

Mormon Gold

From its inception in the early 1830's, the Mormon Church was faced with opposition wherever they settled due to their distinctive religious views and marriage customs. This caused the congregation to move frequently – first to Ohio, then to Missouri, and finally to Illinois. In Illinois, they founded their own community (Nauvoo) where its leader, Joseph Smith, was killed in 1844. His successor, Brigham Young, called for Mormons to head west in 1846 to territory recently conquered during the Mexican War.

This migration west was preceded by the Mormon Battalion, a group of over 500 Mormon volunteers tasked by the US army with marching 1,900 miles against San Diego during the Mexican War. Their only notable action (other than capture of Tucson) was to help block Fremont's takeover bid of California.

After being mustered out in 1847, several battalion members headed toward the Sacramento area to work for James Marshall at a place called Sutter's Mill. The following year, gold was discovered, thereby triggering the famous California Gold Rush. Shortly thereafter, this group of veterans rejoined the Mormon community, now in Utah with large quantities of gold dust they contributed to the church.

Like most remote locations at the time, the Mormon settlement had an acute shortage of small change, or indeed currency of any kind and had to rely on a barter system. The Church issued script, but it was not accepted beyond the community. Gold dust was easily lost through exchange transactions, so the Church placed this gold in packets with the value on its contents written on the front of the packet. Obviously, a more effective method was dictated.

Brigham Young promoted a distinctive Mormon coinage, with four denominations of two-and-one-half, five, ten, and twenty-dollar coins envisioned. While the ten dollar pieces featured the legend PURE GOLD, the other denominations (which were struck later) displayed the initials G.S.L.C.P.G, standing for "Great Salt Lake City Pure Gold," a misnomer as all the gold came from California.



Mormon gold coins also used various religious symbols for the central design motifs. The obverse devices included the three pointed Phrygian Crown, the emblem of Mormon priesthood, above the All-Seeing Eye. The inscription "Holiness to the Lord" is from the Old Testament and was originally intended for engraving on sacred jewels of Jews. The reverse devices included the clasped hands for friendship.

Production began in late 1848 with \$10 coins dated 1849. Only 46 were minted before the die broke,

thereby halting production. It is estimated that only 7,500 coins of the other denominations were minted 1849-51 from the California gold.

Mormon coins were the first of the Western territorials to be publicly vilified as lightweight and of low fineness, despite the claim of "Pure Gold". Outside of Mormon territory, the coins were discounted 20-25% by bankers and merchants. Widespread melting followed, causing most Mormon gold pieces to disappear.

In 1860, the Mormon Church acquired Colorado gold which it minted into \$5 pieces. The obverse depicts a recumbent lion facing left, symbol of power and protection, with the Deseret alphabet inscription "Holiness to the Lord" surrounding the lion and the date below. The reverse shows a beehive (holy symbol of industriousness) made of straw protected by an eagle. Surrounding the eagle is the inscription DESERET ASSAY OFFICE PURE GOLD.



Mormon coins are particularly rare. Today, just 148 of them are known to exist, and the cost is beyond the means of most collectors.

Special Meeting Activity Calendar

- September** – Show n' Tell night
- November** – Veteran's night,
Officer/Director elections
- December** – Christmas party

We need volunteers to give programs in 2016 or 2017. Contact Kevin Kell if you have an interest.

Upcoming Local Coin Shows

- September 10** – Waco Coin Show, Bellmead Civic Center, Bellmead. Free.
- September 30-October 2** – Texas Coin Show, Grapevine Convention Center. \$3 or free with NETCC membership.
- October 8** – Collin County Coin Club Coin Show, Quality Inn, Hwy. 75, Exit 40B, McKinney. Free.
- October 21-22** – Wichita Fall Coin & Stamp Show, 1000 5th St., Wichita Falls. \$2.
- November 4-6** – Ft. Worth Coin Club Coin Show, Forest Hill Civic/Convention Center. \$3.
- November 18-20** – Texas Coin Show, Grapevine Convention Center. \$3 or free with NETCC membership.

August New Members: None.

August First Time Visitors: Ann Jameson.