	4 known
6-G	4	
8-G	7	9 known

COUNTERFEIT CENTS

1-B	7+	5 known
5-I	7+	5 known
7-H	7-	11 known

1788**HALF CENTS**

1-A	5
1-B	3-

CENTS

Variety	Rarity	Comments
1-D	3	
2-B	4	
3-A	5-	
3-E	4	
4-G	5-	
6-N	3+	
7-M	5-	
8-C	3+	
9-M	6	
10-L	3	

11-C	5	
11-E	4	
11-F	5	
12-H	7+	5 known
12-I	4	
12-K	6	
12-M	3+	
12-O	7+	4 known
13-I	7+	4 known
13-N	4+	
15-M	5	
16-M	6	
17-I	7+	6 known

COUNTERFEIT CENTS

14-J	8	2 known
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Ryder and Crosby list a 1788 cent variety 5-H.

Vlack lists a 1788 cent variety 11-G.

No specimens of either variety are currently known.

If located, these varieties will be added to the listing.