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## **MATTE PROOF**

The design wasn't the only controversial feature of the Indian Head quarter eagle. A limited number of proof coins were struck for collectors using a new innovation not previously seen in U.S. coins until around 1908 (a similar satin finish had been introduced on the Saint-Gaudens eagle, double eagle and the \$5 Indian).

Instead of the bright, shiny mirror-like surface most collectors expected, the Mint used the matte proof technique popularized by the Paris Mint. The finish gave the surface a softer diffused finish with a uniform granular sheen meant to make the bright devices stand out stronger.

The actual method of producing the effect was a closely guarded secret, but experts believe the coins took several strikes from the press and then were "pickled" or etched in diluted acid.

While the innovative technique may have tickled the fancy of Charles Barber and his minions at the mint, the public turned up its nose. The matte proofs were unpopular because people didn't like the dull, flat finish and often couldn't distinguish them from common business strikes. Many were spent, either on purpose (during the Depression, for example) or by accident, and many more sat unwanted in government vaults until they were melted down.

## **THE PRATT-BIGELOW LEGACY**

Pratt unequivocally broke new ground in American coin design. Yet his accomplishment was always overshadowed by the masterful work of his mentor Saint-Gaudens. Perhaps if his innovations had come before or well after Saint-Gaudens' beloved eagle and double eagle classics, his work might have been treated differently. Saint-Gaudens was simply a tough act for anyone, no matter how talented, to follow.

The groundbreaking features that distinguished the Indian Head quarter eagle and half eagle never really captured the public imagination and thus had only limited impact on the course of American coin design. The incused relief concept has never been used again in U.S. coinage. Photorealistic faces became the norm but, except for Fraser's Indian Head nickel, seldom with as much force and authority as Pratt's Indian chief. The matte proof finish and its variants sand blast proof and satin proof have appeared occasionally on other coins but with mixed reaction from collectors.

Nonetheless, history has been kinder to Pratt and his collaborator, Dr. Bigelow, than their contemporaries were. The Pratt-Bigelow legacy has been exonerated by time. Despite its less than auspicious beginnings, the Indian Head quarter eagle has earned its place as one of the most popular and sought-after of all American coins.

## PEOPLE

Knowing the plot only tells us part of the Indian Head quarter eagle story. Knowing the characters fleshes out the story's dimensions, offering hints from their life experiences that may help explain why they did what they did and how they came to be involved in this story.

The cast of the Indian Head quarter eagle drama includes some of the most interesting players in American numismatic history.

### Theodore Roosevelt

Easily one of the most colorful of all American presidents, Theodore Roosevelt has been called the Universal Man and the American Renaissance Man. Some historians hold up Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson as the only Americans in history to rival Roosevelt's multi-faceted character.

"Roosevelt was a many-sided man and every side was like an electric battery," said his friend and nature-writer John Burroughs. "Such versatility, such vitality, such thoroughness, such copiousness, have rarely been united in one man."

The Theodore Roosevelt Cyclopedia enumerated the depth and breadth of his accomplishments:



Theodore Roosevelt was naturalist, hunter, conservationist, rancher in the "wild West," historian, soldier, prolific writer on diverse subjects, explorer, social reformer, politician, intellectual, and public official. He was the Colonel of the Rough Riders, and the first American to win the Nobel Peace Prize. He put a river on the map, Brazil's "Rio Roosevelt," over 900 miles in length; and he started the Panama Canal. He was a deputy sheriff in the Dakota Territory, and also President of the Board of Police Commissioners of New York City. He hunted, collected, and wrote about wildlife in North America, Africa, and South America. For a time he led his own political party, the Progressive or "Bull Moose" Party. He was President of the American Historical Association. He was a major figure in American politics and government for nearly forty years. TR was elected to the New York State Assembly in 1881 at the age of twenty-three, and became President of the United States in 1901, at forty-two the youngest President before or since.



*Four-year-old "Teddy,"  
sickly & asthmatic*

Roosevelt was born to a wealthy family in New York City on Oct. 27, 1858. He was sickly and asthmatic as a child, yet in spite of his poor health he was hyperactive and mischievous. His father made him exercise to help strengthen him and boxing lessons to deal with bullies.

He graduated from Harvard in 1876 and entered public life as a Republican activist, serving as a New York assemblyman.

Roosevelt's first wife and his mother both died on Valentine's Day 1884 in the same house, just two days after the birth of their only daughter, Alice. Roosevelt was devastated. He quit the General Assembly, gathered up his daughter and headed west to his ranch in the North Dakota badlands. He found the rugged

life there as a rancher and lawman invigorating and healthful, convincing him of the value of the "strenuous life."

After the winter of 1886-87 wiped out his cattle and investment, he returned East to run for mayor of New York. Coming in a distant third, he traveled to London, where he married his childhood sweetheart Edith Kermit Carow. He was the only American chief executive to become a widower and remarry before becoming president.

Returning to Washington, the highly charismatic and larger than life Roosevelt began to make his mark in national politics, becoming Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1887. At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in Cuba in 1898, Roosevelt resigned from the Navy Department and formed the First U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, which the newspapers dubbed the "Rough Riders."

William McKinley won the election of 1900 with Roosevelt as his vice president. McKinley was shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz on September 6, 1901. He died on September 14, making Roosevelt the nation's 26th and youngest president.



*Colonial Roosevelt, commander of the First U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, dubbed the "Rough Riders" by the press.*



*Roosevelt the visionary saw the United States taking its place on the global stage as a world power.*

Nicknamed “Teddy” as a child, a name he detested, Roosevelt’s informal moniker became attached to the popular children’s stuffed bear toy after a hunting incident in 1902 when Roosevelt refused to shoot a black bear simply for the sake of making a kill. Whether he liked the name or not, the stuffed toy would be known from that point forward as the “teddy bear.”

Roosevelt won the presidency in his own right in 1904. Roosevelt recognized probably the first American president to do so that the United States was destined to become a major world power. He saw it as America’s duty to participate actively on the world

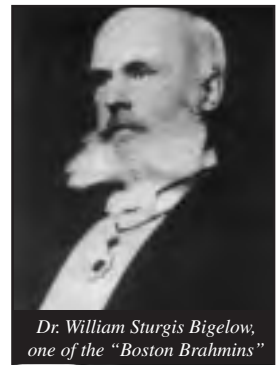
stage and was the first to project American power abroad through the display of military might.

It was in this context of manifest destiny and Roosevelt’s grand vision of America’s emerging role of strength in the world that he sought to refine and elevate the nation’s coinage to a stature worthy of a world power.

### **Dr. William Bigelow**

Son of prominent Boston surgeon Dr. Henry Jacob Bigelow, William Sturgis Bigelow seemed ordained to follow in his famous father’s footsteps. But he was to imprint his own deeply spiritual side on his career that would lead to his living in two distinct worlds.

Bigelow was born in 1850 to great privilege as one of the Boston Brahmins. The term Brahmin comes from the Indian caste system. The Brahmins are the highest caste in that social structure. Also called the First Families of Boston, the Brahmins are a blue-blooded class of New Englanders who claim hereditary or cultural lineage from the original Anglo-Saxon Protestants who founded the city of Boston and settled New England. They form the historic core of the so-called East Coast establishment, along with wealthy families of New York and Philadelphia. Among the Boston Brahmins were Samuel Adams, John Adams, John Quincy Adams,



*Dr. William Sturgis Bigelow, one of the “Boston Brahmins”*

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Henry Cabot Lodge, Percival Lowell and many other well-known lights of American culture (the Kennedys are not among the Brahmins).

William S. Bigelow graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1874 and continued his medical education in Europe, studying under Louis Pasteur. He returned to Boston to practice surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital.

But Bigelow wearied of his job and life in Boston and grew restless. He traveled to Japan with a friend and was immediately taken with the Japanese culture. He stayed for seven years, studying Japanese art and Buddhism, which became a lifelong study. His interest in Japanese art had grown even before he visited the country as he amassed a formidable collection. He donated more than 15,000 pieces and 40,000 prints to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1911.

It was through his involvement with the museum that he came to know Bela Lyon Pratt. It was also there that he saw and became enamored with the Egyptian art style of incuse sculpture, which later gave him the idea for the radical coin design that he suggested to his good friend Teddy Roosevelt.

When Dr. Bigelow died in 1926, he was split between two worlds, as he had been in life. Half his ashes were interred at the Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The other half were buried in Japan near a Buddhist temple overlooking a lake he loved.

## **Bela Lyon Pratt**

Bela Lyon Pratt was born on December 11, 1867, in Norwich, Connecticut, to family that prized education. His father was educated at Yale. His maternal grandfather founded a music conservatory in Connecticut.

Pratt entered Yale University's School of Fine Arts at age sixteen. His professors included celebrated artists John Henry Niemeyer and John Ferguson Weir. Three years later, Pratt was enrolled in the Art Students' League of New York, where his tutors included the likes of noted artists William Merritt Chase, Kenyon Cox, Francis Edwin Elwell, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Saint-Gaudens saw great promise in Pratt and became his mentor.

While working as Saint-Gaudens' assistant, Pratt gained admission to the prestigious Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he absorbed knowledge from renowned sculptors Henri-Michel-Antoine Chapu and Alexandre Falguière. Pratt won several medals and prizes while studying in Paris under the masters.

At Saint-Gaudens' invitation, he returned to Boston in 1892 to create two massive sculptural sets representing The Genius of Navigation for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, thus launching his professional career.

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He soon was offered the position as instructor of sculpture at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (where he became acquainted with Dr. William Bigelow). He remained with the museum for 25 years.

In addition to his duties at the museum, Pratt maintained a private study to pursue his own works. There he produced numerous noteworthy sculptures which can now be found at the Library of Congress. He was awarded a silver medal at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York.

Pratt is described as “a mild-mannered, modest, and congenial man who loved music and the outdoors.” He married a sculpture student, Helen Pray. The couple had four children, and Pratt lived contentedly in a comfortable family setting.

Over the decades, he produced a wide-ranging array of work, including small portrait busts, reliefs, and memorial tablets to ideal nudes, fountain figures, and public monuments of “heroic size.” He developed a technically skilled restrained naturalism in his work that some of his associates and contemporaries called “quintessentially American.” No doubt it was this reputation that prompted Dr. Bigelow to seek out Pratt for the coin design project entrusted to him by President Roosevelt.

The Indian Head quarter/half eagle was the only coin Pratt designed. Undoubtedly he had had enough of the Mint bureaucracy and Charles Barber’s meddling.

## Charles Barber

Engraving ran in Charles Barber’s family, though talent apparently did not. Barber’s father William and grandfather John were engravers.

Charles Edward Barber was born November 16, 1840 in London. William Barber emigrated with his family to the United States when Charles was 12.



The elder Barber was appointed chief engraver of the U.S. Mint in 1869. Young Charles, by then 29, was apprenticed to his father at the Mint.

William Barber’s dubious claim to fame is that during his tenure he was one of only two U.S. chief engravers of the 19th century who did not design a single major circulating coin. He died suddenly in 1879. President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed Charles Barber to fill his father’s post as chief engraver of the Mint.

In contrast to his father, Charles Barber churned out a prodigious list of coins and medals, including the Barber dimes, quarters, and half dollars, and the Liberty Head “V” Nickel.

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The latter was notable for the fact that Barber's first design, released into circulation in January 1883, did not carry the word CENTS anywhere on it. The Liberty design closely resembled the \$5 gold piece then in circulation and was of similar size. Enterprising scoundrels plated the Liberty Head nickels with a thin layer of gold and passed them off as \$5 coins. These became known as "racketeer nickels." Production had to be halted while Barber retooled the design to include the requisite word CENTS.

Numismatic historians differ in opinions about Barber's artistic merit. Though he has some defenders, they are in the minority. The predominant view generally holds that creatively he was colorless and unimaginative. His boring and predictable designs tended to regurgitate the tired conventions of antiquity and stuffiness of his native England. He was a man stuck in time, his visions gone out of fashion.

Underscoring the point, it was Barber who vigorously resisted the adoption of some of the most brilliantly creative coin designs in American history – those by Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Bela Lyon Pratt. His resistance can be laid in part to protecting his turf from outside intrusion. But it seems equally of import that Charles Barber very likely couldn't recognize a creative design if it was pasted to his nose.

It was precisely his lack of imagination and creativity that forced President Theodore Roosevelt to look outside the Mint for fresh ideas to begin with. Even upon direct orders from the president of the United States to make it happen, Barber did everything he possibly could to sabotage, deface, and demean three of the most beloved coin designs in U.S. coinage history. Despite his meddling and interference, the Saint-Gaudens' eagle and double eagles, and Pratt's quarter/half eagle masterpieces survived and endured.

Charles Barber died February 18, 1917, in Philadelphia.

## **Frank Leach**

Frank Aleomon Leach served as Director of the U.S. Mint from September 1907 to November 1909, filling the vacancy left by the departure of George E. Roberts. He had been at the time superintendent of the San Francisco Mint.

In that time frame, he had the difficult task of presiding over the contentious development of new coinage mandated by President Teddy Roosevelt using designers outside the jurisdiction of the Mint. Judging from his own writings, he was a reluctant buffer between the strong-willed, forceful Roosevelt and the stubborn, sulking Charles Barber. Leach's sympathies were clearly with his staff rather than with his boss.

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Leach, a former newspaperman from California, detailed his view of the experience in a 1917 book, *Reflections of a Newspaper Man*:

Another very important matter was in hand in the bureau when I arrived at Washington, which was soon to cause me some anxiety, and that was the perfection of President Roosevelt's scheme for new designs for all the gold coins of our country. There were a number of prominent people in the East, especially in New York and Boston, who some time before began an agitation for an improvement in appearance of all our coinage. The President quickly became the leading spirit of the movement. The prevalent idea in this undertaking was that the design and execution of our coinage were inferior and inartistic when compared with those of ancient Greece; and as the coins used by a nation are one of the most enduring records of the art and mechanical skills of its age, our government should make an issue of coinage that would leave to future generations and ages something that would more truthfully and correctly reflect the artistic taste and mechanical ability of our day than the coinage then in use, unchanged for so many years. The admiration for the ancient Greek coins unwittingly influenced those gentlemen to suggestions that were imitative rather than original. They wanted the designs for the proposed coinage to be brought out in high relief, or with medallion effect, like the designs on the ancient coins. The commercial use and requirements seemed to have been lost sight of in the enthusiasm of producing a highly artistic coin; but in all probability none of the leading spirits in the movement was familiar with the use of metallic money, and did not understand that the proposed high relief would make the face of the coins so uneven that the pieces would not "stack," which was a condition fatal to the practicability of the idea.

As superintendent of the San Francisco Mint, Leach, a political appointee with no crisis management experience, along with 50 dedicated employees was instrumental in saving the Mint building from the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire that destroyed most of San Francisco. The small band of men fought desperately to preserve the building even as the flames melted the windows and burned the clothes from their backs. Incredibly, the Mint building was one of the few buildings left standing and stood as a symbol of survival to San Francisco as they rebuilt their ravaged city.