

Sample Slab Book, 3rd edition

What's IN/What's OUT

Revision History

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Author

BURTON STRAUSS, ANA#5136

What's IN, What's OUT (Sample Slab book, 3rd Edition)

This white paper is an attempt to explain what will and what will not be included in the 2022 Sample Slab Book, 3rd edition. It started in August 2021 as a simple bright line definition of promotional slabs being excluded from the 3rd edition, but like all things Sample Slabs, it's not *that* simple. Between then and December 2021, I've had to do a couple of complete re-thinks.

Going back to the source, what is a sample slab? David Schwager's 2015/2016 book defines it in the Preface as "*Several companies seal collectible coins in plastic holders known colloquially as slabs. The slab protects the coin and, more importantly, a label gives the service's opinion on the coin's condition and authenticity. These companies sometimes give away slabs, usually with inexpensive modern coins like state quarters or 1960 – 64 silver dimes, to demonstrate their products, show new features, or as gifts for preferred customers. These slabs are samples and therefore known as sample slabs.*"

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Production Slabs

Among the technical definitions, David's book's glossary defines:

Production slab: A regular slab that is not a sample or one of the other categories listed here. That is, a production slab serves the usual purposes of authentication, grading, and preservation.

I do not plan to include new production slabs in the 3rd edition of the book.

Most of the research in the area of production slabs focuses on “generations” of slabs as an aid to dating and identifying rarity. Why? Only one TPG has – so far – documented the dates slabs and labels were used “officially”, PCGS has the Museum of Coin Holders¹. Even that information can be sub-divided by interest specialists. I'm aware of perhaps one (defunct) TPG where the certification database publicly shows when a coin was graded, and only a few cases (releases before an embargo date) where the holder shows a grading date. Sometimes the TPG itself doesn't know – due to an error importing data, all ANACS coins before 2006 show a 2005 date not the actual slabbing date.

There is intense interest among segments of the collecting community, for example people who like to find coins that are likely to upgrade (and become more valuable) if resubmitted. How does the holder/label generation help? PCGS #s from 108##### to 7##### (I'm not sure of the exact cut off, but it is known fairly accurately) are 1st and 2nd generation, “Rattlers”. When you see a rattler# in a non-rattler slab with a non-rattler label, you can be pretty sure it was reholdered during the era of that slab/label, but the grade didn't change.

The example right is a (PCGS#ing) Generation 3.1 from March 1993 to September 1998 with a relatively early rattler error cert#

It didn't upgrade approximately 10 years after being first slabbed, but another 23 years... would it upgrade TODAY???



I am aware of current “generations” work for PCGS and ANACS, with a partial update for NGC by Conder101 from around 2008. See the appendix for pointers.

For this restriction, I'm taking a broad definition of “Production” exclude from Sample Slabs many of the objects being created by the TPGs for general sales such as artist's signature cross-over items, &c.



Also excluded are object that might be of numismatic interest but are one-offs as part of a submission. For example, an October 2022 pop-up of a Utah Fifty States quarter encased from the Utah Numismatic Society. A quick check of the ANACS database shows that the items on either side of it are other Encased or Utah items, but this itself is one-off. OUT.



¹ <https://www.pcg.com/holdermuseum>

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Sample Slabs

I'm not going to fight over this, if it says "SAMPLE" or something close, it's a sample. Even if you paid money to the TPG to create it for you to sell, these are properly classified as samples, will continue to be listed in the book, and similar items will be added in the future.

I will accept self-made slabs from members of the sample slab community. HOWEVER, simply being offered in the market as a sample (erroneously called a sample by the seller) is not sufficient for inclusion in the Sample Slab book.

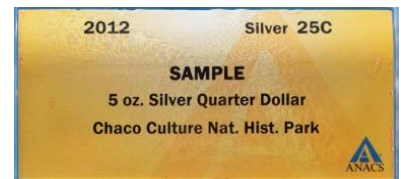
Lastly, I will accept the identification made by a contemporaneous expert. Some "samples" were given out at shows, but not identified as such anywhere on the slab.

Valid examples:

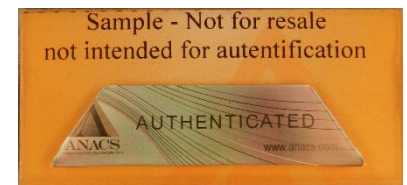
- Joel Rettew's FASTCOIN.com, which have been sold on eBay for many years (since at least 2014 based on the sales records). The front label of the older ones say "PCGS Sample" with the FASTCOIN.com reference on the reverse. PCGS-VARIOUS-5-1



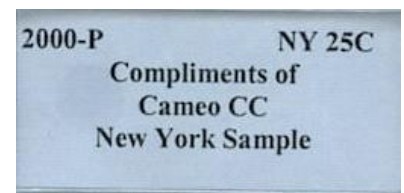
- Jim Cauley's five-ounce silver hockey puck series, slabbed by ANACS and marked as samples ANACS-AG5-3-1



- Mad Marty's medals. These are marked as samples on the reverse. A new style of label, has been added to the 3rd edition. ANACS-MEDAL-3-4 and ANACS-MEDAL-3-5



- (Self-made) David's edition-of-20 dateless Buffalo nickels counter stamped "SS21". This was a give-away for the [Sample] Slab Collectors Birds of a Feather (BoaF) meeting at the ANA WFoM 2021. Although it doesn't say Sample, it comes from within the Sample Slab community, it's labeled, and dated to a show (SS21 = Sample Slab 21). Purely selfishly, I say it's in. Based on the number of these type of items that surfaced during the period right after the *disease that shall not be mentioned*, I've created a "Company", OTHR for self-slabbled items.
- Although promoting a business other than the TPG, the common "Compliments of/Courtesy of" slab labels also self-identify as samples. I am not reclassifying them as promotional and will continue to add new examples to the book as they are discovered. Reference to a club is just gravy.



- (Expert Identified) Cam Kiefer lists two ANACS foreign coin sample slabs, ANACS 5 and ANACS 5.1 "ANACS 5 is the most recent sample to come out of ANACS. They was given out at the 2003 Colorado Springs, CO coin show and has a Mint State Canadian 5 cent piece inside. The label has the barcode across the front but does not say sample anywhere on the label. It is still technically a sample since they were handed out at a show for free to all that wanted one. Three grades were present (MS63, MS64 and MS65) and ANACS graded each one individually."

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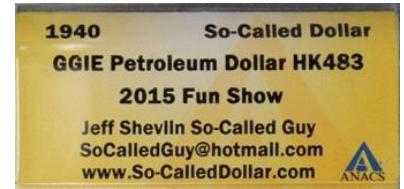
What's IN/What's OUT

Club, Show, Luncheon, Young Numismatist Slabs

If the slab identifies with a Coin Club, a **Coin Show**², a TPG Luncheon, or a YN event, it falls in these categories. Again, I take the word of the slab (or a recognized expert), not just a random seller's information.

Example:

- The So-Called Dollar slabs, labeled to the coin show that Jeff Shevlin had them created for ^{ANACS-SCD-3-1}, and ^{ANACS-SCD-3-2}.



Note that this leaves “Coin Dealer” for the next part of the discussion.

Novelty Slabs & Promotional Slabs

The area of *novelty slabs* and *promotional slabs* has always been a little murky, with the willingness of the Third-Party Graders (TPGs) to create them for their customers dictating how prevalent they are. Sometimes they seem to be samples, other times the presence of a TPG is almost coincidental (typically Production Slabs with a business name). Many times, these commemorate a non-numismatic event or subject and/or have no traceable relationship to a numismatic event.

The book's glossary defines our last two categories as:

Novelty slab: A holder that does not exist to provide a grade and guarantee of authenticity and also does not fall into any other category. For example, some commemorate events while others were made to amuse their owners.

Promotional slab: A holder that advertises a business other than a grading service. For example, a coin dealership may put its name on a label and give the holder to potential customers.

NB: David uses the term “presentation” slab once in the book. Cam Kiefer uses it once in the context of ICG18. Here I am combining it with Promotional.

As you and I go through this discussion, keep in mind ACG-100-1-2, promoting Goldie's coin shop – notable as a higher valued coin, a photoslab, and for its early issuance but not marked as a sample.

Let's knock off *Promotional* first, as (spoiler) it allows *Novelty* to be “none-of-the-above”.

For clarity, in the 1st and 2nd edition of the Sample Slab book, David defined our target as “Including Sample, **Promotional**, Club, Show, Luncheon, Novelty, and Young Numismatist Coin and Currency Holders”. For the 3rd edition I am modifying this to “Including Sample, **TPG Promotional**, Club, Show, Luncheon, Novelty, and Young Numismatist Coin and Currency Holders”.

The opposite of *TPG Promotional* is the *Purely Promotional*.

Purely promotional (out) vs. TPG promotional (in)

There is a class of slabs that clearly simply memorialize an event, pedigree, or provenance, where the slabbing aspects are simply a way to package the product with its implied Certificate of Authenticity. These are manufactured by the TPG, but effectively created by a non-TPG company for commercial purposes unrelated to the slab and will not be added to the Sample Slab book in the future.

For our purpose I may (incorrectly) use Pedigree and Provenance equivalently. Technically they aren't but if you can ignore the faint whiff of wet dog, in (mal)practice, they are used interchangeably.

² 33rd Annual Gun and Knife show – no, even if it has a few coin dealers. 33rd Annual Gun, Knife, and Collectables show – yes. **It is an arbitrary line.**

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Early examples of these would be various company's "Redfield" and "GSA" label notations. Shipwreck coins and items such as National Collector's Mint (NCM)'s Ground Zero Recovery slabs are in this class.

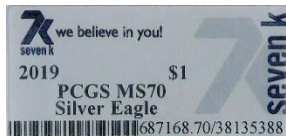


For the 3rd edition, I define a purely promotional slab as one that [only] promotes another business or event or provenance, is not labeled as a sample, nor promotes the TPG itself or numismatics.

With the addition of "or numismatics", this is slightly looser than David's rule: "As for what type of slab, I call it a sample slab because it is an advertisement for the grading service. A promotional slab is an advertisement for a business other than the grading service, usually a coin dealer or auction house."³

The number of issuers of purely promotional slabs (e.g., the companies being promoted) seems to have exploded since the publication of the second edition of the Sample Slab book. A new version, which was once rare, can be found for sale every week on eBay. A new issuer pops up every month.

Here is a modern example of a mention of the TPG beyond the custom selling graded bullion hoping their name confidence.



purely promotional, one where there's no label, no event, club or show. It's just a company increases perceived value or customer

Any decision I make is purely arbitrary, never-the-less, I am not interested in creating a general, ever and rapidly expanding listing of purely promotional labels – our focus is sample slabs. If somebody wants to focus on promotional labels, I will help as I can.

Going forward, I've made a conscious decision not to add additional purely promotional slabs/labels, but also not to remove the current ones from the Sample Slabs book.

The Goldie's coin shop example I've asked you to keep in mind, clearly fails – so far – it would not be added to the book because it is a purely promotional slab (even though the source is a coin shop).

I've considered adding purely promotional slabs to the database and at least generating a simple list for completeness. I've decided not to at this time, just because of the huge number of candidates. I'm open to a proposal with a rational numbering scheme. The best I've come up with is awkward. If the decision had been No on some of the examples in this white paper, the best numbering I can come up with would be:

- PCGS-025-Hallenbeck-1 (Slabbed by PCGS, 25¢, by/for Hallenbeck Rare Coins, 1st of its kind)
- PCGS-100-7KMetals-1
- PCGS-025-Finner-1

If I do create a purely promotional list in the future, I will probably put a cross-reference in the list for historical entries, i.e.

- ACG-100-Goldies-1, see ^{ACG-100-1-2}

So far, the rules:

For the 3rd Edition of the Sample Slab book:

1. Items that were classified as samples in the 1st and 2nd editions will continue in the 3rd edition [stare decisis].
2. True samples (marked), show coins, luncheon, et al will be continued in the book or added as discovered. E.g., one labeled Redfield AND Sample would be added.
3. Purely promotional items will not be added to the book.

³ Cited from: <https://www.cointalk.com/threads/is-this-a-newly-discovered-pci-sample-slab.296703/page-2>

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Novelty Slabs

Novelty slabs are a bit more difficult to define. Most novelty slabs are issued in very small numbers, such as one cricket. They often don't have (visible) certification numbers so they can't be traced in the various TPG's database. There is a "I can't define it but I know it when I see it" aspect here.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary⁴ defines "tangential" as "touching lightly", but also "of little relevance". Which seems to define the ins & outs of this class.

In the future, those that are not labeled as samples but still have *some tangential relationship to numismatics* [the study or collection of coins, paper currency, and medals.], will be added to the Sample Slab book as novelties. Additionally, the stranger the object slabbed, the more likely I am to call it a novelty and catalog it. There is simply no reason to slab a cricket or a piece of chocolate other than to show that the TPG could do so.

Those slabs without even a tangential relationship to numismatics will not be added.

Slabs that promote or commemorate events such as class-year graduation from high school? Investigating several of these, I've found they were often giveaways at a class reunion because a member of the class happened to work (part-time) for the TPG or be a coin dealer. The reunion chairperson solicited items for the grab bag: "Can you provide 50 pieces of something from your personal or professional life for the class grab bag?" There is no indication they were seen as special keepsakes, other than perhaps containing a 1938 Buffalo Nickel for a class graduating in 1938. Although a bit arbitrary to have some in and some out: if they say SAMPLE, they're in (Rule #1), if they don't, they're not.

Examples:

- ICG's Hastings High School slab, ICG-005-1-3 was listed in the 1st edition, so it remains, but would not be added to the 3rd edition
- The newly discovered Central East St. Mary's Class of 1968 slabs, they say SAMPLE on the reverse, so ANACS-001-3-10 in the 3rd edition.
- (Expert Identified) Cam Kiefer lists several ICG samples on his site⁵ such as ICG 18, "This is a controversial slab of whether it should be considered a sample or presentation slab. Keith Love went to the University of Texas and gave a talk to the numismatics class that is held there. At the end of the talk, he gave out samples of the companies slab and is pedigreed to the Fall 2002 class with "University of Texas" where the grade would go. 50 of them were made and they are scarce today since nearly all the students have moved on and kept the slab."

In the second edition several slabs were listed that I would today be classifying as *purely promotional* slabs. Some are sold as samples (unmarked) and some (which I will retain in the book for continuity) were simply new and novel at the time.

- ANACS-WN-3-3 the Wooden "To it" (circular legend: "This is a 'round to it' for all of those who said do something when they got one."). In the 1st edition, David called it a novelty and it certainly has no business being slabbed, so it's in.
- ANACS-AG1-1-1 Coin World 1 ounce silver 40th anniversary round has no mention of a club or even the TPG (other than the hologram). But "Coin World" is a numismatic publication. In.

Purely Promotional, but added to the 3rd edition, because they pass the "More than just minimally, tangentially related to numismatics" test:

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tangential>

⁵ <https://sampleslabs.com/icg.html>

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ANACS-025-1-12 Doesn't say sample, no mention of the TPG beyond the standard label, the event doesn't appear to have been a coin show, not a club, BUT the issuer is a dealer. This one passes by the eau du wet dog.



This is a PCGS shell, but the branding is their parent company, Collectors Universe. It's a created collectable that just happens to use a coin. There's no indication of the sponsor, and no obvious traces on the web.

In 2005, Heritage sold⁶ a 9-coin PDS set of business strike Bicentennial coins in these slabs. The reverse foil embossing on these was PCGS not CU. There are other examples in the auction archive that have a PCGS cert# on the reverse. These are likely rarer than they seem as none of the known examples have item numbers above 495 of 500 or 672 of 10,000.



Even so, with the same smell test as above, this one doesn't pass.

This is a PCGS slab, with nothing except a name & coin description using the common state flag label. The purpose is unknown – are they business cards? Commemoratives of something? Either way, it doesn't say sample, it doesn't indicate a numismatic event, and it doesn't promote PCGS.



Except for the subject: Patti Finner was the Vice President of the ANA from 2007-2009. She was president of Central States Numismatic Society in 2008-2009.

Several of her initiatives during her term created unusual and sought-after sample slabs, including the "Thank you for your service and dedication to our country!" NGC-100-4-5 and the Boy/Girl Scout coin+stamp slabs (Boy Scouts listed in the 3rd edition as NGC-025-4-114, Girl Scouts are NGC-025-4-23).

More than minimally, tangentially related to Numismatics? Yes. PCGS-025-9-22

The next to last word

Over the months, a couple questions have been asked. The answers have given us two additional rules.

0. It has to be a slab.

We had a discussion on the PCGS forum and I decided at the time that an NGC Photo Proof, clearly marked SAMPLE but not a slab was not in the book. Nothing in the years since have changed my mind.

3. Because this book is aimed at collectors, the item has to be collectable. This has two parts:

It means that singleton items are excluded from the book. If there is one and only one example in existence, we won't create a Schwager# that nobody can have in their collection. Or we will clearly mark it as non-collectable.

It also means that low-volume collections of objects related by labels will be assigned a single number, not multiple numbers.

Previously in this section, we referenced a new style of medals in the "Mad Marty" series. With the individual population of a specific medal low or unique, there are two Schwager#s one for each of the two labels, not one for each unique medal.

⁶ <https://coins.ha.com/itm/washington-quarters/bicentennial-artist-edition-set-pcgs-pds-business-strike-sets-of-each-of-the-1776-1976-bicentennial-designs-the-three-quar-9-coins-/a/377-783.s>

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For the 3rd edition of the Sample Slab book, I will be erring on the side of grouping – if I can research in the PCGS, NCG, or ANACS database and figure out how many were made, I have the answer.

I also know that the databases hide many sins, including reuse of cert numbers. There is a series of PCGS samples of three Indian circulating commemoratives. The database shows three cert numbers [clearly non-collectable, but perhaps assigned a single number for the series]. I (Burton) have two of the three in my possession. The third has never been sold on eBay. But there is another listing for a coin with the same cert number as one of mine which I have verified with the seller. It's tantalizing, but not enough to turn off the non-collectable flag.

NGC-025-494 is the example that cemented my thinking. Approximately thirty different state quarters were sold on eBay in 2021. Researching the certificate number, I learned that there were 62 issued, being two of each of 31 different states. As 31 different Schwager#s that would be around 25% of the entire NGC Quarter samples and not collectable. As a single Schwager# regardless of state, an edition of 60 pieces is considered collectable.



Items that are retained in the book due to rule 1 but have been determined not to be collectable will be marked: ☹. An example of this is NGC-BOL2R-4-1. Since it's unique, it's not collectable by more than one person.

The Final Rules (finally)

FINAL SIX: For the 3rd Edition of the Sample Slab book:

0. The item has to be a coin slab.
1. Items that were classified as samples in the 1st and 2nd editions will continue in the 3rd edition [stare decisis].
2. True samples (marked), show coins, luncheon, et al will be continued in the book or added as discovered.
3. It has to be collectable – groups of unique items linked by certificate number or label will be assigned a single Schwager#.
4. *TPG Promotional* items will be retained/added to the book.
5. *Purely promotional* items will not be added to the book.
 - a. Except items more than just minimally, tangentially related to numismatics. Those will be added as *Novelty* slabs.

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Appendices

PCGS Generations

For reference, the PCGS Sample Slab Taxonomy by Lakesamman (Tim Larsen) and hosted at forums.collectors.com

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/918775/>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017185955/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/918775/>

PCGS Generations - Samples

Generations 1-3.5

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/936323>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017183945/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/936323>

Generations 4-5

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/987334>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017184054/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/987334>

Generations 6-7

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/936325>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017184150/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/936325>

Generations 8-13

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/936326>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017184156/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/936326>

PCGS Samples by years of issue

2005-2012

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/967669>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017184607/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/967669>

2013-2014

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/967672>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017184731/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/967672>

2015-2016

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/967673>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017184833/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/967673>

2017-2021

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/977665>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017184647/https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/977665>

NGC Generations

(Conder 101) 2008 data

Conder101's (Michael Schmidt) original "Slab Book"⁷ included sample slabs known as of the time of publication in 2003. For the 3rd edition I will be adding a cross reference to Conder's numbering.

<https://boards.ngccoin.com/topic/117773-ngc-slab-varieties>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211017183835/https://boards.ngccoin.com/topic/117773-ngc-slab-varieties>

ANACS Generations

J D's ANACS Generations

Regular slabs

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Y_6cj6X2v_ZbO4NrqlRLysVeJO1IgoqnAA51ErVhLf8/

⁷ Properly: "Third Party Grading/Certification Services & Slab/Certificate Varieties"

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Problem slabs

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1bXsC1n3s1fLVAoxQyQTivDXlmaUUv-oFADkbwUGXIfs/>

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About the Author

Burton Strauss is a long-term numismatist, but a shorter-term collector. Like many, he had a childhood collection (nothing special, the two Gold \$1 coins are 47th Street Lebanese fakes from the 70s) and came back to coins. Unlike many, he had kept up his interest as a casual numismatist and is an ANA Life Member.

He started collecting coins in circulation as of 10am, February 11th, 1861. Not as a Lincoln collection, but simply an interesting point in time, between the Coinage Acts of 1853, 1857 and the Civil War. The records show Lincoln withdrew \$400 from his bank, \$300 of which was notes on a New York Bank. The extra hundred, presumably in cash, could have been a nice selection of “circulating” coins. It was probably boring, 4 Gold Double Eagles and 20 Mexican Silver Dollars, but one could hope.

Starting with the Half Cent, Large Cent, and then the Three Cent Silver. Which sparked a couple year diversion to collect the “circulating” 3 cent silvers from 1851 to 1862 in XF/AU.

The 1861 collection started out as just a type set, but then mintmarks showed up. The copper and silver part is largely complete at 35 of 40 slots filled, with only a couple of crazy expensive items left. Go ahead and send along (VF→AU) an 1860O Seated Liberty dime, 1856-1860S Seated Liberty quarter, 1855S Seated Liberty half, or 1853-1859 or 1859S Seated Liberty dollars.

That, of course leaves the “8” items for the basic gold page (everybody needs gold coins). \$1, \$2.5, \$3, \$5, \$10, and \$20. Just \$41.50 face value. THEN, after winning the lottery, the mintmarks. As soon as you say “Charlotte” and “Dahlonga” and circulated, you are definitely looking at selling organs to pay for it.

Along the way he got interested in slabs, and from that both early slabs (as history) and sample slabs.

All of which basically goes to show Burton's sanity is questionable and explains his fascination with getting a 3rd edition of “Sample Slabs” out the door. You don't HAVE to be crazy to work on a Numismatic Passion Project, but it sure helps.