

US \$5 INDIAN HEAD HALF EAGLE 1908-1929



Diameter: 17/20" (21.6 mm)

Weight: 129 grains (8.359 grams)

Composition: 90% gold-10% copper

Designer: Bela Lyon Pratt

Engraver: Charles E. Barber

Mint Marks: Philadelphia (none); Denver (D); New Orleans (O); San Francisco (S); (found left of arrows on reverse)

Obverse: Male Indian head wearing feathered headdress facing left. LIBERTY above head with date below. Designer's initials BLP over date. 13 stars (6 left/7 right) around plain border.

Reverse: Eagle perched on a group of arrows and an olive branch. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA above eagle around plain border. Motto E PLURIBUS UNUM in the field to the left in 3 rows. Motto IN GOD WE TRUST in the field to the right in 4 rows. Denomination FIVE DOLLARS below eagle.

Edge: Reeded

The U.S. \$2.50 and \$5.00 Indian Head designs were the next logical step to President Theodore Roosevelt's "pet crime", his desire to improve our "atrociously hideous" coinage and restore it to the beauty and dignity of Ancient Greek coinage. Roosevelt's personal friend Augustus Saint-Gaudens was a resounding success with the first two inspired efforts (his famous \$20 and Indian Head \$10 debuting to rave reviews in 1907).

Another of President Roosevelt's close friends, Bostonian Dr. William Sturgis Bigelow provided the spark for the \$2.50 and \$5.00 gold coins. Apparently inspired by Egyptian reliefs on display at The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Bigelow got the idea of making coins with the devices sunken below the fields. Despite the fact that there was no modern precedent using this technique for coinage production, Roosevelt gave the unique concept his blessing.

After the difficulties encountered dealing with mint engraver Charles Barber on the Saint-Gaudens \$20 it was decided that secretly working with an outside designer would be the best course of action.

Bigelow wasted no time in persuading the prominent Boston sculptor Bela Lyon Pratt to submit models in this technique. President Roosevelt enthusiastically approved the designs and instructed that they be immediately sent to the mint for conversion into dies so that the new coinage could be in the public's hands as soon as possible.

Despite initial criticism, most likely due to the incuse technique being such a radical departure from previous issues, this design stands as one of the most aesthetically pleasing of all 20th century United States coins. -

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