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2014-15



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Table of Contents

<i>Chinatown Tales: La Chinesca</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel [First Place]	2
<i>Explaining the Most Common Designs: from Castles and Lions to Bald Eagles and Arrows</i>	
Mark Benvenuto [Second Place]	11
<i>PCNS Medal Archives</i>	
William D. Hyder [Third Place]	16
<i>Chinatown Tales: Grant Avenue and Dupont Street</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel	23
<i>A Token from the Danish West Indies: J Müller</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel	33
<i>The Folsom Asparagus Gin Company</i>	
Michael Wehner	35
<i>France: Downfall of an Emperor</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel	40
<i>Notgeld Coins and More: Meissen Porcelain</i>	
Mark Benvenuto	41
<i>Quintera Mining Company: Only at the Company Store</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel	45
<i>Spanish Silver and Dollars Mex: What We Used Before 1857, What We Could Use Now</i>	
Mark Benvenuto	48
<i>Florence Evelyn Nesbit Thaw</i>	
Herbert Miles	53
<i>San Francisco Gas & Electric Company: Lost in the Mists of Time</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel	60
<i>The Ocean Shore Railroad: A Terrific Idea, But...</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel	61
<i>United Railroads</i>	
Jerry F. Schimmel	64



Chinatown Tales: La Chinesca

Jerry F. Schimmel

I climbed down from the bus into an open air furnace. Noisy, overladen trucks dragged billows of dry dust across the pavement turning us into a gasping huddle of now ex-passengers. Our group was all Mexican except for me, and we stood waiting for our luggage from a by now grimy *Estrella Blanca* transport.

We had just arrived from Tijuana along Mexico Route 2 traveling in reasonable, air-conditioned comfort. Our stopping point, the city of Mexicali, lay on a large piece of desert snuggled up to the international line. Barely visible on the north side were the low roofs of its smaller American sister, Calexico. Temperatures outside were well over 100.

Sweating like a horse I pondered what needed doing before I

continued my travels south. Not much, I concluded, which left me two hours until the *Ferrocarril Nacional* left for Guadalajara. There just had to be some interesting shops to poke around in like flea markets and coin stores. However, I hadn't eaten since San Diego, and a smart-looking restaurant beckoned. Food first.

Opening the door, I was assaulted by a blast of cold air from a super-efficient air-conditioner. It almost knocked me off-balance. A bigger surprise was the restaurant's management and clientele. They were all Chinese, chattering away with each other in rapid Spanish! Now and then I heard a Cantonese phrase pass between the cooks, however, Español was clearly prevalent. After a tolerable tomato and beef over rice and good Tecate Beer I ventured out.



1950s postcard views of Mexicali: title page — looking north from the Mexican side; above — Entrance to Callejón Chinesca, one of the main alleys.

If anything, the day was hotter, drier and dustier.

Nearly all shops and eateries nearby were Chinese-managed, something new to me, having spent years in cities and towns throughout Latin America and seeing few persons of East Asian ancestry. While there is a large Chinese community in Mexico City and a handful of smaller settlements on the Pacific Coast, Mexico's biggest has always been in Mexicali. As I was to learn later, *La Chinesca*, the local name for Chinatown, had historic connections to the San Francisco Bay Area.

Sadly, I could find no coin stores or flea markets.

Eugene Moy, a Southern California historian and genealogist wrote:

“Mexicali was established in

1903 as a mostly agricultural settlement, created out of the dreams of Harry Chandler, then publisher of the Los Angeles Times. Chandler built an irrigation canal to fertilize the 800,000 acres of desert land he controlled in northern Baja and Southern California....

“Many Chinese laborers who built the irrigation system stayed on in Mexicali after its completion, and settled in an area known as La Chinesca, historically located at the intersection of Avenida Madero and Calle Melgar. The city continues to have the largest Chinese population in Mexico and more Chinese restaurants per capita than any other city in that country.

“Mexicali is the only border town that's a state capital, boasting Baja California Norte's largest population,

approximately 850,000. Unlike Tijuana to the west you won't find any zebra-painted burros on street corners or a bar strip designed to entice gringos.”

The first Chinese in Baja California ended up as laborers for the Colorado River Land Company.

They arrived mostly by sea mainly at the port of Ensenada, lured there by false promises of high wages. Others crossed later from north of the border fleeing officially sanctioned anti-Chinese policies.

Prohibition years in the United States (1920–1933) made border towns like Mexicali flourish. Yanks flocked to towns across the border from Tijuana east to Matamoros looking for booze, gambling and prostitution by then outlawed at home. Enterprising Chinese laborers and farmers responded by forming partnerships and pooling meagre resources into restaurants, bars and hotels — anything that held even a remote promise of better living.

In 1916, against the wishes of La Chinesca, the state government of Baja California Norte shifted the city's casinos, bars and brothels en masse into the Chinese district, a plan to make the city's tawdry enterprises visibly less offensive to businessmen and families in transit across the frontier.

Today a reduced Chinesca survives not far from the border blending with local traditions to create a novel

Chinese-Mexican way of living.

It's been more than three decades since I took that trip, and whenever I think of it I remember my hours in that unique setting. Nowadays travels are more often done in my head along with writing about coins and tokens. In my life learning their histories has always been one of the most important parts of collecting, so read on to find out about a few from Mexicali.

CHINESE-MEXICAN MERCANTILE COMPANY — C.M.M.Co.

司公務商墨華

The C.M.M.Co. circulated three brass tokens in denominations



of 5¢, 10¢, and 25¢, with 18, 24, and 30 millimeter diameters respectively. Their obverse legends

included Chinese characters, English numerals and English initials. Reverses were in Chinese only, and none carried any indication of provenance. However, I was still curious to know where the pieces came from. To find out I had one weak lead, a previous owner's enigmatic note: Chinese-Mexican?

Another clue was the Mahk 墨 character (obverse, second from right). The full Cantonese name for Mexico is *Mahk-sai-go* 墨西哥, thus the Mahk character turned out to be an abbreviation. A complete transliteration of the obverse side gives us *Wah Mahk Seung Mouh Gung Si* which translates to the English "Chinese-Mex. Mercantile Company" (and neatly fits the four CMMCo initials). Oddly, the initials do not represent Spanish words. In that case the name would have been *Compañía Mercantil China Mexicana* with the initials "Cia.M.C.M."

On the reverses the top glyph for all three is Mei 美 or United States of America. The bottom line characters are denominations as shown:

仙五	Ngh Sin = 5¢
毫壹	Yat Houh = 10¢
五毫貳	Yih Houh Ngh = 25¢

The Mei character is a short way of saying the tokens were denominated in U.S. cents, not centavos. Mexican merchants in border localities commonly conduct business in U.S. currency.



Lew Hing

An obituary from the *San Bernardino County Sun* explains that it was Lew Hing who organized CMMCo. Lew's relationships with the San Francisco Area were major and long-standing:

OAKLAND, March 10 1934.

A penniless youth when he came from China 66 years ago, Lew Hing, 77 years old, known as one of northern California's wealthiest Chinese, is dead. The Chinese, whose first step toward building a fortune in a strange country was a job in an Oakland cannery when he was little more than 11 years old, died at his home here Wednesday night. Lew performed his work so well at the cannery that within a few years he became its owner. Later he established the Pacific Coast Canning Co. in

west Oakland and assumed its presidency. Banking and steamship activities also engaged his attention and he became president of the Canton bank in San Francisco and vice-president and general manager of the China Mail Steamship Company. Entering the import trade, Lew founded the Chinese-Mexican Mercantile Co. of Mexicali and the Hop Wop Lung Company of San Francisco. Retiring from active business in recent years, Lew had been dividing his holdings among his sons, Lew Gow, Thomas G. Lew and Ralph Lew. His sons and his wife were at his bedside when he died.

Lew was the senior partner and investor. Under his leadership the organization adopted a support role for Chinese residents, serving as a lending bank, developer and financial advisor for field hands who wanted to get away from the desert. Many small and large Mexicali enterprises owe their success to Lew Hing.

How were the tokens used? Probably as credit IOUs for customers and were likely issued between 1915 and 1925 during a shortage of Mexican and even of U.S. circulating currency due to the revolution. We can safely assume they served as an emergency coinage among local Chinese. So far all CMMCo tokens are rare with only one of each known. If other denominations exist they have not been reported.



MARIANO MA

Mariano Ma became a revered local community leader, a pioneer from the days when Chinese outnumbered Mexicans in the *Valle de Mexicali* by ten thousand to a few hundred. He was among the first Chinese-born laborers who came to Mexico, one of twenty-two including his brothers Antonio and Agustín. The men received 50 cents a day each, 25 cents more than the cost of their daily food. They lived in cabins, tents and adobe huts, even under trees when they could find any. Ma supposedly told others, "In this place there were many mosquitoes. Many died because of the various sicknesses caused by the bites of flies and rattlesnakes, by the intense heat of the place."

Ma established himself first in Ensenada in the 1890s, before hiking overland to Mexicali across 150 desert miles. For a time he settled in Los Algodones, a patch of sand facing Yuma, Arizona, forty miles east. In time he opened a restaurant and bar in Mexicali proper which is where the token was issued. In his Mexican lifetime he was variously called Ma Lean, Ma Leong and Chang Pet, and, as the story goes, was the first Chinese to become



Avenida Francisco Madero after The Owl and allied businesses moved into Chinesca. The U.S. border is a ditch on the right side a few feet past the light poles. 1930s

a naturalized Mexican citizen. In 1911, at some personal risk, he approached the commander of a local revolutionary unit to stop the troops from harassing Chinese workmen. For his contributions, a street in Mexicali was given his name, *Calle Mariano Ma Lee*. I would guess that he passed away in the 1920s or 1930s. Along with his mates he is seen by many as one of the founders of La Chinesca.

The 24 millimeter token shown is the only one I've seen. Another was pictured in a 2011 eBay sale with a diameter of 31mm. No photo of the reverse was shown so its denomination remains unknown. The token was issued about the same time as those of CMMCo, about 1915–20. Its manufacturer was the Los Angeles Rubber Stamp

Company. The denomination is in U.S. cents.



THE A.B.W. CLUB AND THE OWL

The A.B.W. Club issued three handsome brass tokens: One Dollar, 50 Cents and 25 Cents with 38, 30, and 24mm diameters respectively.



Interior scene of the ABW Club bar — 1920s postcard

All feature a handsomely designed owl on the obverse with business name at the top and town below. The reverse repeats the club name, adds a denomination, the year 1933, and names Joe Flores and Mike Miller. Below the two names is a tiny diesinker's signature, *L.A. Rub. Stp. Co.* for Los Angeles Rubber Stamp Company, the manufacturer. The names Joe Flores and Mike Miller were not found anywhere in my research so it's likely they were bartenders or day to day managers, a "public face" for the ABW's large complex.

Like tokens from CCMCo and Mariano Ma, the ABW tokens were denominated in U.S. currency, not Pesos, and mainly served as gaming checks much as clay chips are used in today's casinos. Some tokens can be found with a drilled hole, a

cancellation mark often found on older gambling pieces. I suspect the tokens were accepted at all of ABW's counters and may even have been a temporary street coinage much like the CMMCo tokens. One Dollar tokens are the most common. Fifty and twenty-five cent pieces are considerably harder to find.

Why include ABW tokens in what is a story about a Chinese community? Because, for the State of Baja California, Chinesca offered a good hiding place for its vice industry. Just move everything in with the Chinese as authorities in San Francisco had been doing for decades. This largest of latin chinatowns would de facto become the center of vice in Mexicali for the next twenty years, and the Owl, later ABW Club, was its largest purveyor.

The name *Owl* was adopted by

ABW, a syndicate consisting of three Americans: Marvin Allen, Frank “Booze” Byers, and Carl Withington, Withington serving as chief investor and managing partner. Under his leadership the Owl remained open 24/7 for the years it was in business. In 1922, after a major fire destroyed its buildings, the name was switched to ABW Club. The old moniker had become too notorious.

Taxes and favors from the syndicate supported the Baja government during revolution years (c.1910–20), and, in 1916, gambling provided its largest source of state revenue.

By 1925, ABW controlled 95% of Mexicali’s prostitution. Its women lived under virtual house arrest in a building apart from the casino and bar, surrounded by a tall fence. One sex worker, Grace Clark of San Francisco, worked and lived there from 1919 through 1927.

News reports often compared the vice area of Mexicali to San Francisco’s Barbary Coast. Uncounted numbers of prostitutes did leave Frisco in 1917 after their houses were shuttered, and many like Grace Clark went south.

The date 1933 suggests two events that impacted life in the U.S. and border towns of Mexico — Franklin Roosevelt was elected President of the United States and Prohibition was repealed. Less well-known is that Roosevelt ended an eight-year border curfew which had kept the

American side of the line closed from 6 PM to 8 AM, a ruling which played havoc with the major transborder tourist trade.

All of Mexicali’s organized houses of prostitution were closed in 1936, and, with them, the ABW Club. While ABW and smaller competitors ran the state’s biggest brothel system inside La Chinesca, not one Chinese woman was reported to be a prostitute in two decades of operation.

PHOTO CREDITS

Tokens & Postcards: Stephen Huston
Lew Hing Photo: Wikipedia

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Explaining the Most Common Designs: From Castles and Lions to Bald Eagles and Arrows

Mark Benvenuto

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, very few people in almost every civilization could read the written word. Indeed, many of the world's languages were entirely oral, and survived for centuries, possibly even millennia, without a written form.

As a few languages in our modern world became common and dominant, such as English, French, and Spanish, many languages that were never written down were lost. In so many cases native speakers have passed away and their children chose not to learn a language that the Endangered Languages Project was formed.¹

Only in the past hundred years have modern nation states made efforts to educate their populations, so that they are almost fully literate. Only in the past forty years at most have those same governments tried to save any endangered languages within their borders.

This then is the background setting for us concerning two images seen countless times on coins from two nations, Spain and the United States of America.

THE HOUSE OF CASTILE AND LEON

Much of the history taught in the different state school systems within the United States deals with the settlement of this country by the British. Numismatists are often aware that during the colonial era the lands that would become the United States of America were kept cash-poor as a matter of official British policy, and that the coins of the Spanish Empire in the New World were used to facilitate a great deal of daily commerce. Therefore, the images on Spanish coins were most likely familiar to the people living in the thirteen British colonies.

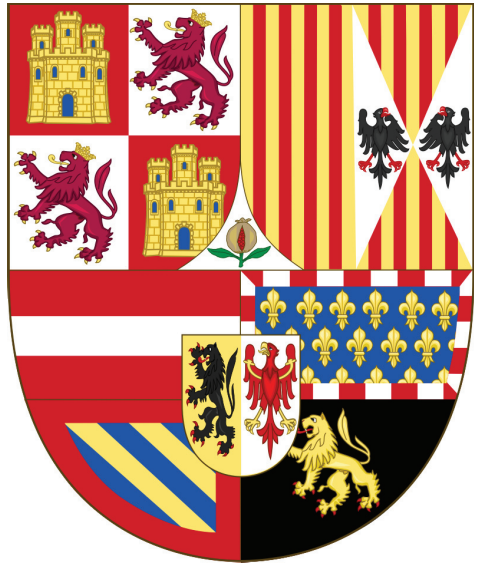
The shield seen on the reverse of Spanish imperial coins has changed numerous times over the course of several centuries, but a form of it continues to exist on the coins of Spain even today.²

Numismatists often divide Spanish imperial coinage not by monarch, but by design, such as the *Pillar and Waves* design, the *Castles and Lions* design, and the *Portrait* design, also called the *Imperial Coat of Arms* design on occasion.

The coat of arms illustrated here is that of King Charles II of Spain, who reigned from 1665–1700, is one of the more complex versions of any coat of arms a Spanish monarch utilized. But all the design elements have a meaning, at least for those who can read such symbols. While there is a highly specific, traditional language used to describe any coat of arms, let's use straightforward English in order to make the understanding of it as clear as possible.

Starting in the upper left quarter, one can see the two castles and lions. This is the main image of the House of Castile and Leon. On the oldest Spanish colonial coins, the crudely made cobs, this was the entire coat of arms which was displayed. Thus, simply knowing the coat of arms of Castile and Leon becomes an excellent starting point for identifying the earliest coins of the Spanish colonies in America. But Spain was more than these two houses, and their combined lands.

The upper right corner or quadrant shows the gold and red stripes of the House of Aragon. Today Aragon is a state in the northeast of Spain. About the time these symbols were added to Charles' coat of arms, Aragon was much larger, and encompassed both a large part of what is now eastern Spain, and the islands of Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily, as well as much of southern Italy and even a small portion of modern Greece.



The lower right and left corners are each further divided. The red and white of the Austrian flag are shown to the left, while the fleur de lys of France appear to the right. The Austrian connection is that the royal houses of Spain and the Hapsburgs of Austria intermarried, which gave the Spanish monarch claims to lands there. The fleur de lys are symbolic of the House of Burgundy, which also married into the Spanish royal house.

The diagonal stripes in the lowermost left of this coat of arms is another symbol of Burgundy, and the yellow lion in the lowermost right is the symbol for Brabant, an area in modern Belgium and Holland. Again, royal marriages meant that the Spanish king could lay claim to some far-flung areas still within Europe.

Right in the middle of this coat of arms is a small, apparently flowering pomegranate. This is the symbol of the kingdom of Granada, located in the southeast of present-day Spain. A kingdom under the House of Castile, like many of the smaller kingdoms that would become modern Spain, it was officially abolished as an independent kingdom in 1833.

The final two pieces of this coat of arms are the small black lion on a yellow background, and the red eagle, both of which come together to form a shield in the lower center of the greater shield. The lion is the symbol of Flanders. The eagle is the symbol of Tyrol, an area straddling the modern Austrian-Italian border. As to how these two symbols made it onto this rather cluttered coat of arms, well, if you guessed by some form of royal marriage, you'd be right.

Almost all of this design is seen on the later 8 reales coins of Spanish Mexico and Peru. For aficionados of such pieces, we must mention that we have omitted the two pillars which very often flank the coat of arms. These two columns represent the Pillars of Hercules, and have been associated with Spain for centuries. The Latin words, *Plus Ultra*, seen on the ribbons that wrap about the pillars, mean: *further beyond*.

Since almost everyone in our modern world can read, this multi-image

coat of arms may indeed seem like a strange way to represent both a monarch and a kingdom. Yet this is precisely how the royal houses of Europe chose to represent themselves to friend and foe alike. The people of the Spanish Empire knew this symbol. This resonated with them as much as the Stars and Stripes resonates with us today.

A HERALDIC EAGLE

The original leaders of a brand new United States of America may have discarded the rule of a British king for whom they had little love, but they did not cast aside all the symbols of their age and time. Rather, they adapted what was already known, and so created symbols for our new nation.

The bald eagle as one of the national symbols of the United States goes back at least to the development of a strong, federal government. According to the "American Bald Eagle Information" website:

The bald eagle was chosen June 20, 1782 as the emblem of the United States of America, because of its long life, great strength and majestic looks.³

In numerous articles on early United States coinage, some mention has been made that Benjamin Franklin was against using the bird as a symbol, and was in favor of the turkey in its stead. But the eagle has rather obviously taken the center stage, and what is often depicted



The Great Seal of the United States of America

on official US seals of various government offices is what is called a heraldic eagle, holding an olive branch and a bundle of arrows in a decidedly unnatural pose.

The idea of the eagle being posed in a heraldic way — which is quite odd when one considers how the bird flies — is simply one taken from European heraldry. In the coats of arms of several other nations, eagles are posed in such a fashion. The coats of arms of Imperial Russia and of Poland serve as just two examples. The Tyrolian eagle on the coat of arms of Charles II that we just examined is another.

The eagle is usually not alone when shown as a heraldic device representing the United States. The olive branch in the eagle's right claw is an ancient symbol of peace.

The dove mentioned in the Bible in the Book of Genesis brings an olive branch back to Noah as the Great Flood receded, as a symbol that land is again present above the water. Thus, the olive branch becomes a symbol that God's wrath has passed. Placing it in the eagle's right claw — the right being the primary claw or hand or appendage — is a sign that the United States wants peace rather than war.

The arrows in the left claw of the eagle are often thought of as a symbol of the United States' readiness for war, if it should come to that. The idea that there are thirteen arrows, the same as thirteen original states, indicates that the entire nation will go to war as one, again if need be.

But the symbol of the arrows in the

eagle's left claw has more to it than is usually mentioned. After all, the citizens of the new nation did not usually use arrows for hunting or warfare. They used long rifles, muskets, and perhaps cannons.

No, the native peoples used arrows more than the English colonists who would become the citizens of the United States. In fact, the multiple arrow image may very well have been taken from the Iroquois Constitution, more officially called the Great Law of Peace of the Longhouse People. Within it, there is a passage that reads:

Five arrows shall be bound together very strong and shall represent one Nation each. As the five arrows are strongly bound, this shall symbolize the complete union of the nations. Thus are the Five Nations completely united and enfolded together, united into one head, one body, and one mind. They therefore shall labor, legislate, and council together for the interest of future generations.⁴

Five arrows represent the original five nations of the Iroquois Confederation. Thirteen arrows represent the original thirteen states of the new United States. One is hard-pressed to consider this a mere coincidence.

SYMBOLS TODAY?

These symbols seen on the modern coins of Spain and the United States, which many of us take for granted today, are actually centuries old, and

have origins that have in some cases been forgotten. Yet the marriages of different royal houses, the symbols and images that represent them, and the old symbols that represent a new nation are all pieces of a continuing history. A deeper understanding of them gives us a feel and knowledge of the world in a former time when few could read, and when such images served to tell the stories of their nations.

END NOTES

1. Endangered Languages Project. Website accessed 29 June 2014, as: <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/>
2. Fabrica Nacional de Moneda y Timbre. Website accessed 29 June 2014, as: <http://www.fnmt.es/en/home>
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4. The Great Law of Peace of the Longhouse People. Website accessed 29 June 2014, as: <http://www.manataka.org/page135.html>

IMAGES

Spanish Arms and Great Seal, both in the public domain, were adapted for print by Stephen Huston.

PCNS Medal Archives

William D. Hyder

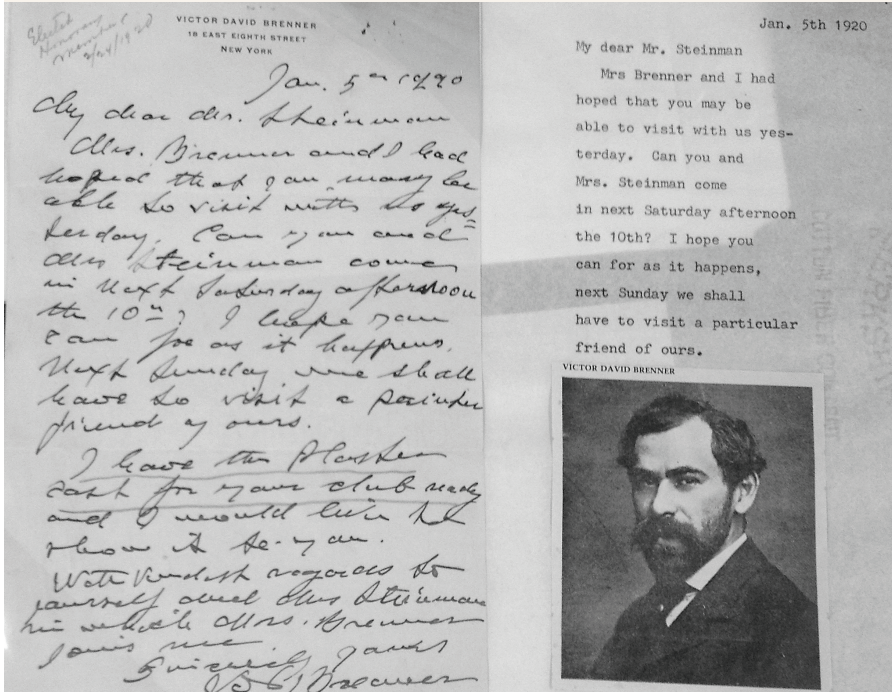


Fig 1: Brenner's letter and partial transcription of the text from the PCNS archives.

As we celebrate our 100th Anniversary and develop our anniversary medal, a review of the Society's archives produced a few interesting artifacts.

Eight men gathered in the San Francisco office of I. Leland Steinman on June 17, 1915 to propose forming a new society for coin collectors. Those present in addition to Steinman included Alfred Twitchell, Basil Brandon, A. Reimers, M. L. Miles, Charles F. Cox, A. C. Nygren, and Farran Zerbe. Joseph Barnet, Rudolph

Harmon, H. L. Hill joined them the next week, June 24, along with Fred T. Huddart, where the assembled group voted to form the Pacific Coast Numismatic Society (PCNS), and Huddart was elected president.

A few years later, Farran Zerbe designed the Society's seal based on ideas developed by PCNS Secretary Steinman. PCNS members adopted the design on August 26, 1919. Who exactly completed the final image for the seal remains unknown, although Society records provide the ultimate tease

for the designer's identity. In January 1920, Victor D. Brenner wrote Secretary Steinman that he was ready to show him the "plaster cast for your club." (Figure 1)

Brenner executed the seal for the New York Numismatic Club (of which Zerbe was also a founding member) in 1909. Steinman nominated Brenner to an Honorary PCNS membership in December 1919. Brenner's application included two NYNC presidents as references, Moritz Wormser and Howland Wood, both of whom served as presidents of the NYNC. In addition, Howland Wood served as chair of the ANA Board of Governors (a position that carried the clout equal to the president at

the time) and playfully spoofed Brenner's NYNC seal in 1909. Moritz Wormser would serve five terms as ANA president in the years following 1920.

The August 1920 issue of *The Numismatist* carried notice of the design adopted as the seal for the Society. The design was first used on the Society's 25th Anniversary medal, the first officially issued by the Society. It was explained in detail (see figure 3, next page):

The setting sun is suggestive of the Pacific, the great ocean that takes on from "Westward Ho!" to the Far East and whose waters and moisture wash the shore and nourish the great fields and forests of the motherlands, Oregon and California territories, from which have been carved the Pacific Coast States. In the foreground, mining at left and forestry at right, is depicted the two gifts of Mother Earth found by the pioneer and the foundation on which has been built and evolved the great Western coast country. Within a double-line circle surrounding this central device, PACIFIC COAST NUMIMATIC SOCIETY. ORG. SAN FRANCISCO. 1915. The Society aims to extend its influence to eight Western states, which are named, commencing at bottom reading from right to left and divided by a five pointed star—CALIFORNIA OREGON ARIZONA UTAH NEVADA MONTANA IDAHO WASHINGTON each in a line with and within a double-line bordered octagon.

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP B 58
 THE PACIFIC COAST NUMISMATIC SOCIETY Elected 12/1/1920
 SAN FRANCISCO

I hereby apply for membership in the Pacific Coast Numismatic Society, subject to the Constitution and By-Laws of said Society.

Name Victor D. Brenner

Address 118 East 8th Street

City and State New York

Date Dec. Amount enclosed \$ 10 - 1919

References: (Give two with address)
Moritz Wormser
Howland Wood

Recommended by J. Heland Steinman

Figure 2: Victor D. Brenner's PCNS membership application.

The seal is octagonal, typical of the Pioneer gold coins of the Pacific Coast. The sun's eight major rays are representative of the Society's original eight members who met and formed the organization June 24, 1915.

Considering eight states, eight stars, eight original members' major rays, and eight sides, Secretary Steinman has commented "Some piece of eight!" which is quote apropos numismatically, since the "piece of eight" was the coin mostly bought, sought and used by the pioneers.

PACIFIC COAST NUMISMATIC SOCIETY SEAL.

For use in its literature and as a reverse design for medals which it hopes to produce, the Pacific Coast Numismatic Society adopted a design for a seal at its meeting August 26, 1919, from a sketch and ideas presented by Farran Zerbe, a cut of which is shown herewith.



The setting sun is suggestive of the Pacific, the great ocean that takes one from "Westward Ho!" to the Far East and whose waters and moisture wash the shore and nourish the great fields and forests of the motherlands, Oregon and California territories, from which have been carved the Pacific Coast States. In the foreground, mining at left and forestry at right, is depicted the two gifts of Mother Earth found by the pioneer and the foundation on which has been built and evolved the great Western coast country. Within a double-line circle surrounding this central device, PACIFIC COAST NUMISMATIC SOCIETY, ORE. SAN FRANCISCO, 1915. The Society aims to extend its influence to eight Western states, which are named, commencing at bottom reading from right to left and divided by a five pointed star—CALIFORNIA OREGON ARIZONA UTAH NEVADA MONTANA IDAHO WASHINGTON each in line with and within a double-line bordered octagon.

The seal is octagonal, typical of the Pioneer gold coins of the Pacific Coast. The sun's eight major rays are representative of the Society's original eight members who met and formed the organization June 24, 1915.

Considering eight states, eight stars, eight original members' major rays, and eight sides, Secretary Steinman has commented "Some piece of eight!" which is quote apropos numismatically, since the "piece of eight" was the coin mostly brought, sought and used by the Pioneers.

Figure 3: clipping from the August 1920 issue of
The Numismatist



Figure 4: The PCNS 25th Anniversary medal

The San Francisco firm, Patrick & Moise-Klinkner Co., struck the silver medal from dies engraved by F. H. Johnson of San Francisco. The medals were announced at the April 24, 1940 meeting with an issue price of \$3.30 for delivery at the twenty-fifth annual meeting to be held on June 29. Records indicate

60 were struck, although it may have been more. An aluminum piece was recently acquired in an Ebay auction. (Figure 4)

The 1940 die broke when Medallions Unlimited attempted to use it to strike a sixtieth anniversary medal in 1975. The obverse die, engraved

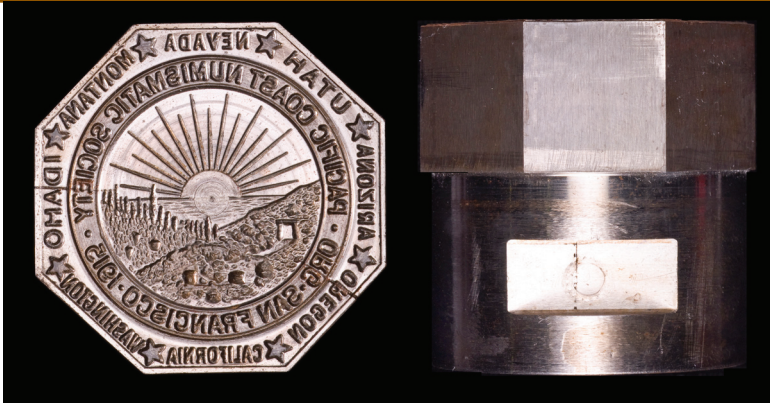


Figure 5: The PCNS 1940 die after being resized to fit the Medallions Unlimited press. Die breaks at 3 and 9 o'clock, and the center of the die shows evidence of being damaged, perhaps when secured to a lathe.



Figure 6: The PCNS 1975 replacement die created by Medallions Unlimited.

by Borus Buzon, featured the San Francisco Palace of Fine Arts building, one of the few architectural survivors from the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. The new reverse die appears to be the same as the original die, although minor differences are readily apparent when placed side-by-side with the 1940 issue.

The broken 1940 die resides in the archives. Close comparison with the 1940 medal shows that the edges were ground down to a

slightly smaller size and the face was damaged, perhaps as a result of being secured to a lathe so the diameter of the shank could be reduced or perhaps by an attempt to rework the die to minimize the effects of the cracks. Whether accidental or deliberate, the die was rendered unusable. (Figures 5 & 6)

The 1975 logo die was paired with the 60th anniversary obverse die designed by Borus Buzon. The original plaster model and galvano reside in the PCNS archives. The



Top, figure 7: The finished plaster cast of Borus Buzon’s design for the obverse of the 1975 60th anniversary medal (left) and the galvano (right) used to produce the working die.

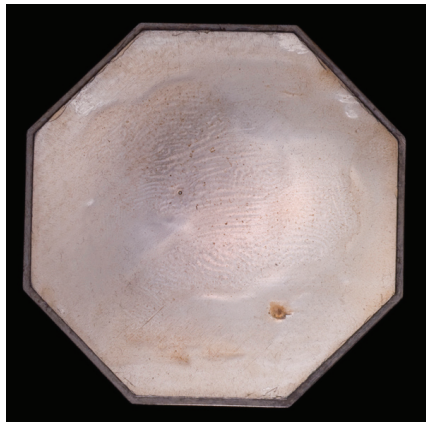
Below, figure 8: The 1975 60th anniversary die produced by Medallions Unlimited



Palace of Fine Arts, a surviving building from the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition tied the PCNS anniversary to the PPIE. (Figures 7 & 8, above)

A blank die was likely produced at this time as well since uniface logo die medals were ordered to use for awards.

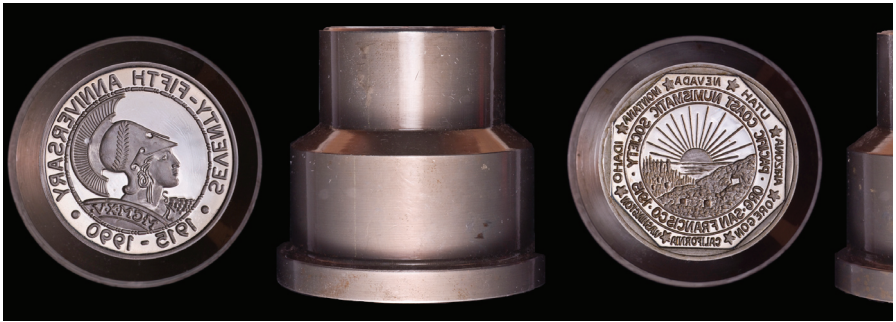
Right, figure 9: Blank die used to produce uniface award medals





Above, figure 10: The 1982 800th Meeting medal die

Below, figure 11: obverse die for the 1990 75th anniversary medal and the 1990 round PCNS logo die



The 800th meeting was celebrated in 1982 with an obverse die patterned after the 25th anniversary medal. Medallions Unlimited produced the die and medals. (Figure 10, top)

When time came to produce a medal for the 75th anniversary, the Society could not find a mint capable of producing an octagonal medal. Masterpiece Medallions produced an inexpensive round die for the obverse and a new logo die in the round. (Figure 11, above)

The Society celebrated its 1000th

meeting with a medal featuring Farran Zerbo, the traditional founder of the PCNS. The Medallic Art Company was able to produce an octagonal medal and use the 1975 octagonal logo die. The plaster cast of Zerbo's portrait executed and signed by Durek resides in our archives. The galvano and finished die reside in the Medallic Art archives. (see figure 12, next page)

With the advent of computerized design and die production, a fourth octagonal logo die will be created using the original logo drawing as



Figure 12: The plaster model produced by Durek used to produce the obverse die for the 1000th Meeting medal.

published in *The Numismatist* and the medal produced in 1940. Was Brenner's original plaster used to produce the 1940 logo die? We will never know since the Society no longer has the "plaster" presented by Brenner. The 1920 drawing shows a distinctive curved letter style for the state names to conform to the circular inner design. I presume Brenner would have captured that lettering style in his rendition of the logo. The 1940 die uses standard letter punches, so the Brenner plaster may have already been lost.

Fortunately, sufficient artifacts and ephemera survive in the Society archives to spark our curiosity as we begin our second hundred years.

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PHOTOS

- All images prepared by the author,
William D. Hyder

Chinatown Tales: Grant Avenue and Dupont Street

Jerry F. Schimmel

GRANT AVENUE — narrow and colorful with sidewalks just wide enough to squeeze by on, designed long ago for Californians who rode horses to town or walked. It's the main passage through Chinatown running in a straight line from Market Street all the way to Fisherman's Wharf. The Chinese part starts with the Bush Street gate and ends at cluttered Broadway.



*Bush Street Gate on an elongated
1980-P U.S. Cent*

Tourists in bunches heedlessly block the narrow route to gape at colorful buildings and exotic signs. Harassed shopkeepers wrestle packing cases away from the curb while serious-looking Chinese-American men and women brandish big-ticket briefcases and elbow their way through flowered shirts, cutoffs and baseball caps.

Above street level pagoda structures cast sawtooth shadows downward onto the pavement. On the ground splashy emporiums beckon to all with an overabundance of cameras, flip-flops, T-shirts and gaudy toys.



*Grant Avenue between Sacramento
and California streets looking south.
Note the Sing Chong building at center
left and Far East Cafe at lower right.
1930s postcard*

But not to worry. Two and three star restaurants and a few better shops declare that San Francisco's celebrated district has not entirely declined into kitsch.

It wasn't always called Grant Avenue. From July 1847 to the early 20th Century, our white forefathers named it Dupont Street after Rear Admiral Samuel Dupont, one of the operational top brass in the Mexican War. Before then the street had a Spanish name adopted in 1835, *Calle de La Fundación*. The phrase translates to "Street of The Founding," a tongue-twister for most

of us. “The Founding” was a major happening in the village of *Yerba Buena*, as San Francisco was then known. The pre-San Franciscans had just acquired a Mexican *alcalde* (mayor) to organize the settlement’s first municipal regime.

Grant Avenue got its name in pieces. Dupont from Market to Bush became Grant Avenue in 1886, after our late President. In 1908, the remaining section was given Grant’s name including the long blocks north of Broadway. It hasn’t changed since.

While white city fathers tediously debated their choices, Chinese residents quietly chose their own name, which is still used by many:

都板街 (Dou-Ban Gai).

The phrase is the closest Cantonese speakers could get to the English of Dupont Street and has no meaning other than to approximate English sounds. In recent years street signs have carried a small attachment upon which Dou-Ban Gai is imprinted in Chinese characters.

The rest of this write-up is given to stories about medals and tokens issued by shops and eateries along Dou-Ban Gai — accompanied by as much history as could fit into a handful of pages.



Views of the Far East Cafe — 2010



THE FAR EAST CAFE 遠東酒樓

The front of the Far East Cafe should have been something else. What does it in is the lifeless awning and overuse of shiny aluminum for doors and windows unlike the “old fashioned” marquee in the postcard shown at the beginning. Whatever shortcomings the outside may present are made up for by the interior. The high-ceilinged inside is pleasantly dim with hand-carved wood separators, Chinese theme chandeliers and a small sparkling bar. The food is decent which makes the Far East well worth a stop.

A few years back large medals were distributed to the old owners and their well-wishers. Shown is a 3½ inch diameter, gilt aluminum disc with a ¾ inch square center hole looking very much like an oversized, but flashy, Imperial cash coin. The

*Far East Cafe 50th Anniversary
Medal (reverse reduced)*



legend declares that it was made for the bistro's 50th anniversary, but for whatever reason the date of commemoration was not mentioned.

Current proprietors knew nothing about the medal nor had ever seen one. I have not run across another and think that few were handed out. Most recipients or their families probably kept the others. But I still needed to know when it was issued.

The search for the café's commemorative year was a bit involved. I easily found Far East Cafe in city directories going back to the early 1930s, but not before. A 1930s date would have placed the medal's production sometime in the 1980s, however, its general appearance is a bit earlier which helped limit my search.

The next possibility was to find the café's name in Chinese, preferably published in the English alphabet. San Francisco telephone books are often more helpful than city directories when tracing early Chinese merchants. I found the Far East listed as Yuen Tung Low (Far East building) back to 1920, but not earlier. I concluded the medal was produced in 1970.

The large Chinese glyphs on its obverse read Far East Restaurant. The two smaller characters, *Jing Fauh* 埠正, represent an old Chinese name for San Francisco, which literally means *Main Port*.

The reverse of the medal shows a phoenix at left and a dragon at right facing one another across the center hole. Their eyes are fixed on a ball-like object at the top, a "pearl," with

flames issuing from the sides. An old tale says that the two creatures together made an exquisite pearl out of a small stone, and it became their pride and joy. However, in a fit of envy the Heavenly Empress secretly snatched the gem away launching the bereft pair into an ages-long search for their loved one. Both are depicted with mouths and eyes wide open in delight as the trio is once again united.

In days of yore, pearls were associated with truth and life. The Phoenix was a female symbol of the empress, warmth, sunshine, summer and harvest. The masculine dragon became an advisor to the powerful, a guardian and symbol of goodness and strength. As the story goes dragons who lived in the sea were inordinately fond of pearls, piling them into heaps and jealously guarding them in grand watery palaces.

THE SING CHONG COMPANY

生昌公司

The Sing Chong Company (Prosperous Life Company) occupied the first two floors of 601–611 Grant Avenue from 1905 to 1970, though it was shuttered briefly after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. Asian art, furniture and ceramic specialties, especially Chinese products, were its stock in trade. The first manager was community leader Look Tin Eli, born in Mendocino, California, who later founded the first Bank of



SING CHONG COMPANY, INC.
Leading Chinese Bazaar, California and Grant Avenue
San Francisco, Cal.

Canton. He passed away in 1919.

Architects T. Paterson Ross and A.W. Burgren designed and built the Sing Chong structure in 1907. Their remarkable work still stands on the northwest corner of California Street and Grant Avenue with few changes. In the years after Sing Chong's closing the street level rooms became in turn a McDonald's, the Chinatown Wax Museum and no doubt other forgettable enterprises.



The 21mm brass token would have been used for outgoing telephone calls made by store staff. Nickel-size metal checks like Sing Chong's

were commonly used in saloon slot machines with a typical reverse legend: Good for 5¢ In Trade.

However, Sing Chong's piece shows no denomination, like most tokens made for telephones. Since Sing Chong catered to middle and upper class white and Asian customers, any device associated with saloons or cigar stands would have been banned from the premises.

Note the small diesinker's signature at the obverse bottom, MOISE K. CO., a wording not employed before 1907. Since "Dupont St." is part of the address, and the street name change to Grant Avenue did not occur until 1908, an issue date of 1907 is a certainty.



Elongated Cent

Images of Sing Chong's building are widespread, found on dozens of postcards and websites, one of a number of travel brochure icons like the Golden Gate Bridge and Coit Tower. Here the building is shown on a 39x21mm elongated cent souvenir dated 1944S. Like slot machines Sing Chong would never

have allowed a penny-rolling machine inside or even on the sidewalk by the door. The nearest example would have been at least a block away and likely owned by someone else. The legend on this piece reads "Chinatown, San Francisco, Cal." and shows the northwest corner of Grant Avenue and California Street.



Medallic Ashtray (reduced)

In place of rolled pennies Sing Chong gave its customers $3\frac{1}{2}$ x $2\frac{1}{2}$ inch medallion ashtrays. This one was molded from a tin alloy and decorated in the center with a gilt image of Confucius with the impersonal phrase "Confucius Trade Mark" above. Below the portrait is "Compliments of Sing Chong Co.,

Chinese & Japanese Bazaar, Dupont at California” etc. At the edge two dragons circle the whole in a counter-clockwise direction. At the top is the character *fu* 福 — prosperity. At the bottom is *sauh* 壽 — long life. On the frame around Confucius are three lines of Chinese in tiny, super-fine print. I didn’t bother translating them other than to say that the store address is included as well as a mention of objects d’art for sale. The address “Dupont at California” tells us that the ashtray was made at the same time as the token, probably to celebrate the store’s re-opening after the previous year’s Earthquake and Fire.

ANONYMOUS

In times past brass pieces like the two below were found at Chinatown souvenir stands and art goods shops, usually in a small dish next to the cash register. They were given to customers as a favor or perhaps sold at a small cost. Sing Chong would have been the kind of shop to do this but elected instead to give out eye-catching ashtrays. The Far East Cafe might have done so as well, but any place catering to customers with money was likely. Duck Chong, Ling Nun and Pekin shown below certainly did not.

These “coins” had no cash value, their purpose being to serve as “Good Luck” pocket pieces or counters in games like *mah-jong*. Based on appearance and style the possible

dates of issue for the octagonal piece are 1895–1910, the square token 1915–1935. Like the Far East medal both are modeled after imperial cash coins.



Octagonal brass (23.5mm)

Obv: Souvenir

Rev: (t. to b.) 福 *fu* 壽 *sauh*;

(r. to l.), 福 *fu* 壽 *sauh*. Both sets of characters read: prosperity and long life. The two *sauh* characters are versions of the same word.



Square brass (23mm)

Obv: Souvenir

Rev: (t. to b.) 長 *cheung* 命 *ming*;

(r. to l.), 貴 *gwai* 富 *fu*. Both sets of characters together read: a long life, noble and wealthy.

DUCK CHONG AND COMPANY

德昌酒房

The Duck Chong name was found in the June 1902 phone book listed as Duck Chong, liquors, 1016 Dupont Street. Its Chinese name ironically stood for “Moral Life Drinking



House” — *dak-cheung-sa-fohng*. Located on the downhill side of Dupont between Jackson and Pacific streets, its rear entrance abutted the Chinese bagnios of Bartlett Alley.

Oddly, its 21mm token was struck in aluminum, not a handy metal for slot machines or telephones. Tokens made for machines always required some heft because light pieces tend to jam the apparatus. The specimen I examined was reasonably worn and without the nicks and scars of machine use. The most likely explanation is that it was a tally for drinks sold by bar girls. The small diesinker’s signature, IRVINE S.F., was not employed after April 1906, when all Chinatown enterprises were wiped out in the Earthquake and Fire, including Duck Chong.

LING NUN COMPANY

嶺南烟枋

Ling Nun was short-lived. Directories record the shop from May 1905 through April 1906. English alphabet listings show Ling Nom Yin Lum at 1003 Dupont Street. The shop stood near the northwest corner of Jackson and Dupont across from Duck Chong.

The meaning of the longer, four-character Chinese title is a bit

murky, taken from the Chinese language section of the phone book. *Ling Nun* and *Ling Nom* are spelling variations of the term *Ling Nam*, which literally stands for “Southern Mountains.” In China’s Guangdong Province it’s the title for an area called “South of The Five Ridges,” locally spelled *Lingnan*. The word *Nun* on the token may be a diesinker’s error or yet another dialect variety. *Yin* means “cigarette” or “smoke” which suggests that the business was a cigar stand. *Lum* means “forest,” or at least a lot of trees. What the reference to trees may signify is beyond my resources, but there is a possible explanation.

The late Walter Lee, of the old Chew Chong Tai store, once at 905 Grant Avenue, said that sometimes when shop owners added partners they also added names to the business title, names that would make no sense to outsiders. For example, in its early years Chew Chong Tai Company was simply Chew Chong. Possibly it was the same with Ling Nun.

The 21mm brass token is another of the earliest for Chinatown. The six point star center hole identifies it as a token for machine use, probably slot machines which were present

in every San Francisco cigar store and saloon until 1909. Like Duck Chong's token, Ling Nun's bears the tiny diesinker signature: IRVINE S.F.



PEKIN

北京樓酒

Pekin was a post-earthquake restaurant at 1111½ Dupont Street between Pacific and Broadway, on the northernmost block of Chinatown's main street. Its first meals were served as Sing Chong reopened five blocks south, mere weeks before Dupont Street turned into Grant Avenue. From 1908 and ten years after, the Pekin served excellent roast duck and Dim Sum.

The token is the most common size and metal of all San Francisco pieces, 21mm in diameter and made of brass. The word PEKIN and characters 京北 make up the obverse legend. The two glyphs translate to Bei-jing, capital city of The People's Republic of China. The word Pekin is an earlier and now discarded term for the same. The reverse says simply "Good For 5¢ In Trade" and was exchangeable for drinks or cigars. Made for a slot machine.

NATIVE SONS OF THE GOLDEN STATE: SAN FRANCISCO PARLOR

Thomas Chinn tells us that The Native Sons of The Golden State first organized in 1895.

"The purposes of the organization were to show the members' pride in being Americans and their patriotism toward the United States, and to seek avenues of advancement into the mainstream of American life."

The society evolved from the frustrations felt by American-born and long-term Chinese residents as they looked for work or places to live, or simply travelled through a not always welcoming society.

After early organizational issues the parlor was re-constituted under the leadership of Walter U. Lum in 1904. By 1912 the association had moved to 945 Grant Avenue from its decade-old office on Kearny Street. From 1912 to 1915 other parlors opened in Fresno, Los Angeles, Oakland and San Diego.

A major issue arose when out-of-state Chinese-Americans wanted to join and could not because the by-laws required California residency. In 1915, Lum and his associates remedied the matter. They prepared a new charter and changed the Native Sons name to The Chinese-American Citizens Alliance, available to anyone of Chinese ancestry wherever they lived in the U.S. The first out-of-state branch



opened in Chicago in 1917, and others soon followed. By 1921, the national headquarters had re-opened at 1044 Stockton Street, where it has been for almost a century. In 1985, Brenham Place, a Portsmouth Square alley, was given Lum's name.

The serious-looking badge is gilt bronze with a 40mm diameter and loop at the top for ribbon and hanger. Its border has a clever design of California poppies. The obverse Chinese characters and English words read as follows:

金源同埠大 / NATIVE
SONS / (California State Seal) /
OF THE GOLDEN STATE /
SAN FRANCISCO PARLOR

The reverse is blank and unadorned except for a tiny diesinker's signature at the top: IRVINE & JACHENS / S.F.

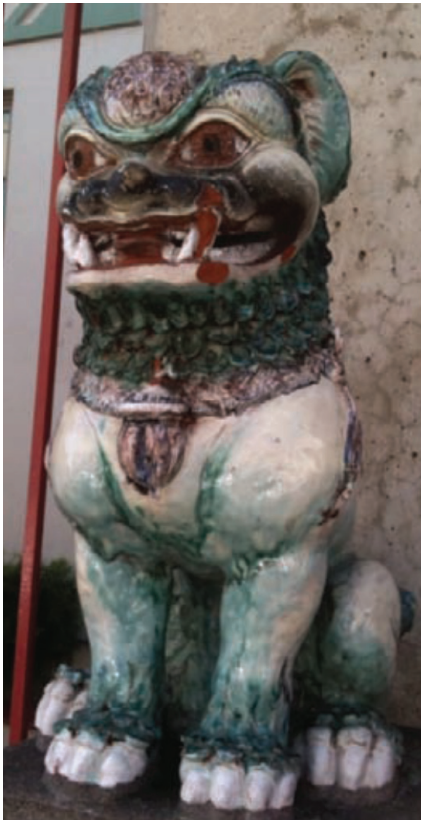
The Chinese motto on the obverse is not easy to translate. It reads something like "Great Port City is the same as a Source of Gold," that is "(Chinese) San Francisco is a source

of prosperity," or something close to that. Perhaps some old-timer from the Citizens Alliance can give us a better translation, but as with many Chinese organizations it is not easy to get information unless you are a member or know someone. The organization name, "Native Sons of the Golden State," resembles the title of and perhaps pokes fun at another long-standing fraternal organization.

The diesinker name on the reverse was first used in 1909, though both Irvine and Jachens had been in business since the 1890s. The firm is still operational but long since relocated to San Mateo County. The badge was manufactured about 1912.

CHINATOWN

San Francisco's Chinatown has a Chinese name of its own — *tangrenbu*. Oddly this title is three words lumped together from the northern Chinese dialect that we call Mandarin. "Oddly," because San Francisco's traditional dialect has always been Cantonese. The word



Chinatown Guardian Lion, popularly known as a Fu Dog (2013)

Tangrenbu translates to “People of the Tang Dynasty” (AD 618–907), though to Chinatown veterans it’s become an informal reference to anyone of Chinese descent.

Frank Chin slyly comments that southern Chinese identify with the Tang dynasty while northerners prefer the Han (BC 206–AD 220). Tangs gave the world great art, he says, and the Hans produced an even greater bureaucracy.

Here’s how the name is written in Chinese: 唐人埠 (*tang-ren-bu*).

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Tokens, ashtray & medals:

Stephen Huston

Restaurant, Fu Dog, and street scenes:

Donna Dion

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San Francisco City Directories, various years.

San Francisco Telephone Directories, various years.

A Token from the Danish West Indies: J Müller

Jerry F. Schimmel



NOT MANY AMERICANS KNOW about our U.S. territory in the Caribbean, The Virgin Islands. They once existed as the Danish West Indies and have been under U.S. control since 1917. Before that the archipelago actually had a Danish administration that began around 1670. A wide range of coins and paper currency were issued for use during the Scandinavian centuries utilizing a variety of mint-struck and counterstamped coins and paper currency. Less is known about the token series.

Starting in 1888 a series of more than 65 different metal checks in small denominations were issued

by 22 merchants for 1¢, 5¢, and 10¢, mainly on St. Thomas and St. Croix islands. The tokens were outlawed in 1892 by Danish authorities when many issuers refused to redeem the value of their tokens. However, the series served as a short-term emergency minor coinage.

The series is different in one way from others issued in the Caribbean area, or anywhere. They were based entirely on the silver value of the Mexican dollar, or Eight Reales. An example of one token shown here is from J. Müller & Co., made of brass and 23mm in diameter. Both sides are the same. Some collectors and



researchers have mistakenly assumed they were of Mexican origin.

J. MÜLLER & C^o / 1^c / MEXIC /
 ✦ ST THOMAS ✦

The legend tells us the token was valued at 1¢ in Mexican silver. While the Caribbean islands were awash with the specie of different governments in various weights and denominations, Mexican silver had a stable value backed by the Mexican mint. Presumably one hundred of such tokens would get their owner a whole Mexican 8 Reales coin. For many this would never be the case.

John Francois Müller was located in St. Thomas from 1868 to 1890, according to J. Sømød, selling out later to Delinois, Fonseca and Pearson, each of whom issued their own tokens.

TOKEN PHOTOS

Stephen Huston

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The Folsom Asparagus Gin Company

Michael Wehner



Obv: GOOD FOR ONE / DRINK / ASPARAGUS / GIN / FOLSOM BRAND / + AT ANY BAR +

Rev: REDEEMED BY / * THE * / ROTHENBERG CO. / 140 FRONT ST. / SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

Brass, 30mm

I LIKE ASPARAGUS. And I have been known to enjoy a gin martini once in a while. However, the combination does not sound like a natural one to me. However, at the beginning of the 20th Century, asparagus gin was sold by at least one firm in San Francisco. Described as “very agreeable and pleasant to the taste,” it was composed of the juice of fresh asparagus and Double Stamp Gin.¹

It is not clear when the concoction was first developed, but it is described as a new product in the 1915 Monthly Bulletin of the California State Board of Health.² This source goes on to say that statewide some 50,000 pounds of asparagus stalks were used in 1915 to make Asparagus Gin. That’s a lot of hooch.

For some, Asparagus Gin was touted to be a health tonic because asparagus, like ginger, was widely considered a diuretic. It was labeled as a remedy for kidney and bladder diseases. But, as was common at the time, these claims of medicinal value were false. The California Bureau of Chemistry stated that asparagus gin “is of no value in the treatment of diseases of the genito-urinary tract and that, in fact, it is contra-indicated in all genito-urinary conditions.”³ In other words, it is bad for you because it is gin.

THE ROTHENBERGS

A large brass token, good for a drink of asparagus gin, was a promotional effort by the Rothenberg Company on Front Street in San Francisco. M. Rothenberg and Company was

first listed in the 1891 San Francisco city directories⁴ as “wholesale liquors” located at 423 Kearney Street until the 1906 earthquake.

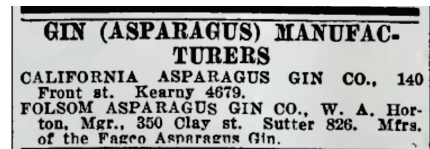
It would appear that Mendle Rothenberg, a San Francisco resident and the owner of this company, had a relative named Samuel B. Rothenberg who lived in Oakland but whose company S.B. Rothenberg and Company (wholesale wines and liquors and agents) was nearby at 117 Battery Street. This latter firm was the exclusive distributor of Old Judge Whiskey and first appeared in the city directories in 1899. Samuel even had a telephone at this time. Both firms have separate directory listings up until the earthquake, although Samuel was replaced by Louis Rothenberg as manager in 1900. S.B. Rothenberg and Company would become “The Rothenberg Company” in 1901, with Louis as the president. As is still the case, liquor stores were often the victims of crimes. The San Francisco Call newspaper lists a few instances where bad checks were passed or liquor stolen from the Rothenbergs.

The fire following the 1906 earthquake burned these downtown neighborhoods, and the Rothenbergs had to relocate. In the 1907 San Francisco/Oakland combined directory, the Rothenberg Company would temporarily relocate to 844 Franklin Street in Oakland. Henry Rothenberg and Company (wholesale liquors) was listed as 609

Sansome Street in San Francisco. Henry was also the vice president of the Rothenberg Company. M. Rothenberg and Company was listed as 2714 Pine Street (near Divisadero Street) in San Francisco. This was Mendle’s residence and was outside of the devastation caused by the fire. Israel Rothenberg joined Mendle’s firm according to the 1908 San Francisco directory and was probably his son as he lived at the same address. The devastation of the city did not quench its thirst.

By 1910, the Rothenberg Company would relocate to 140 Front Street in San Francisco, the address on the token, where it would remain until Prohibition in 1918. During Prohibition, some of these Rothenbergs sold “wholesale dried fruits.” One wonders if some bootleg could be had for the right price.

After Prohibition ended, it would not be long before the family was back in the San Francisco liquor business. In the 1935 city directory, Albert Rothenberg had a liquor store at 441 Eddy Street, yet another downtown address.



*Advertisement in the 1917 San
 Francisco Chronicle Classified
 Directory.*

A 1917 San Francisco newspaper advertising directory lists the

California Asparagus Gin Co. as also being located at 140 Front Street.⁵ A light green bottle with the words ASPARAGUS / GIN / ROTHENBERG CO. molded into it further establishes that this company was likely owned by the Rothenbergs.⁶

THE FOLSOM ASPARAGUS GIN COMPANY

Norman W. Folsom was employed in 1901 as a winemaker for the St. George Vineyard on Brannan Street near 8th Street in San Francisco according to the city directory of that year. It may seem strange today for a winery to be located within the city limits. However, it was not uncommon then as several wineries had warehouses south of Market Street. There is at least one reestablished winery there today using that history as an advertising ploy.⁷

In 1913, Norman's occupation is listed in the directory as "rectifier." According to a 2008 Industry Advisory from the Department of California Alcohol Beverage Control:⁸

Rectification is any process or procedure whereby distilled spirits are cut, blended, mixed or infused with any ingredient which reacts with the constituents of the distilled spirits and changes the character and nature or standards of identity of the distilled spirits.

This modern definition is an

accurate description of the gin making process where "botanicals" are infused into pure alcohol. By 1916, Norman had his own firm selling "liquor" at 229 East Street. That street is now called The Embarcadero. In 1917, the year the patent was granted, the Folsom Asparagus Gin Company, with Norman listed as the superintendent, opened at 350 Clay Street in San Francisco. The newspaper advertisement shown above also lists this company with W.A. Horton as the manager. The brand name of their product is "Fag-Co. Asparagus Gin." Sometimes the hyphen is omitted. Two related bottles are known. A light green one has FOLSOM / ASPARAGUS / GIN CO. molded into it. The other is clear glass with a paper label and came in a cardboard box stating the alcohol content at 30% and extolling the virtues of the product. This company is listed again in the 1918 directory but did not survive Prohibition.

Pat. No. 100,252. (CLASS 40. DISTILLED ALCOHOLIC LIQUORS.) FOLSOM ASPARAGUS GIN CO., SAN FRANCISCO, CAL. Filed Dec. 30, 1916.

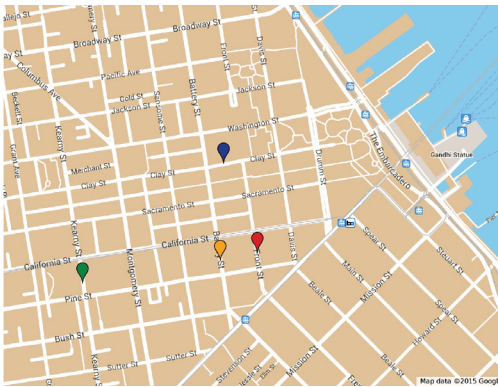
FAG-CO



Particular description of goods.—Asparagus Gin. Claims use since Oct. 31, 1916.

In 1917, patent 100,252 was granted to the Folsom Asparagus Gin Company of San Francisco.⁹ Their

- Rothenberg & Co. 140 Front St (post-1906)
- Folsom Asparagus Gin 350 Clay St
- M. Rothenberg & Co. 423 Kearny St (pre-1906)
- S.B. Rothenberg 117 Battery St (pre-1906)



Downtown San Francisco locations mentioned in this article. 229 East was likely near where Washington Street met the piers.

logo, seen in the patent office gazette, shows two bears holding a bunch of asparagus. This was also used on the paper labeled bottle and its box.

The fact that there were two asparagus gin companies not three blocks apart raises some questions. The reference to “Folsom Brand” on the Rothenberg token implies some sort of relationship between the two firms. Were these the same company? Or did one supply the other? Who else was in this gin business leading to the consumption of 25 tons per year of asparagus?

So what did asparagus gin taste like? It is hard to know as the product has not been made in nearly a century. Nor is the process that Norman Folsom patented readily available. He may have distilled a mash or simply infused asparagus into gin and filtered it. Auction records reveal several nearly full bottles with paper labels were sold since 2010, but it would seem unlikely to still be drinkable. Photos indicate the

liquid is green, perhaps suggesting an infusion, but 100 years is a long time and discoloration could be a factor. An adventurous individual, posting on his internet blog, described an infusion process for making asparagus gin.¹⁰ His review was that straight up drinks like a martini were unpalatable but it worked well as a bloody mary or gin and tonic base, mixing well with tomato juice or tonic. I will leave to the readers to experiment on their own!

The token is rare, the pictured example being the only the second one known, and it is unlisted in the printed catalogs. This and the other token were both sold on ebay in 2014, possibly by the same seller. In such cases, it is possible that a hoard exists. Time will tell.

A pair of companion asparagus gin bottles are pictured in Polak’s bottle book,⁶ one from the Rothenberg Co., the other from the Folsom Asparagus Gin Co., but I am unable to locate the auction records.

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France: Downfall of an Emperor

Jerry F. Schimmel

NAPOLÉON III WAS CAPTURED BY the Prussian army on September 2, 1870, at Sedan, along with his ill-prepared army — an event putting him out of business after a reign of twenty years. Earlier in the year, Louis-Napoleon, as he was known to his family, had declared war upon Prussia. He was not an accomplished soldier like his famous uncle, and, against the judgment of his generals, stayed with his troops in the fortress at Sedan. There he was forced to surrender with what was left of his army of 180,000. He died in England three years later.

The French public was quick to disown their leader, one result of which was a numismatic bonanza of possibly hundreds of satirical medals and altered coins. Most collectors have seen these in one form or another at shows. Here are two.



The obverse of this 25mm brass piece shows the head of Napoleon III in a Prussian helmet smoking a cigarette. The name Sedan is shown on his collar with two chain links attached. The two inscriptions at top

and bottom read Napoleon III *Le Miserable* and 80,000 *Prisonniers*. The reverse features an owl perched on a cannon over crossed bones. The inscription above the owl is *Vampire Francaise*. The dates 2 Decbre 1851–2 Septbre 1870 are below the owl.

There are many variations of satirical Napoleon coins, many being alterations of the actual coins, usually the copper dix centimes. Remodeled coins normally involve a Prussian helmet being engraved on Napoleon's head and changing the eagle on the reverse to a vampire owl.



Here's a hand-punched counterstamped message on the obverse of an 1861 dix centimes: VENNU / AUX / ALLEMANES / A / SEDAN (The Germans came to Sedan).

PHOTOS

Stephen Huston

REFERENCE

Wikipedia, June 2013

Notgeld Coins and More: Meissen Porcelain

Mark Benvenuto

INTRODUCTION

Numerous collectors assemble sets of one type or denomination of coin, and pass by many other series without a blink. When it comes to those coins that many of us consider off the beaten path, this translates to some beautiful pieces that end up being under-collected. This is not a condemnation, as we are all free to collect in any way we'd like. But there are some gorgeous series that can be both fun and educational to collect and learn about. One series that falls into this zone very often is the porcelain coins produced for various German cities and states right after the end of the First World War.

HISTORY OF MEISSEN & PORCELAIN

Porcelain, especially porcelain used in table settings, is still called China or Chinaware by many people simply because that is where it first came from historically. The Chinese had mastered the art and science of making porcelain, and were smart enough to trade it widely long before Europeans were able to duplicate the recipes and formulas. Both the source materials and the firing and baking processes were closely guarded secrets. But in the early 1700s, the secret of porcelain was discovered and the process of its manufacture harnessed by Johann Friedrich Böttger, and thus the monopoly of the Chinese companies was broken. Mr. Böttger was himself a prized asset, and the nobleman who was his patron kept him in what might be described as genteel captivity for some time, rather than let him and the secret of what would

become known as Meissen porcelain escape.

Years and decades passed, and through them, in both times of peace and war, the Meissen company continued to grow and produce several grades of porcelain for sale throughout Europe. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the firm was not in the business of making coinage, although it did make an ever wider selection of porcelain items. The tables of the wealthy definitely became places where the beauty and functionality of Meissen porcelain was seen.

WORLD WAR I & NOTGELD

The end of the First World War was an economic disaster for Germany. Even though the German army had not been defeated in the field, the nation's leaders had signed the surrender for their fatherland at

Versailles, and among its many provisions was Clause 231, popularly called the War Guilt Clause. This part of the treaty effectively made Germany the debtor to the victorious allies, and, among other things, drove coined money out of circulation. Into the void stepped what is called *Notgeld*. The word is a compound of two German terms, *Not* meaning *need* and *Geld* meaning *money*. So, this is effectively the money of need, or emergency money.

Most *Notgeld* was made from metal, invariably base metals such as copper, brass, nickel, and iron. Collecting it can become a lifelong passion, and a wonderful way to learn the location of hundreds of towns and regions of Germany and even of Austria. But other materials such as coal, wood, and yes, porcelain, was used for emergency money as well. Since the Meissen porcelain works were over 200 years old at the war's end, the company was well situated to meet the demands of city and regional governments to provide porcelain coinage while the post-war depression ran its course. Many municipalities used Meissen porcelain as coins, with the most popular being a dark maroon formulation.

Meissen porcelain coins have been studied and catalogued, but remain far enough from the mainstream, that most collectors do not avidly collect them (yes, there are some exceptions). The prices for Meissen



coins are not as cut and dried as those found in standard catalogues; and thus there is still some room to negotiate purchases between dealer and collector. Common pieces, such as those from Sachsen (above) can usually be purchased for \$5–\$20. Rarer pieces, or medallion issues, often cost more.

The Meissen porcelain *Notgeld*, like the vast array of metal *Notgeld* that was issued after the war and into the 1920s, had pretty much faded into obscurity by the time the national socialists — the Nazis — had taken over the German government. Numismatists who do try to assemble sets of porcelain coins note that there are some Meissen pieces sporting the swastika, for the company certainly did not disappear between the two world wars. As with many collectibles, Meissen porcelain medals and other such pieces sporting a swastika do tend to cost more than that which was just mentioned.

POST-WORLD WAR II

In 1945, for the second time in less than 30 years, Germany saw itself as the loser in an enormous war. This time, the Allies did indeed beat the German Army in the field,



and actually occupied the entire nation. The four victorious allied powers dived up the Third Reich into four zones of occupation, and the town of Meissen, along with its porcelain factory, ended up in the Soviet zone that would eventually become the DDR — the Deutsche Demokratische Republik — popularly known in the west as East Germany.

One might think that the Meissen factory would disappear under a communist state government, but such was not the case. Rather, a wide variety of events were commemorated with a medal made from Meissen porcelain. The accompanying photos of Meissen medals are shown actual size. Both maroon medals celebrate some accomplishment in the DDR. The type shown above celebrates construction projects.

The example on which the state symbol of East Germany appears

prominently, was given to members of the *Volkskammer* — literally, the People's Chamber — which was at least in name the governing body of the nation. (below)





THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

On October 3rd 1990, East Germany was reunited with West Germany, to again become one Federal Republic of Germany. The Berlin Wall, a long-time symbol of Communist regimes to the east and the repression they represented to the minds of those in the west, had its gates thrown open, and in the next few years the idea of private companies again took root in eastern Germany. And in this greater process the Meissen factory again took a place on the world stage when it came to manufacturing fine porcelain. The Meissen catalogue is now available on-line, and locations where Meissen porcelain is sold worldwide are also available at their website.

But Meissen medals still are part of the greater Meissen output. The white porcelain piece displayed above shows the crossed swords Meissen trademark very prominently on the reverse, and celebrates the millennium of the coronation of King Heinrich II. It is one of

many different Meissen medals, and while it is not a proper piece of Notgeld — for Notgeld have coinage values written on them — it is the next step in the continuing story that is Meissen porcelain. It is also a collectible that many of us might wish to examine in more detail.

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PHOTOS

Taken by the author, Mark Benvenuto; edited for print by Stephen Huston.

Quintera Mining Company: Only at the Company Store

Jerry F. Schimmel

FROM THE AMERICAN MINING MANUAL
1900–1910:

Mine office: Aduana, Alamos (municipio), Sonora, organized May 4, 1888, under laws of Great Britain revised 1901. Property considered valuable, but in a remote section that is without even wagon roads. Operations suspended since 1911 owing to Mexican Revolution. Mine is impossible to operate until peace is restored to the country.

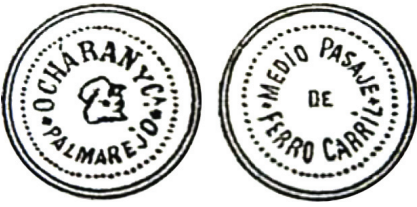
The Quintera mine site lies about nine miles west of Alamos, Sonora, named after a peon who stumbled across a few shiny stones during his rounds. The site opened in colonial times and was worked on and off for a century, probably much longer. After an 1888 British acquisition, Quintera became highly profitable through the next two decades extracting mostly silver. Investors received dividends up to fifteen percent!

Large scale work on the mines was suspended in 1909 for reasons not recorded, although one of them may relate to the company's history of monopolizing local water supplies, denuding hills of timber and illegally paying workers with tokens instead of cash. At any rate there was widespread resentment throughout the *municipio* (county).

Eventually the company was forced to change its policies and pay an indemnity to the city of Alamos. We can assume that the Mexican Revolution was the final straw in closing the Quintera.



The controversial tokens were manufactured by L. H. Moise of San Francisco, probably in the early 1900s, if the diesinker signature is any indication. The mine used at least five different designs: the one photographed, a 33mm octagonal brass piece for \$1 (shown as 100); 23.5mm square brass 25; pentagonal 22mm brass 10; and a 15mm round brass 5.



The fifth piece, 23mm brass, was originally issued by the Ocháran Company of Palmarejo, Chihuahua, for its small railroad line. As the story goes leftover stocks were apparently brought to Aduana through a commercial relationship between Quintera and Ocháran.



All tokens, including the Ocháran pieces are found counterstamped with a small bovine head, though occasionally some are seen without. The Quintera \$1 token and the Ocháran piece are moderately common to scarce, the others rare.

Like coal mine scrip used in the Eastern mountains of the U.S., tokens in the very beginning were little more than credits advanced against wages. Given the fact that most employees earned barely enough to live on there was often little left on payday. If the company operated its own store (in Mexico, *tienda de raya*) the worker could draw goods against his personal account.

Tokens could also be used at other local establishments if the proprietors had a prior arrangement



with the mine for cashing in the scrip, usually at a discount.

Besides overcoming the difficulty and danger of importing ready cash, another advantage of tokens was that the company could pay almost its entire payroll in common metal, disturbing only a few pesos of working capital. And tokens were not as subject to destruction as were paper slips sometimes used at other mines.

Today tiny Aduana is barely more than a church on the humblest of plazas, a country store, hotel and two local handicrafts cooperatives. The abandoned mine overlooks the hamlet from its hillside position.

PALMAREJO

Palmarejo was another tiny mining community in the mountainous southwest of Chihuahua on the road from Temoris to Chínipas. Oscar Ocháran, of Alamos, operated the narrow gauge railway between Palmarejo and Chínipas issuing fare tokens for use by either passengers or freight customers.



His company, Ocháran y Cia. of Palmarejo, also issued a note (above) dated September 6, 1888, for twenty-five centavos payable in Chihuahua banknotes or their equivalent in silver coins and signed by Jesus Almada. It was payable in *moneda corrient* at an 8% discount.



ILLUSTRATIONS

Drawings and map by the author
 Photos by Dan Hipple and Stephen Huston

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Spanish Silver and Dollars Mex:
What We Used Before 1857, What We Could Use Now
 Mark Benvenuto

INTRODUCTION

Just what sort of money were we using in 1776? Thirteen different colonies clinging to the western shore of the Atlantic Ocean were under British rule at the beginning of that year, and would proclaim independence in the middle of it. Certainly all of them had and used money of some sort. Much of it was paper currency, and many of the people were deeply suspicious of the value and worth of paper money. Silver coins were one of the mainstays of the everyday economy, but during all the years that encompassed what we now call the Revolutionary War, and the years after in which the fledgling nation was governed under a series of Articles of Confederation, there was no unified coinage. As well, there was not any real, circulating US silver coinage. Doing business across a state border was more akin to conducting business in a foreign country than anything else. While the coins of several European nations were used in everyday commerce, the “big kid in the playground” as it were, was still Spain. Specifically, the Spanish colonies south of the young United States produced enough

silver coinage that the thirteen newly independent states could basically use what was exported up to the north. This actually has some interesting implications for assembling any collection of early American coinage.

CASA DE MONEDA IN MEXICO CITY

When the ink was drying on the United States’ Declaration of Independence, the mint in Mexico City had already been producing coins for 241 years. That’s longer than the United States has been a country today. It was 1535 when the first coinage came from the Mexico City Mint, under the supervision of Antonio de Mendoza, the Spanish viceroy at the time. At least two things had changed there by 1776, though. The designs were one. The output — enormous by the time of US independence — was another. The now famous “pillars and waves” design had been replaced by what is called the Spanish milled dollar, and then by what today we might consider the more standard image of a Spanish monarch on the obverse, and a royal coat of arms on the reverse. As far as the big

8 reales — the silver dollars of the Spanish system, really — the switch from pillar to royal portrait design was made in 1772, although in popular culture both are sometimes called *pieces of eight*. It was King Charles III who graced the first of the portrait dollars. Thus, for any collector of coins used in the early US, it's probably fair to add a pillar dollar of Charles III (the pillar and coat of arms, or Spanish milled dollar, did say CAROLUS III on each) as well as a portrait dollar. After all, both were most likely circulating in the US, and the only thing resembling a United States silver dollar in the earliest years of the republic were the extremely rare Continental Currency coins, some of which are made of silver.

A PARADE OF SPANISH KINGS

By the eighteenth century, Britain and France had definitely been on the rise for generations when it came to empire building, but the Spanish kings still commanded great power in the New World between 1776 and 1857 (a date we'll get to in a moment). The just-mentioned Charles III reigned from 1760 to 1788. His royal father Ferdinand VI, sometimes called Ferdinand the Learned, had reigned from 1746 to 1759, and deserves mention because his coins too were probably in circulation in the US when we moved from colonies to country. The 8 reales of each monarch probably

circulated in the colonies and new states. Both could be added to an "early American" collection.

The next Charles, meaning Charles IV, ruled Spain and all its colonies from 1788 to 1808. Some of the earliest 8 reales coins of his reign proclaim his name on the obverse legend, but display the portrait of his dearly departed dad. By 1791, both name and portrait were of the same man, and the mintages of the 8 reales pieces, as well as of most of the silver minors, were continuously large. Thus, adding silver of Charles IV to a collection might be another way to lay claim to some of the working silver dollars used in the young US.

In the year 1794, the hatchling United States Mint in Philadelphia got around to coining 1,758 silver dollars. Owning one of them today, even in the worst of conditions, usually means parting with enough money to buy a pretty good automobile. The mintages did rise after that, but to nothing near the levels of the Spanish 8 reales. By the time US silver dollar production was halted in 1804 by order of President Jefferson, it is probably fair to say that the total output of US silver dollar coins during 1794–1804 wasn't any greater than a single year of Spanish 8 reales production in Mexico. Maybe. Since Charles IV was on the Spanish throne until 1808, it's plain that owning an 8 reales from the later part of his reign is probably the easiest way to own

a silver dollar that circulated in the young U.S.

It was Ferdinand VII who sat on the Spanish throne from 1808 to 1821, with plenty of times in the midst of those years when real power lay in the hands of Napoleon (who had accepted Ferdinand's abdication at one point). Since there were no United States silver dollars at all during this period, the only coin a person can claim for their collection as a silver unit coin of the US would be one of the 8 reales of Ferdinand. Like many of the 8 reales of his forbears, these are generally available to collectors today.

REVOLUTIONARY WAR — OF MEXICO

Too often we forget that ours was not the only revolutionary war, or war of independence fought in the western world. Mexico had its very own years of bloodshed and turmoil, from its declaration of independence in 1810 all the way up to the official end of that war in 1821. Therefore, post-1821 silver coins of a newly-independent Mexico generally sport a liberty cap with rays on one side, and an eagle grasping a snake in its beak on the other. Admittedly, there are a few years right after independence was won when the coinage of what is called the Empire of Iturbide was issued with different designs. But for collectors wishing to add another silver dollar to a collection of coins of a young US, the "cap and rays" dollars, as they

are often called, makes a good piece, since they were really the only game in town prior to the US Seated Liberty dollars that sport the design artwork of Mr. Christian Gobrecht.

DOLLARS MEX

For today's collector, the change from royal portrait to liberty cap dollar means some sort of step down in terms of price, and rather unfortunately in terms of prestige. This can be a bit ironic, since the cap and ray dollars actually have their value and fineness proclaimed as part of the design, just under the cap. A person today could actually assemble and entire date run of these, from 1824 up to 1857, without expending too much of their own hard earned cash. The terminology changes from "8 reales" to "peso" during this time. On the world stage though, for these coins were used in more places than just Mexico and the US, the name had become "dollars Mex." These big, silver coins commanded the respect of merchants and banking houses as far away as the port cities of China.

JUST A COUPLE OF BITS, PLEASE

One other addition to a growing collection that a person might wish to consider, assuming we wish to think of Spanish and Mexican silver as equal to early US silver, is some cut piece of an 8 reales coin. While it might be hard for us to think of today, back when Spain's influence on Mexico was waning, and the US



Mexico Pillar-type 2-Reales of 1756

was growing west from the eastern seaboard, the big silver coins were sometimes quite literally cut into pieces to make change. Finding a “4 reales” or even a “2 reales” piece today, or even a little “1 real” piece of pie-shaped sliver of the bigger coin, made by some strong and clever soul who cut a larger coin with an axe, sword, or knife, can be a wonderful coincidence. Not many people actively collect them. Not many folks, dealers or collectors, can simply look at one and quote a price for it. These old, mutilated pieces might be one of the last bastions of true collector haggling today. The value of any such piece has to be both a matter of how good it looks, and how well it was cut.

THE CHANGE OF 1857:

34TH CONGRESS. SESS III., CHAP LVI

We have mentioned the year 1857 twice thus far. It had been almost sixty years since the United States Mint was authorized before Congress decided it was once and for all time to end the use of Spanish and Mexican coinage in the US. The wording of the act was legally precise and quite encompassing:

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the pieces commonly known as the quarter, eighth, and sixteenth of the Spanish pillar dollar, and of the Mexican dollar, shall be receivable at the treasury of the United States, and it several offices, and at the several post-offices and land-offices, at the rates of valuation following — that is to say, the fourth of a dollar, or piece of two reales, at twenty cents; the eighth of a dollar, or piece of one real, at ten cents; and the sixteenth of a dollar, or half real, at five cents.

Sec.2 And be it further enacted, That the said coins, when so received, shall not again be paid out, or put in circulation, but shall be recoined at the mint [and]

Sec. 3. And be it further enacted, That all former acts authorizing the currency of foreign gold or silver coins, and declaring the same a legal tender in payment for debts, are hereby repealed.¹

And while there is more to the wording, this pretty firmly ends the chapter of US history in which Spanish and Mexican silver coinage could be used for everyday transactions. But it also gives a person a clear, crisp, exact date from which to claim that all prior silver coins can qualify as coins that could have been used in the US.

FINALLY?

It may seem odd to connect the events of so distant a past with possible events today, but two of our current United States have brought to the table — or to the state house and senate floor — the idea of again making a hard money, a coinage, in which people would have more faith than the predominantly paper money of the United States of America. Both Utah and Arizona have taken the step of making it legal to use gold and silver coins for payments once again.²⁻⁵

It has certainly not become commonplace to settle transactions in these two states with silver dollars, or pillar dollars, or dollars Mex. But it is curious indeed to see whether or not the wording of our Thirty-Fourth Congress, Sess. III., Chap. LVI will end up being overturned, and whether there will be a new chapter in collecting the coins that circulate in the United States.

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2-Reales photograph by Stephen Huston

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Florence Evelyn Nesbit Thaw

Herbert Miles

In 1901, the most famous face and, perhaps, the most beautiful woman in the United States was a child, 16 year old Florence Evelyn Nesbit, and this is her story.

You may think that Brittany Spears, Lindsay Lohan, Kim Kardashian, Paris Hilton, and, for us older folks, Marilyn Monore, are the first of a breed of publicity-seeking, morally suspect, beautiful women whose notoriety sells huge quantities of newspapers, books and magazines. But, you would be wrong.

Indeed, they may be the descendants of the first modern American woman to captivate the general public; and they may also fade in the glare of Florence Evelyn Nesbit's supernova light, that is, if you know the tale.

Her story begins in 1884 or 1885 when she was born in the small town of Tarentum near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her father was a small town lawyer and her mother, a homemaker. Evelyn's early childhood was unremarkable, but upon the death of her beloved father when she was about 10, her world changed forever. The death of the sole breadwinner in the late 1800s meant that Evelyn, her younger brother, Howard, and her mother were thrown into poverty unless taken in by other family members.



Evelyn Nesbit at age 16, 1901

Of course the extended family members had their own mouths to feed and bills to pay. They could not permanently care for three additional charges. Evelyn's mother attempted to obtain employment as a seamstress, having a natural sewing ability. But she was ill-equipped to find work having been a homemaker all those years, and her lack of confidence, lack of experience (no formal Paris training!), and perhaps her fear of leaving the children alone kept her from succeeding.

She managed a boarding house for a bit, but even collecting the rents during those hard times was beyond her ability to do successfully, so she began sending her 11 year old daughter to collect the rents, believing that residents would have

difficulty saying “no” to a young girl. Naturally, a boarder with little or no money can say no to anyone, even a child.

Periodically Mrs. Nesbit sent the children to live with relatives on nearby farms so she could travel to Pittsburgh or Philadelphia to look for seamstress work or any other gainful occupation.

She finally obtained work as a salesclerk in Wanamaker’s, a Philadelphia department store, and was successful in getting additional work for her young daughter and son at the same location. It appeared the family might be able to make ends meet and move forward. However, the 12 hour days for 6 days a week had a negative effect on her young son Howard. He was sent back to a relative’s farm near Tarentum to recover while she and Evelyn continued to work at Wanamaker’s.

But Evelyn’s life changed forever at age 12 as she was wandering down Philadelphia’s Arch Street one Sunday admiring the clothing and material in the shops. Reflected in one shop’s window was a woman staring at Evelyn. Introducing herself as Mrs. Darach, a local portrait artist, she invited Evelyn to pose. Evelyn brought her mother to Mrs. Darach’s studio later that same day and received one dollar for a 5 hour sitting! Average hourly wages at that time for females amounted to between 10¢ to 18¢ per hour.



Another local artist, John Storm, also requested weekly sittings and soon Evelyn was posing for many local Philadelphia artists including Violet Oakley, who had received stained glass training under Louis Comfort Tiffany, Jessie Wilcox Smith, and Elizabeth Shippen Green, all women graduates of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

Oakley used Evelyn’s adolescent face and figure to portray angels, doll heads, and other heavenly figures on stained glass in a number of churches in Philadelphia, and perhaps even in New York.

Evelyn’s fame spread and other artists used her for long sittings; professional photographers commented on her ability to hold poses for hours and also began to photograph her. Evelyn and her family’s future seemed secure, but suddenly in 1900 her mother decided to go to New York, the



Postcard, undated, but circa 1902; taken by Rudolph Eickemeyer.
Evelyn is wearing one of Stanford White's antique Kimonos.

center of modeling, to increase Evelyn's success.

She took letters of introduction provided by the artists to introduce Evelyn to New York's artist community, but left her children behind with relatives until she could secure *something* for the family. After months of fruitless searching for work for herself and after exhausting what funds Evelyn had earned, she sought out noted painter James Carroll Beckwith, showing him photographs of her then 15 year old daughter. Beckwith, immediately entranced, wanted to meet the model in person. Soon thereafter, he introduced her to other legitimate artists and her angelic and malleable

face and figure began appearing on all manner of media.

Postcards, calendars, magazine covers, advertisements, from toothpaste to beer to Coca Cola trays, sheet music, pinbacks, advertising mirrors, and more all featured her likeness.



Charles Dana Gibson portrayed her as the *Eternal Question of inscrutable femininity* in 1903.

She was more famous at this time than any woman had ever been in the United States; more popular than Kim Kardashian could ever hope to be!



Broadway beckoned and she chose to become a chorus girl at the tender age of 16 in *Floradora*, a popular musical production at the Moorish Casino, lying or shading her true age from the producers. At age 16, she hardly knew that Broadway chorus girls were considered no more than gold diggers at best or prostitutes at worst. It was merely exciting for her and more fun than hours and hours posing sedately, even though she continued her lucrative posing during the day.

Stage door Johnnies appeared in abundance, but 46 year old Stanford White, architect of the elite and moneyed class, introduced to Evelyn by another chorus girl, thrust himself into her life. Although married, he bought her gifts, repaired her

teeth, paid for her music lessons, moved her mother into a nicer hotel, and otherwise made himself indispensable to their lives. The foremost architect in New York, he had designed many of the homes of the rich and famous, the Whitneys, Vanderbilts, and Pulitizers. He designed Madison Square Garden, Penn Station, and hundreds of other monuments and buildings in New York, and was friends with Augustus Saint Gaudens, one of the foremost sculptors of the day and designer of the \$20 gold piece minted from 1907 to 1933.

White was a known debaucher; young girls were his prey, and Evelyn was his newest target. Upon entering her mother's and her life, he wined and dined Evelyn, then drugged the youngster one night and took her virginity in his midtown "love nest," the one with the red velvet swing. White loved to see Evelyn swing naked on his red velvet swing, swinging higher and higher until she kicked through a paper parasol he positioned discreetly above her naked legs. Though difficult to believe after White's admitted debauchery, Evelyn declared later in life that he was the only man she ever truly loved!

White was smitten but, alas, there were other chorus girls to entice him and his affair with Evelyn lasted only about a year. In her attempts to make him jealous, she took up with a variety of famous and rich suitors, John Barrymore, among them, but

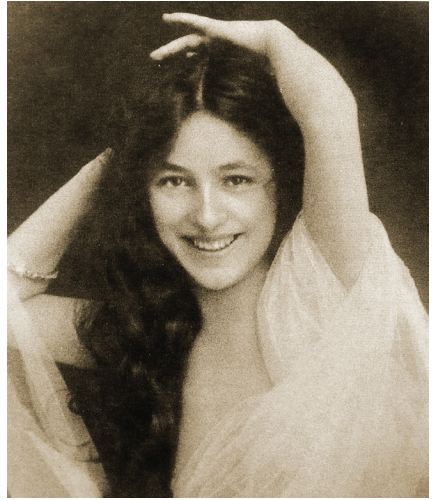
Harry K. Thaw, a Pittsburgh son of wealth, wore her resistance down and won her over with ceaseless entreaties.

Such a marriage was a mistake as Harry K. Thaw was either insane or seriously demented. For many years, Harry had regarded Stanford White as an impediment to his entry into high society and now after Evelyn's confession of White's behavior, Harry knew that White was a "beast" who had debauched Evelyn and many other teenage beauties. Shaw seethed inside at the mere mention of White.

Thaw had White followed and his transgressions reported to the local police hoping they would prosecute him for taking advantage of numerous young chorus girls, but to no avail.

Circumstances came to a head a little over a year after Evelyn's marriage to Thaw. On June 25, 1906, in an amphitheater on the top of the Stanford White-designed Madison Square Garden, Harry K. Thaw shot White 3 times at point blank range, killing him instantly then declaring White had, "ruined his wife, and had it coming to him."

The ensuing legal proceeding was called the "Trial of the Century" and featured all the trappings of modern society: chorus girls, tales of debauchery, the rich and famous being brought low, scandals, theatrical excesses, and more.

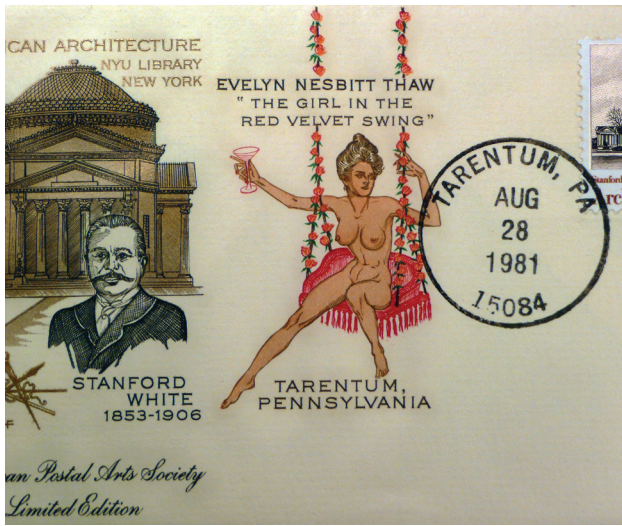


Newspapers tripled and then quadrupled their circulation as the trial of Thaw commenced. Evelyn, who had been famous as a face of advertising and beauty gained even more notoriety. Her face as drawn by courtroom artists graced hundreds of newspapers for weeks as the trial progressed.

After 11 weeks, the first trial ended in a hung jury; a second trial followed where Thaw was declared insane and committed to New York's Matteawan Asylum for the Criminally Insane until he could be declared competent.

Florence Evelyn Nesbit Thaw was approximately 21 years old!

Can one's life peak at age 21 and then slowly grind along until death? Perhaps that was Evelyn's fate. Even though her testimony was crucial for keeping Harry from the electric chair, the Thaw family disowned her,



Left: from a postcard featuring White's New York University Library, and Evelyn seated nude on the "Red Velvet Swing"

Below: Music Sheet, circa 1915, 30 year old Evelyn in the circle

leaving her facing poverty once again.

For a while, she continued her chorus girl work, made Vaudeville appearances, developed a song and dance act with new partners, wrote her memoirs twice, and eventually opened a ceramics studio in southern California. There have been rumors of drug abuse, suicide attempts, and other human transgressions, but who knows?

She finally succumbed to death in 1967, 61 years after the "Trial of the Century."

Nevertheless, as portrayed in books and movies, she will be known forever as the "Girl in the Red Velvet Swing," the most titillating fact in her short time with Stanford White; Evelyn reduced to no more than an oddly sad over-sexualized image.

For the row house at 22 West 24th Street where Stanford seduced 16



year old Evelyn, it fell into disrepair and collapsed in 2011, leaving nothing but a pile of bricks. One viewer commented at the sight of the rubble, "It was just another old New York building. There were rats on the bottom and pigeons on the top."



*Advertising mirror featuring 16 year old Evelyn: GOOD FOR 10¢ IN TRADE
at Hotel Raymond, Fitchburg, Mass*

And as for Florence Evelyn Nesbit Thaw — once the most beautiful and popular woman in America — among the dross, numismatists have a proliferation of *Good For* advertising trade mirrors with her likeness to keep her young forever.

PHOTOS

All photos provided by the author

SOURCES

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New York Times, March 23, 2011, "The Girl, the Swing and a Row House in Ruins."

Arts & Crafts Quarterly Magazine, Volume V, No 2, 1992

*San Francisco Gas & Electric Company:
Lost in the Mists of Time*
Jerry F. Schimmel

How many of you San Franciscans knew there was an S.F.G. & E.? A tiny minority I would guess, if that many. We're so used to paying the Pacific Gas & Electric Company (better known as PG&E) that it's hard to comprehend that Friscoites once had a separate utility.

Directories first list S.F.G. & E. in 1897, and its last entry is for 1910. After 1910 readers of the directories were referred to P.G. & E.

The first offices of SFG&E were at 415 Post Street, Joseph B. Crockett, President and Engineer. Immediately after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, the firm established six temporary offices:

925 Franklin Street,
500 Haight Street,
1290–9th Avenue,
421 Presidio Avenue, and
5th and Tehama Streets, way out in the southeast part of town at Six Mile House on San Bruno Avenue. The firm's 1910 and final address was 445 Sutter.

The disc shown here was probably a tool tag. It certainly had no trade value. Its obverse legend shows that it was struck by the San Francisco die-sinking firm of Patrick & Co., still in business on Market Street since



the 1890s. The design of its legend suggests a manufacture date between 1900 and 1906.

DESCRIPTION

Brass 25mm holed at top, recessed beaded borders.

Obv: S.F. / G. & E. / Co. / PATRICK & CO. S.F.

Rev: 968
(Probably a tool check number).

PHOTOS

Dan Hipple and Stephen Huston

The Ocean Shore Railroad: A Terrific Idea, But...

Jerry F. Schimmel

You couldn't imagine a better location for the proposed railroad between San Francisco and Santa Cruz. Pre-construction advertising touted it as the upcoming travel experience of the Pacific Coast.

Construction would proceed along the high cliffs and trestles hundreds of feet above the crags and ocean breakers of Central California — one of the most scenic sections of coastline in a nation blessed with breath-taking ocean views.

Ocean Shore was supposed to link the cities via what turned out to be an impossibly difficult coastal route through San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz counties. Despite all promises, the line never made it to Santa Cruz even after a substantial track section had been laid leading north from that city. To top it off the railroad's worst misfortune was the 1906 Earthquake which tore apart tracks naively laid over the infamous and unstable rock cliff at Devil's Slide. Through ups and downs the never-finished project dragged on (and off) from 1905 through 1920.

When the company expired, a twenty-five mile gap in the rails remained open extending from Swanton in Santa Cruz County to

Tunitas Creek in San Mateo County. Travelers proceeding across the temporarily graded stretch had to ride in a Stanley Steamer touring car which was met by trains going either way.

An unremarkable one-story clapboard box served as Ocean Shore's San Francisco terminal located at the southeast corner of Mission and 12th Streets. From that point tracks went south on 12th and across Division, Harrison and Bryant Streets onto Florida Street. At Mariposa Street they turned left four blocks and then right and south on Potrero Avenue.

At 25th Street the tracks made yet another left turn to Vermont Street and then right onto what is now Bayshore Boulevard and the 101 Freeway. Here the line continued below the eastern and southern base of Bernal Heights into the Alemany Gap, then to the parts of San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties that now contain Westlake, Daly City, Pacifica and points south.

A few station buildings leftover from the project still exist in San Mateo County, most of which have been converted into homes or businesses, some available for viewing. The rest



of the story, especially for railroad buffs, can be found in the excellent history, *The Last Whistle*, by Jack Wagner.

The tokens shown, and their issuer, had nothing to do with the Ocean Shore RR other than to borrow its name. The saloon was located at 350–12th Street on the west side, trains rumbling by mere feet from its swinging doors. Since then house numbers on 12th Street have changed as the saloon was originally described as being on the corner of 12th and Harrison Streets.

Directories show John Schwormstede as a saloonkeeper and grocer, partnered with brother Charles from 1897 to about 1902. The drinkery lasted until Prohibition in 1920, though directories tell us that afterward “refreshments” only were available. Schwormstede died in 1923.

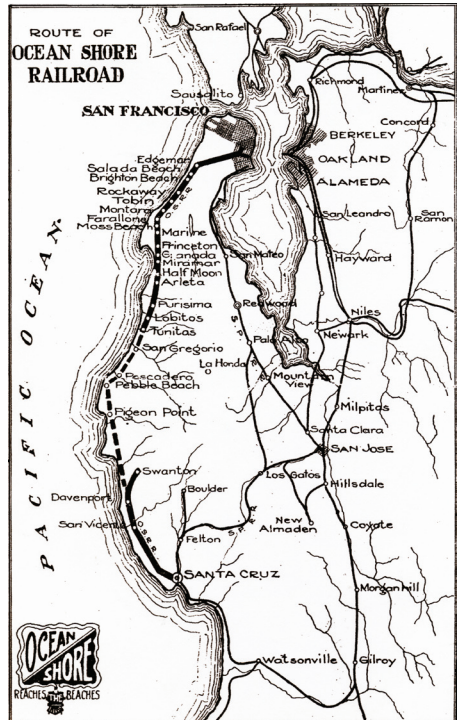
The two tokens are 26mm octagonal brass and read as follows.

Obverse: Ocean Shore R.R. / Saloon / J. Schwormstede / 12TH & Harrison / MOISE K. CO.

Reverse: Good For / 5¢ / In Trade (and another similar for 10¢.)

The diesinker’s signature, MOISE K. CO., was used from about 1908 through 1915. The tokens were good for drinks or cigars. Five cents bought a beer, shot of cheap whisky, or cheap cigar. Ten cents bought the same, only better quality.

I retraced the San Francisco County path of Ocean Shore’s rails with my twelve year old Volkswagen GTI. Driving south from 12th and





Partial street map of southeast San Francisco 1912

TOKEN PHOTOS

Stephen Huston

REFERENCES

- Brandt, R. and Guido, F.A., "Ocean Shore Railroad" in the *The Western Railroader*, San Mateo, California (1965)
- Feisel, Duane, *California Saloon Tokens*, Western States Token Society, Shingletown, California (2004)
- Wagner, Jack R., *The Last Whistle*, Howell-North Books, Berkeley (1974)
- San Francisco City Directories, various years
- Site visits, June 16 and July 7, 2013

Mission, I found that several streets have since been deleted or blocked. I could no longer cross Harrison, Bryant, and Division largely because of the freeway and parking lot of a Best Buy. Across Division Street, I got to Florida Street (not easily) and followed the above route to the Vermont Street section now obliterated by the 101 Freeway. From there south to the county line all traces were covered by Alemany Boulevard and Interstate 280.

The address 350–12th Street no longer exists. It's now one of San Francisco's new live/work lofts with the number 356. The surroundings are rather grey, dotted with old flats and industrial buildings, though it has curious alley names like Isis and Bernice Streets.

The old site of the railroad station lies at the intersection of Mission and South Van Ness Avenue though it has been razed and re-built several times. A sleazy looking one story bar graces the northwest corner of Harrison and 12th, the actual location of Schwormstede's — keeping up the tradition.

United Railroads

Jerry F. Schimmel



Few San Franciscans know the name United Railroads. The United was organized in 1902, when a New York bank purchased the first Market Street Railway in San Francisco as well as several small, privately owned street car operations. The URR lasted until April 1921, when it was bought out by the second Market Street Railway.

San Francisco's Charter of 1900 envisioned the city's total ownership of municipal transportation. A single system would eliminate repetition, overlap and the problem of transfers, part of a policy which was reiterated in the charter of 1932. When the Municipal Railway purchased the second Market Street Railway in 1944, the city had municipalized its urban transportation and became the holder of all lines except the cable cars. Later they, too, were brought under the Muni umbrella.

In late 1906, United Railroads had its offices at Broderick and Oak streets having been forced out of downtown because of the Earthquake and Fire of April.

The brass check shown had no cash value nor was it intended for such. Likely it was a tool tag or possibly a workman's identification badge.

We can date its issue for certain to October 1906, because of the manufacturer's signature on the reverse. The firm Irvine, Wirth and Jachens was listed at 2439 Market Street only for that year. A year later the company had moved to 2129 Market Street.

In 1909, the firm was recorded in directories as Irvine and Jachens which is still in operation. Prior to 1906 there had been separate die sinking companies: J.C. Irvine & Co. and Wirth & Jachens.



The check's value is probably more historical than financial. It's one of the few near-numismatic ephemera out of the post-earthquake reconstruction period. So far no fare tokens have been recorded for United Railroads.

DESCRIPTION

Four-scalloped brass 52mm, all legends incuse, no raised rim or border designs, hole at top for suspension.

OBV: UNITED / R.R^s /
(large serial number) 5938 /
CONSTRUCTION / DEPT. / S.F.

REV: (on lobe, see detail above)
IRVINE / WIRTH & JACHENS /
2439 MARKET ST / S.F.

PHOTO CREDITS

Dan Hipple and Stephen Huston

REFERENCES

San Francisco City Directories
1900–1910
The White Front Cars of San Francisco,
Charles Smallwood, Interurbans,
Glendale (1978)

Papers of the Pacific Coast Numismatic Society 2014–2015