

SSDC Guide to Attributing the 1878 7TF From VAM 160 to VAM 188



VAM 166

**Second Edition
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Introduction

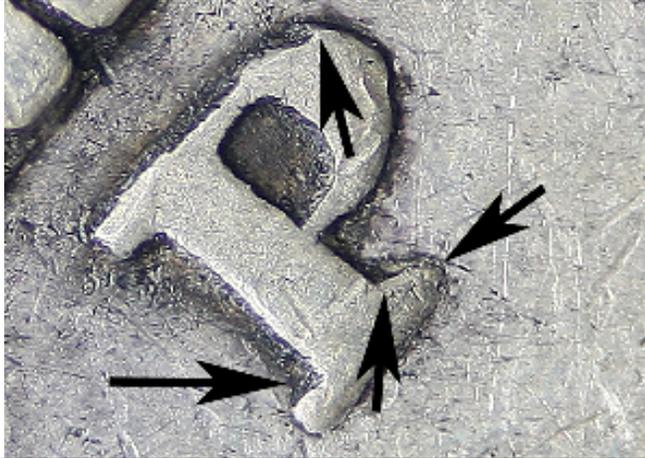
These varieties are what we refer to as VAMs, standing for Van Allen and Mallis. Leroy C. Van Allen and A. George Mallis have likely devoted more time than any others researching and cataloging different varieties of Morgan and Peace dollars, and while Mr. Mallis has passed away, Mr. Van Allen is still going strong listing new varieties and updating the older ones. Those of us who pursue VAMs are forever indebted to these gentlemen for the work they have done. There are many, many other people whose names I will not list at this time who have devoted themselves to the pursuit of new varieties and it is to those folks that this work is dedicated. Hopefully, you will find this work to be helpful in separating the 1878 7TF VAM 166 from all the other similar varieties.

The coins that I have used to make this work are from my personal collection and none of them are in a very high mint state grade. This accomplishes a couple of things: First, it will allow you to identify coins of the different varieties in the lower grades, as well as mint state. And second, you will get to see the most prominent features of the varieties, namely, the ones that show even when the coin has some wear and some dirt and grit on it. I have tried to provide extra examples where die state or stage makes significant differences in what you see on the coin.

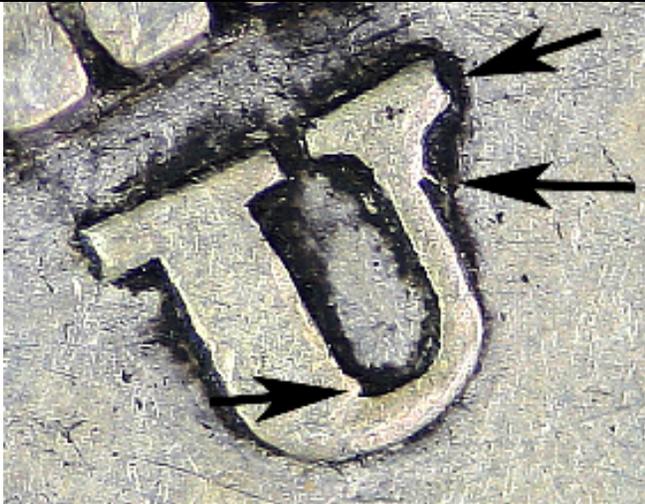
The 1878 VAM 166 is a very elusive variety with a B²c reverse—a reverse that was used on many 1878 varieties. For this reason, we will generally use the obverse die characteristics to differentiate between the different varieties. Also, there are several other VAMs that have the B²c reverse that are part of the TOP 100 or HOT 50 varieties. They are well known varieties, so we will not go to great lengths to show every fine detail to identify them. What we will do is show how to tell them from the 166.

I need to make sure that you realize that this book is not a guide on all the 1878 varieties—it explains how to tell the difference between any coin that could be a VAM 166, and the 166 itself.

VAM 166



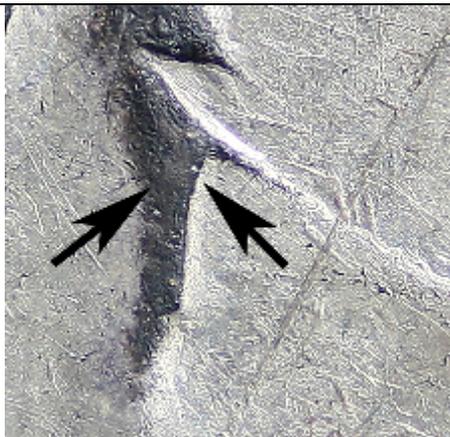
One of the most important diagnostics to authenticate the VAM 166 is the P in PLURIBUS. This coin is only a F15 and therefore the right foot of the P is very mushy. However, one can see that as compared to the left foot, which is basically “perfect,” the right foot has an angled raised bar that extends PAST the end of the foot. On higher grade specimens, one can see the bar clearly. The top loop of the P is doubled and it protrudes out at about 1:00.



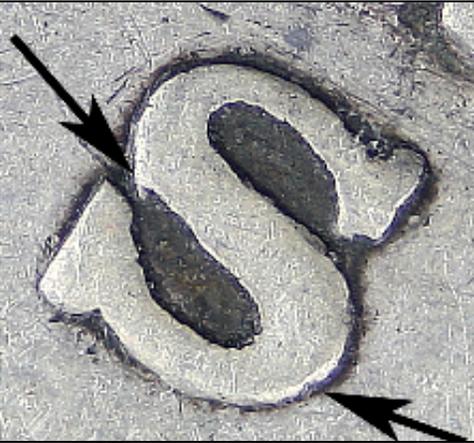
The U in PLURIBUS is the next most important pickup point. The doubling shows most on the outside right upright and inside left upright as shown by the lower two arrows. Note the very near normal thickness of the right serif of the U. There are several VAMs in the 160s that have doubling in the letters of PLURIBUS, but the combination of the P and U in the 166 is basically unmatched. Most attributions can be made using ONLY these two points. Only coins that are very low grade or that have damage will require looking at other points.



The O in GOD on the reverse of the VAM 166 is closed (filled) at the position shown. This is important, because several varieties that can be mistaken for the VAM 166 are about 95% open here. We will show examples of the open variety below.



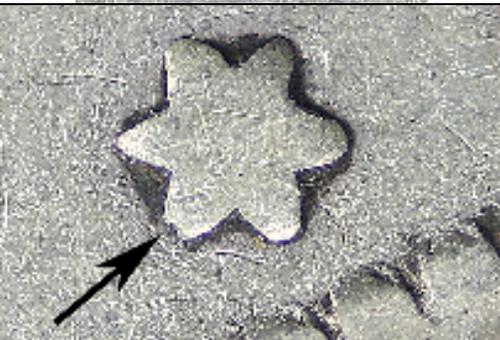
In several references on the VAM 166, the eye is used to attribute this variety. This can be SEVERELY misleading because the “bumps” below the eyelid are so shallow that wear and the very smallest amount of dirt can make them virtually indistinguishable. Such is the case with this coin, a F15 PCGS example. I highly recommend only using this point as a 5th or 6th reference.



These two points on the S in PLURIBUS are minor, yet still important. The lack of these points will rule out some coins.



The notched doubling on the 1 in the date will provide useful information in attributing the VAM 166.

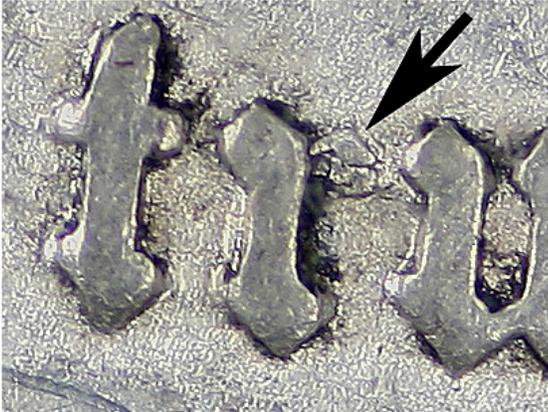


This notch on the first star to the right of the date is very helpful in attributing the VAM 166.



This is the B²c reverse. The outline of the stem of the r in trust is empty in the center and there is an opening at the top of the outline. This is true of ALMOST every coin in this monograph. The only exception is the VAM 160, which has a “recut” r.

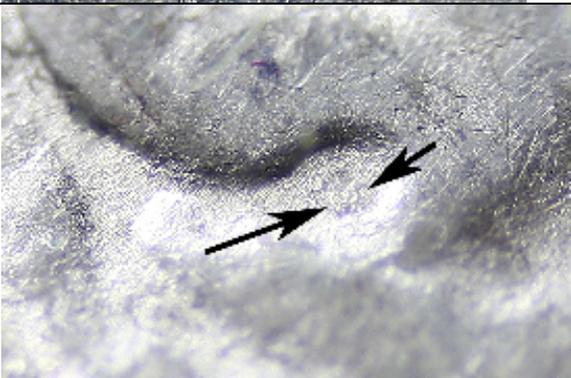
VAM 160



Hopefully, you can see that the inside of the stem of the r in trust is recut or “repaired.” The outline of the stem is essentially the same as all the other B²c reverse coins. **The raised “flag” of this coin is unique in the 1878 7TF varieties, so, once you see this, attributing the VAM 160 becomes trivial. **LEARN THIS****



Note, primarily, the doubling just above the left “foot” of the P of PLURIBUS as indicated by the lowest arrow in the picture. **This distinguishes the VAM 160 from the VAM 166.** The doubling on the right “foot” and the outside right of the loop are fairly similar to the VAM 166.



This picture is the fold of the Phrygian Cap. There is a small group of pits normally regarded as a die “chip” in the fold. This obverse is common to both the VAM 160 and the VAM 118, so this, combined with the broken and repaired r in trust on the reverse will attribute the VAM 160.

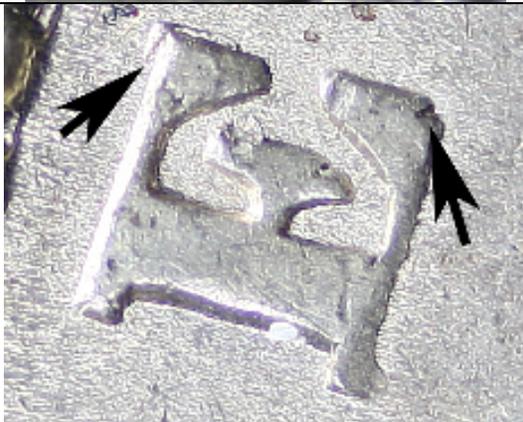


The doubling shown here is, again, very similar to that of the VAM 166, but coupled with the other attributes of the VAM 160, this coin can very easily be distinguished from the VAM 166.

VAM 161



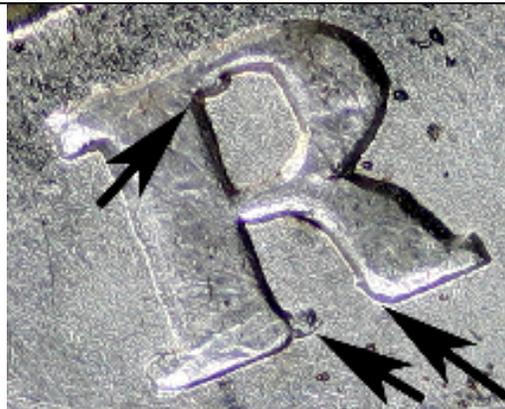
The VAM 161 is distinguishable by the unmistakable tripled inner ear. The only thing is—when you are attributing the VAM 166, it can be hard to remember to check it. So, if you ****LEARN THIS**** you will be fine. If you don't, or you just forget, these other markers will help, and you'll get it.



The E in E PLURIBUS is unique on the VAM 161. The notch in the bottom is the deepest notch you will see in the coins in the 160 range. The doubling at the top right is also the largest spread, but there are other VAMs this marker resembles.



This is one of the very interesting things about the VAM 161. There is almost NO doubling of any significance on the P in PLURIBUS. Yes, there is the smallest amount on the upper loop on the outside, but both of the “feet” on the P look essentially normal. This will help. Once you see this coupled with the E, and then if you happen to check the ear, you have a lock on the variety.



This is the R in PLURIBUS, and it is about as normal as they get in the 160 series. There are two notes—first the inside of the top loop has the metal from where the R was struck with the I, and second, the inside foot of the left vertical is very weak. On MANY of the 7tf coins, this is very weak or missing, so one should not place a lot of validity to using these markers. Most of the other letters are normal in E PLURIBUS UNUM.

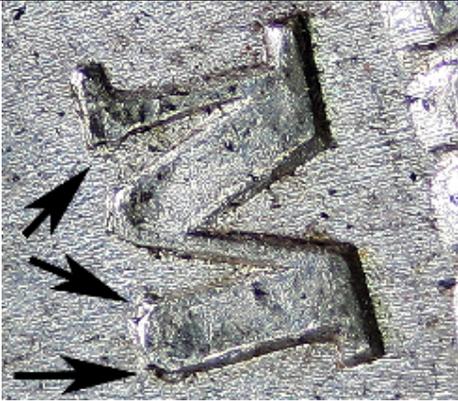
VAM 162



The N and M in UNUM are both missing the serifs on the bottom of the letters. This is without doubt the key to this variety.

****LEARN THIS****

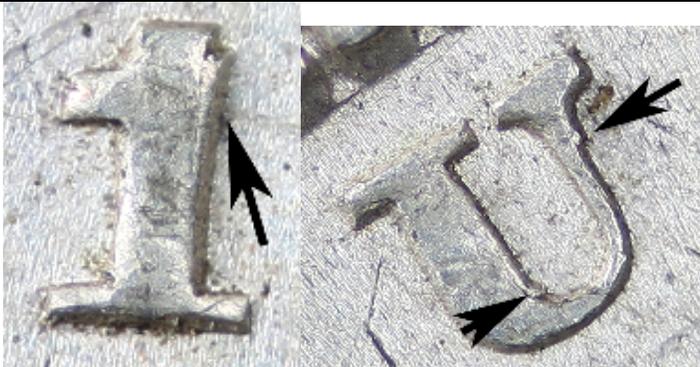
This is the only variety with the B²c reverse in the VAMs from 160 to 188.



See above. If, for some reason you miss these serifs being gone, we will give you a couple more items to separate this coin from the VAM 166.



The P is basically non-descript. There is some light doubling on the tops of the feet and on the outside of the top loop, but it is in no way like the other VAMs from this group.



The 1 in the date has pretty spectacular doubling, especially when compared to the other date digits. This is by far the largest shift on the 1 out of any of the coins in the 160s and 170s

The U in PLURIBUS shows doubling similar to, yet different from the VAM 166. Don't let this fool you. When coupled with the very normal P, you will not come up with VAM 166, it will be 162.

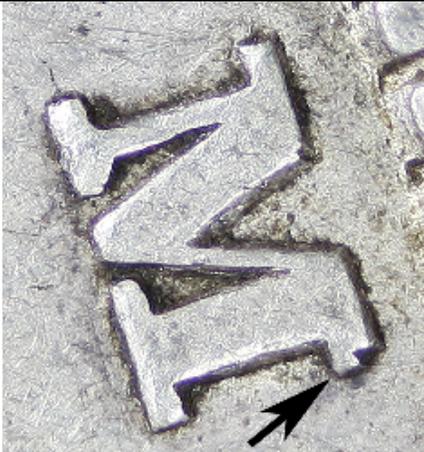
VAM 163



This is the one VAM from 160 to 188 that can be attributed SOLELY by looking at the first U in PLURIBUS. If you ****LEARN THIS**** you will never miss another VAM 163. If you miss this incredibly doubled left upright, you will have a tough time with this coin.



The P in PLURIBUS is basically normal on the VAM 163. How this occurred with the U as doubled as it is, is really amazing.

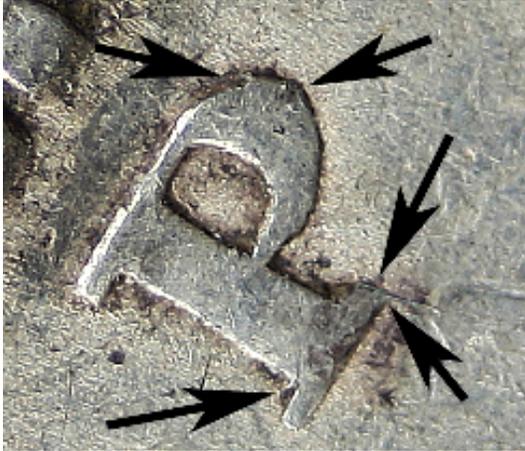


The M in UNUM is also unique on the VAM 163. This notch is the only one of its size on any VAM from 160-188.

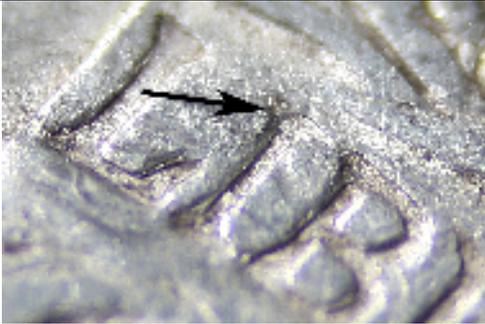


The 7th left star has very strong doubling. This attribute always gets this author looking for the VAM 123. Of course, I turn over the coin and see the broken R in Trust and that is over. The last U in UNUM has some distinct doubling that should be noted on this variety.

VAM 164



The VAM 164 is one of the most misattributed coins in this group. The P in PLURIBUS does resemble the one on the VAM 166. HOWEVER, there is a difference. ****LEARN THIS**** **The left foot of the 164 has a little spike coming out over the foot. The 166 DOES NOT.** If you get this, you won't misattribute this coin unless the coin is very low grade. More attributes will help you narrow down the 164.



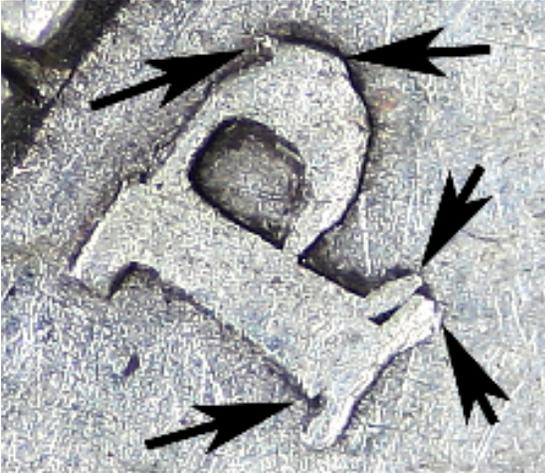
This doubling on the inside top left of the I of LIBERTY is without a doubt the best marker for the VAM 164. This is the **ONLY** coin in the group that is strongly filled in this area. ****LEARN THIS****, it will help so much in getting the VAM 164.



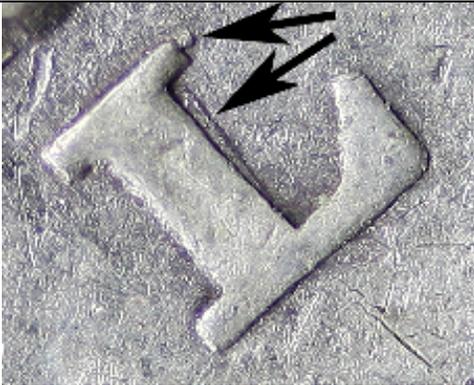
(See Below)

The E, the L and the first U in E PLURIBUS have only the slightest of doubling on the VAM 164. In fact, if it weren't for the P, this coin would very often be misattributed as the VAM 185, which would be the "NORMAL" coin for the obverse.

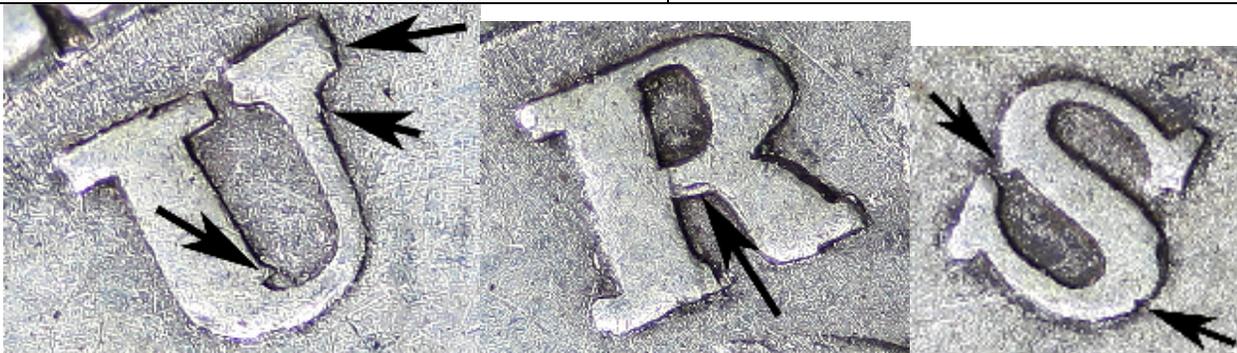
VAM 165



Once you have seen a few VAM 165 coins, you will never misattribute this coin again. Yes, you may think the doubling on the P in PLURIBUS is the VAM 166 once, because of the fact that there is a doubled foot on the right side that extends beyond the end of the normal foot, plus there is basically a normal left foot on the P. And yes, the top outside of the P is doubled like the VAM 166, BUT, THIS DOUBLING IS SO DRAMATIC, IT IS ONLY ON THE VAM 165. **On virtually every 165 I've seen, there is "air" between the doubled foot and the normal one. This is NOT SO on the 166**

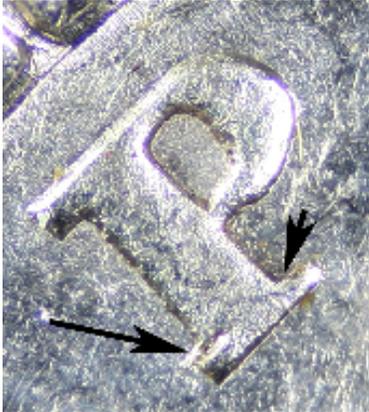


The L in PLURIBUS has very clear doubling on the right side of the vertical . The top right serif is also very clearly doubled. ****LEARN THIS****. This is the only variety in the group that shows this dramatic doubling. Look for this first when checking for the VAM 165.

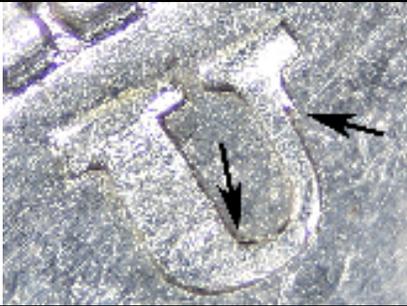


Most of the letters in E PLURIBUS UNUM on the VAM 165 have significant doubling. It is a very interesting coin, and very common as well. This would be a fun coin to find in MS64, though. This coin has a very interesting feature on the reverse as well—the O in GOD is "open "at the top left. This is not the case on the VAM 166. That being said, it would be very difficult to misattribute the 165 for the 166.(It has the B²m reverse, for accuracy)

VAM 167



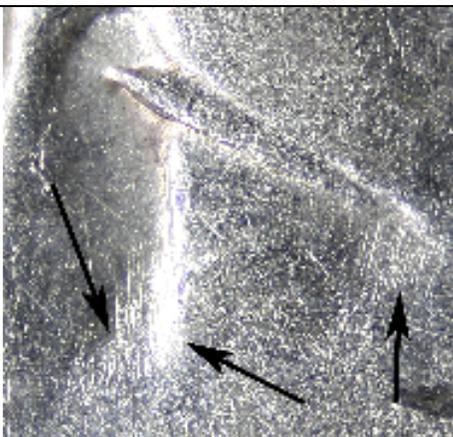
Use the P in PLURIBUS to differentiate the VAM 167 from the 166. The “feet” are backwards. The right foot is basically normal and the left foot is doubled to the North. Also, there is little or no other doubling on the letter. ****LEARN THIS****



The U in PLURIBUS on the VAM 167 can very easily be confused with the VAM 166. This is why properly attributing the P is vital.

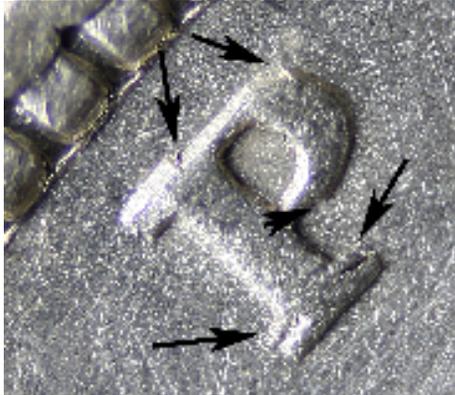


The left foot of the R in PLURIBUS is doubled to the North and this is the way to distinguish this letter from the 166.



Provided the coin is of high enough grade, these die polish lines will significantly help to attribute the coin from all the other coins in the 160-188 range. There are no others with lines like this.

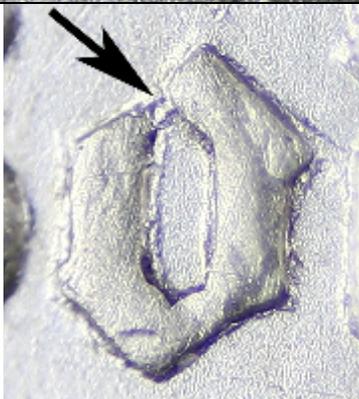
VAM 168



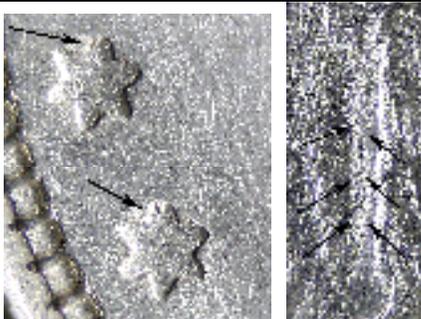
The VAM 168 has very strong doubling on BOTH feet of the P in PLURIBUS, not just the right foot as on the 166. On coins above VF, this is absolutely clear. ****LEARN THIS**** This is a very easy way to rule out this coin.



If you were under the impression that the VAM 166 has strong “gouges” under the eyelid, then this would have a tendency to throw you. However, the 166 is very weak under the eyelid and the VAM 168 is super strong under the eyelid. These marks will be visible on almost any specimen.

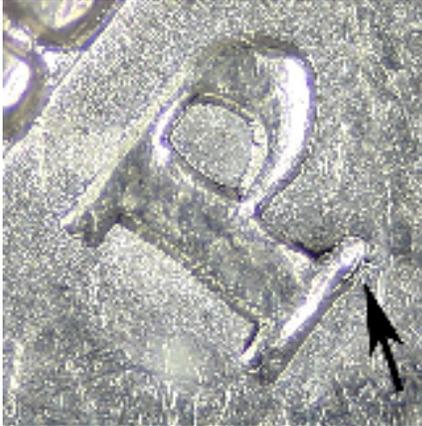


This is the “open” O in GOD on the reverse of the VAM 168. The O is complete on the VAM 166. This is very important if you are having to rely on memory for all the little attribution guidelines, but if you remember that O on the 166 is complete, 2 of the more difficult coins that have to be ruled out (the 168 and the 165) are “open.” Note: there are 2 light lines connecting the gap, but they are recessed. ****LEARN THIS****

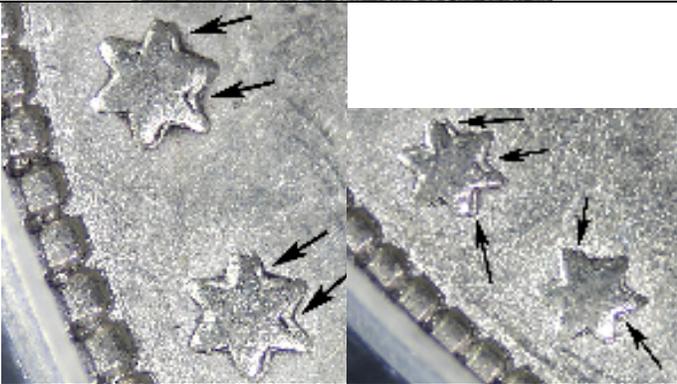


The 5th and 6th left stars are strongly doubled on the VAM 168. This is significantly different from the 166. The reverse of the coin is B²n for accuracy, which has the engraved lines between the eagle’s breast and it’s right wing. Note: Quite a few of the obverse letters are significantly doubled, but we have shown the most important pick up points.

VAM 169



The doubling on the P in PLURIBUS on the VAM 169 is very light. It is virtually impossible to mistake it for the VAM 166.



The primary attribute for the VAM 169 is the super strong doubling, tripling, and quadrupling in the stars of the obverse. This coin is highly sought for this reason and is virtually impossible to confuse with the VAM 166. ****LEARN THIS****. Shown are the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th left stars.



Like the VAM 168 the VAM 169 shares the B²n reverse. This reverse has the broken R in TRUST as well as this “open” O and the bars between the eagle’s right wing and the body.

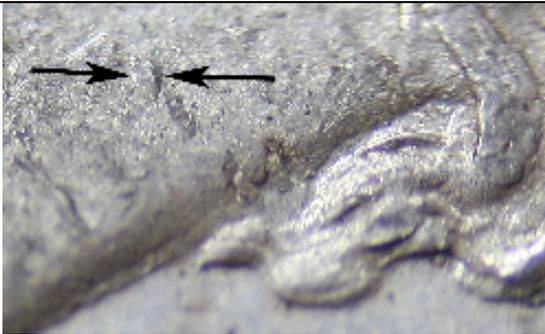


Shown here is the broken R in TRUST that all of the coins in this monograph share.

VAM 170



The VAM 170 has very distinct doubling across the tops of all four date digits. This is visible with the naked eye and should be a very simple differentiator from the VAM 166.



The date doubling combined with the die chip shown here will positively identify the VAM 170. There should be no problems confusing this variety with the VAM 166 ****LEARN THIS****



The bottom left foot of the left vertical of the R in PLURIBUS is distinctly doubled on the VAM 170. Often this is the first pickup point I see when checking the VAM. I generally begin by checking which reverse the coin has and then I move to the obverse E PLURIBUS UNUM. Once I see the base of this R, I move down to the date and the die chip as shown above.



The pictures above are the U in PLURIBUS, the M in UNUM, the 4th left star and the 6th right star on the VAM 170.

VAM 171

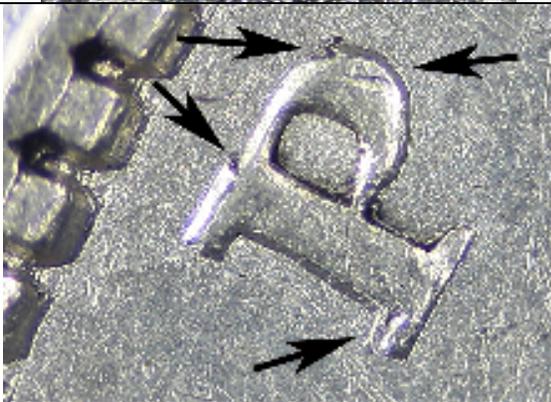


The VAM 171 has a very distinctly TRIPLED R in PLURIBUS. The lower left foot of the left vertical is tripled to the North. In coins above VG, this tripling is quite obvious.



Shown here is the outstanding doubling in the obverse of the VAM 171. This doubling is unrivaled in any of the B²c reverse coins. If you see this, immediately check the R, as above, and you will likely have completed the attribution.

****LEARN THIS****



The P in PLURIBUS on the VAM 171 is very similar to the VAM 167. It is "BACKWARDS" from the 166. The left foot is doubled and the right foot is normal. The rest of the P is doubled similar to the normal VAM 166 or 167. See those two VAMs as written earlier to compare.

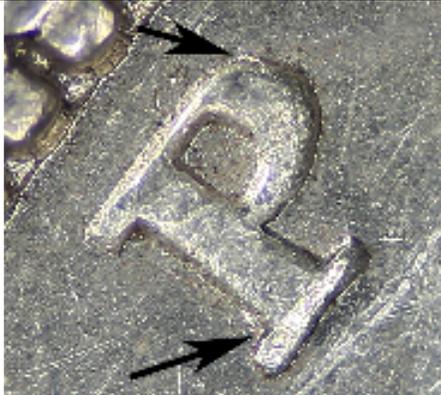


Another nice marker for the VAM 171 is the die polish between the wheat leaves. This is a very solid marker that holds up on low grade specimens if all the dirt is removed.

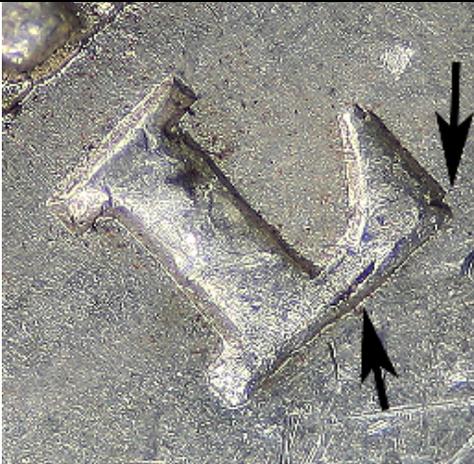
VAM 187



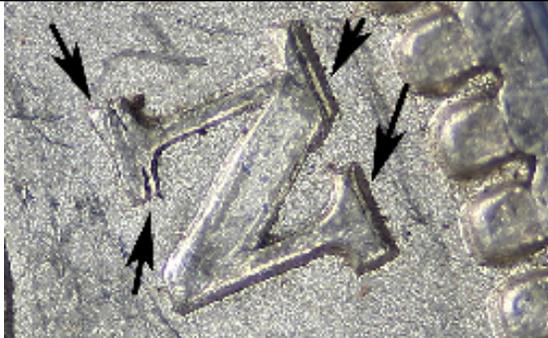
This is an unmistakable variety. The remarkably doubled R in PLURIBUS is very unique and is the only thing necessary to attribute the coin, once you have determined the coin has a broken R in TRUST on the reverse. ****LEARN THIS****



The P in PLURIBUS is doubled but the “feet” are basically normal. It will not be mistaken for the 166.



The L in PLURIBUS is doubled strongly in the center. It will not be mistaken for the 166.



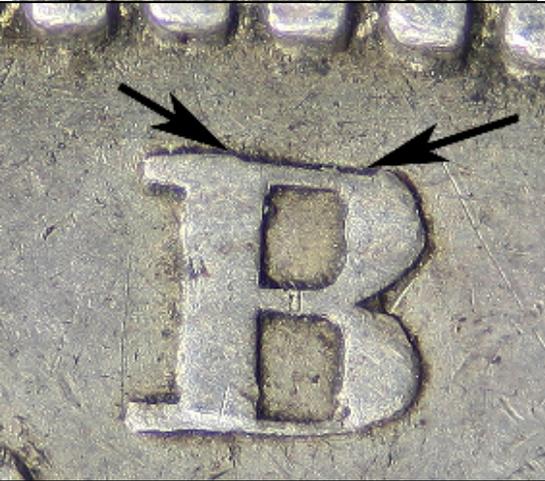
The N in UNUM is doubled strongly in the center. It will not be mistaken for the 166.

VAM 188



The VAM 188 is overpolished in the LIBERTY. The L is worn into the headband. This variety is unique when paired with the B²c reverse and would not be mistaken for the VAM 166.

****LEARN THIS****



There is very little on the VAM 188 that is not normal, so to speak, other than the LIBERTY being weak. The very top of the B in PLURIBUS was cut a bit thin though and it is noticeable.

The VAMs 185 and 186 have normal obverses. They are not listed in this monograph for that reason. The 185 exhibits almost no doubling on the obverse and the 186 is virtually the same except that the 4th right star has a broken point.



About The Author

Ash

Harrison has been a coin collector since 1968 and a dealer since 1988. He is always very pleased to work on estates, because he has a real passion for coins and enjoys looking at them.

Credentials:

- Owner/Operator – Ashmore Rare Coins and Diamonds, 1988-present
- President – Greensboro Coin Club, 2004-2005, 2008, 2005-2006 VP 2006-2007
- President—Winston-Salem CC 2008
- Director – North Carolina Numismatic Association 2005-2006, 2008
- President – Society of Silver Dollar Collectors 2006-current
- Membership Director, Treasurer – Society of Silver Dollar Collectors 2004-2006 Recipient, 2006 Terry Armstrong Memorial Award
- Bourse Chairman, Vice President – Winston-Salem Coin Club
- Member – Blue Ridge Numismatic Association, South Carolina Numismatic Association, Central States Numismatic Association
- Life Member – American Numismatic Association, Florida United Numismatists, NCNA, SSDC, NSDR
- PCGS, NGC, CAC, ANACS, ICG – Certified Dealer
- Certified in Diamonds and Diamond Grading – Gemological Institute of America

Ash travels continuously to coin shows all over the nation to buy and sell coins, and supplies several of the largest coin dealers on eBay. He is a regular speaker on the topics of Varieties of the Morgan Dollar, Grading US Coins, Online commerce, and many others.

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