

EMPIRE NUMISMATICS



US \$5 LIBERTY HEAD HALF EAGLE 1839-1908

Diameter: 7/8" (22.5mm) - 1839-40
17/20" (21.6 mm) - 1840-1908

Weight: 64.5 grains (4.18 grams)

Composition:

: 90% gold-10% silver/copper (1839-49)

90% gold - 10% copper (1849-1908)

Designer: C: Christian Gobrecht

Engraver: Christian Gobrecht (1838-44);
James Longacre (1844-68); William
Barber (1869-79); and Charles E. Barber
(after 1879)

Mint Marks: Philadelphia (none);
Carson City (CC); Charlotte (C);
Dahlonaga (D); Denver (D); San
Francisco (S); New Orleans (O); - obverse
over date (1839) reverse under eagle
(after 1839)

Obverse: Liberty head facing left
wearing a coronet inscribed LIBERTY.
Date (below), 13 stars (surrounding)
around beaded border...

Reverse: Spread eagle holding 3
arrows in left claw and an olive branch
in right. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
and denomination FIVE D. around
beaded border.

Edge: Reeded

Due to a sharp rise in the price of gold (brought on by the turmoil created by The Napoleonic Wars and Bonapart's "Reign of Terror") President Thomas Jefferson ordered that the production of \$10 gold coins be halted on December 31, 1804.

It would be 34 years and 2 Acts of Congress (altering the weight and fineness of U.S. gold coinage) before production would resume.

It was 1838 when the Secretary of Treasury instructed Mint Director Robert Maskell Patterson to begin production of \$10 gold coins at once. Acting Mint Engraver Christian Gobrecht immediately began preparing dies. Using the head of Venus from Benjamin West's recent painting *Omnia Vincit Amor*, Gobrecht created the timeless Neo-classical Coronet Liberty Head motif which would dominate U.S. gold coinage for nearly three quarters of a century. The reverse featured an improved version of the old John Reich eagle (in use since 1807).

The design remained in production through 1907 with only one major change. The terrible carnage and aftermath of the Civil War left many Americans in a religious and philosophical state of mind. Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase was receiving a steady flow of requests that our coinage carry some reference to God. A minister from Pennsylvania suggested "God, Liberty, Law". Mint Director James Pollack offered "In God is our trust" (a line from a popular hymn). GOD OUR TRUST began to appear on some U.S. pattern (experimental) coinage.

Eventually the phrase evolved into the now familiar INGOD WE TRUST. This was officially adopted in 1866 and can be found on a scroll above the eagle.

Hard economic times combined with low demand for the \$10 denomination in circulation made for low mintages in the "no motto" years. Few were saved in mint state (\$10 was a great deal of money). Of the surviving specimens, many fell victim to the gold recalls of the 1930's and were lost forever to the melting pot.

Whether you have the \$2.50, \$5 or \$10 (or a set of all three) the Gobrecht Coronet remains an icon of United States coinage -
a classic American work of art ... wrought in solid gold

