

The United States 1801 Three Errors Large Cent

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If you are interested in collecting error or variety coins the Draped Bust Large Cent, minted from 1796 to 1807, is an excellent and exciting series to collect! This sequence of coinage is rife with errors and varieties. The 2019 *A Guide Book of United States Coins* (aka the Red Book™) lists a total of forty styles, which is very exciting for error and type collectors! Only three of the eleven years of coinage was error free: 1804, 1805 and 1806. As can be expected, most of the errors are due to human mistakes during die manufacturing and coin minting. One especially notable and popular example is the 1801 3-Error Draped Bust Large Cent, which as the name implies, contains not one, not two, but three errors!

As background, following passage of the Coinage Act of 1792 the US began minting coins. The very first were delivered in March 1793 - 11,178 Flowing Hair copper cents. This design was not well-received, and was changed to the Liberty Cap version partway through 1793. This design only lasted through a portion of 1796, when again in mid-year a new design was introduced - the Liberty Draped Bust Cent. Three designs in five years! The third version was more stable and was destined to last for 11 years – through 1807 – with a total of 1,362,837 coins being issued.

As noted, the Draped Bust Large Cent series had numerous errors, and the 1801 3-Error version is one of the most popular. In addition to this variety there are three other versions of the 1801 coin, including the:

- Normal 1801
- 1801 1/000 faction
- 1801 1/100 over 1/000.

The USA Coin Book website has a page which shows very nicely photographed and clear examples of the various errors of the 1801 cent. This page is located at:
<https://www.usacoinbook.com/coins/5670/large-cents/draped-bust/1801-P/all-varieties/>

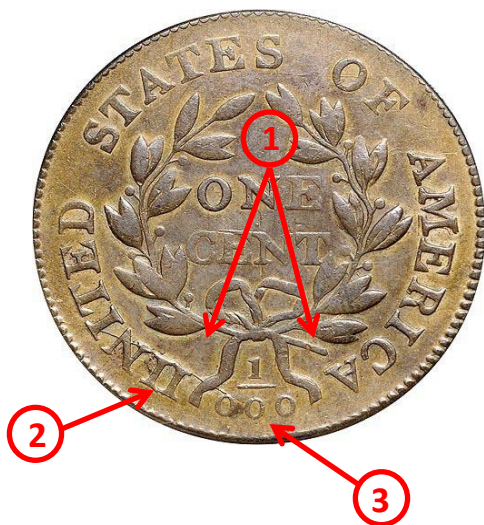
The 3 Error coin encompasses three separate errors at the bottom of the coin's reverse:

1) It is missing the wreath stem on the left side at the bottom of the wreath. Other varieties of this coin either have two stems or no stems. Hence, the one stem is the key diagnostic to identify this 1801 variety, especially if wear has made the date illegible.

2) The "U" in "UNITED" was initially punched upside down,

resulting in an image that looks like the Roman numeral "II". According to the USA Coin Book website, the source of this error was: *"The "U" in "UNITED" was originally engraved upside down and struck on the coin. Eventually the "U" was reversed and the coin was struck on top of the inverted "U" which resulted in what looks like two letter "I"s - making the word "UNITED" look like 'IINITED"*

3) It contains the mistaken fractional denomination of 1 / 000 (one-one thousandth of a dollar!) As previously stated there are versions of this coin which contains only the 1/000 error, i.e., there are two stems and the "U" is normal.



1801 One Cent Three Errors(S-219)

- 1) Missing one stem; Other varieties either have two stems, or no stem. Hence **the one stem is the key diagnostic** to identify this variety.
- 2) The "U" in "UNITED" was initially punched upside down, resulting in an image that looks like the Roman numeral "II"
- 3) Fractional denomination of 1 / 000 (one-one thousandth of a dollar)

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This issue is weakly struck in many instances and the fraction of 1/000 may be difficult to read (even the Red Book™ picture of this variety has a barely legible fraction) especially if there is wear in addition to the weak strike. This is why the “one stem” diagnostic is so important in identifying this variety. Shown here courtesy of NGC’s website is a Mint State example of the 1801 3 Error Cent:



1801 3-Error Cent: Courtesy of NGC:

Source: <https://www.ngccoin.com/coin-explorer/draped-bust-cents-pscid-13/1801-3-errors-1c-ms-coinid-11461>

With respect to valuation of this coin, numerous sources are available on the internet to research this topic and to see final prices paid for examples. The most frequently consulted services are NGC’s Coin Explorer and PCGS’ CoinFacts or CoinValues. An additional resource is USA Coin Books.

The following table of valuations was formulated by reviewing these sites. Notice the population of high-grade certified coins is small; also observe at the higher grades the valuations between the grading services is divergent.

1801 One Cent 3 Error (S-219) Valuations												
GRADE:	PR/AG	G4	VG8	F12	VF30	XF40	AU50	AU53	AU58	MS60	MS62	MS63
USA Coinbook		\$211	\$370	\$843	\$2,607	\$7,963						
PCGS		\$300	\$625	\$1,500	\$5,000	\$7,000	\$11,000	\$13,500	\$19,000	\$30,000	\$85,000	\$150,000
NGC	\$165	\$360	\$650	\$1,450	\$3,210	\$7,100	\$10,750	\$16,000	\$28,500	\$90,800	\$112,000	\$225,000
NGC Population	5	3	5	6	4	1			1			1
PCGS Population	30	9	7	7	4	1	1	2	1	1		

The auction record for this version of the coin is \$138,000 (including Buyer’s Premium) which occurred during Heritage Auction’s 2005 Ft. Lauderdale FL. (FUN) Signature Sale #360. The history and provenance of this specific coin is very interesting and plays into the final hammer price. For Readers who wish to learn more, additional information can be found at the HA website:

<https://coins.ha.com/itm/large-cents/1801-1c-3-errors-ms63-brown-ngc-and-eac/a/360-3258.s?hdnJumpToLot=1&x=0&y=0>

S-218 Variety:

The word “LIBERTY” is shifted to the right, so that the point of the curl of Liberty’s hair is below the “l” in Liberty, rather than under the “B”.



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

There also are two varieties of this error coin, categorized as S-218 and S-219. The S-218 is very rare, and it can be discerned from the more common S-219 version by the location of the word “LIBERTY”. In the S-218 type “LIBERTY” is shifted to the right, so that the curl of hair at the top of Liberty’s head is under the “l”, rather than under the “B”.

The coin shown here, was graded F-15 by PCGS and F-12 by Heritage Auctions. It was put up for sale in 2008 with a reserve of \$25,000, but apparently it did not sell at that time.

1801 3 Error Cent, S-218 Variety: Courtesy of Heritage Auctions at: <https://coins.ha.com/itm/large-cents/1801-1c-three-errors-fine-15-pcgs-s-218-b-8-high-r5/a/460-2221.s>

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The Heritage Auctions website indicated that due to its rarity (and consequently value) the S-218 variety is worth searching for. They stated: *"The rarity and low overall Condition Census of S-218 makes this a worthwhile die marriage to hunt down unattributed."*

If you are an error coin collector, or are interested in early American coppers, the 1801 3-Error Draped Bust Large Cent is an excellent coin to add to your collection! In fact the whole Draped Bust Large Cent Series is a wonderful and relatively inexpensive focus area. With a few exceptions (the early issues and the rarer varieties) most of this series can be purchased for a few hundred dollars through Very Good 8 and in some cases through Fine 12. With forty varieties to choose from this one coin series can produce an interesting collection in and of itself!

Author's Notes:

An excellent article on the history of the Draped Bust Cent and the issues experience in minting coins during this period can be found on NGC's website at: <https://www.ngccoin.com/coin-explorer/draped-bust-cents-1796-1807-pscid-13-desig-ms>.

The following PCGS webpage catalogs recent auctions of this coin: <https://www.pcgs.com/auctionprices/details/1801-3-errors-ms/36272>.

Sources / References:

- NCG Coin Explorer website <https://www.ngccoin.com/coin-explorer/draped-bust-cents-pscid-13/1801-3-errors-1c-ms-coinid-11461>
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- PCGS CoinValues website <https://www.pcgs.com/Prices/PriceGuideDetail.aspx?MS=1&PR=1&SP=1&c=660&title=Draped+Bust+Cent&spec=1461#s1461>
- *A Guide Book of United States Coins – 2019, 72nd Edition*