

Designer's Spotlight: Christian Gobrecht

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Christian Gobrecht was born on December 23, 1785 in Hanover, Pennsylvania. His father, Reverend John C. Gobrecht, had moved from Germany to America in 1755. His mother, Elizabeth Sands, on the other hand, had family that traced back to the Plymouth Colony in 1642. Gobrecht was an apprentice in Manheim, Pennsylvania. From there, he moved to Baltimore, Maryland where he engraved ornamental clocks. When his second apprenticeship was up, he moved back to Pennsylvania, where he joined Murray, Draper, Fairman, and Company, a bank note engraving firm located in Philadelphia, PA. He joined this firm sometime around the year 1816.

In 1823, Christian Gobrecht sought after the position of Chief Engraver of the United States Mint after turning down the opportunity to work as Robert Patterson's assistant, who was then the Mint Director. The job of Chief Engraver instead went to William Kneass, even though Gobrecht had sent then President James Monroe a letter asking for the position. Gobrecht then became William Kneass's assistant. In 1824, Gobrecht prepared a few dies for the Franklin Institute medal, which was produced the same year. His name was put under Franklin's bust, appearing as GOBRECHT F.

In the year 1835, William Kneass had a stroke making it nearly impossible for him to work for the rest of life. Though Kneass was still considered the Chief Engraver of the United States Mint, Gobrecht did all pattern work and dies, retaining his title of Assistant Engraver. In 1836 the Gobrecht Silver Dollar was released. This coin featured Lady Liberty sitting down on the obverse, and a soaring eagle on the reverse. Both engravings on this coin were used on American coins some years later. The engraving of Lady Liberty sitting with a shield was reused on the Seated Liberty half dollar, quarter, dime, and also the half dime, which was taken out of production in 1873. This coin series ran from 1837 up until 1891, when the Barber series of coinage took over. The soaring eagle on the reverse was used by James Barton Longacre on the Flying Eagle cent, which was the first small cent minted by the United States Mint. It was minted for only a few years; 1956, 1957, and 1958.

Gobrecht was made the Chief Engraver of the United States Mint on December 21, 1840, only 2 days before his 55th birthday. During this time Gobrecht continued his work on the Seated Liberty coinage, along with the engraving of the Liberty Head, which was also known as the Braided Hair and Coronet. This design appeared on several coins, with the 1938 gold coin being first. The design was then placed on the one cent and half cent coins, along with the gold 2.5 and 5 coins.

Gobrecht held his position as Chief Engraver of the United States Mint until his death, which was on July 23, 1844. Gobrecht was the Chief Engraver for only 3 years and 8 months. He served longer as the Assistant Engraver than as the actual Chief Engraver.