

Las Vegas COIN JOURNAL

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IN THIS ISSUE:

**The Gold Rush and
Argonauts: The Story
Of Mormon Gold**

**By Robert Campbell
Sin City Was Settled
By Saints:**

**Las Vegas Springs
By Robert Campbell
The Flying Buzzard?
By Joe Cavallaro**

**Las Vegas
Numismatic Society
55th Coin Show
May 17-19, 2018**

Bourse Map 20

Dealer Directory 18

Schedule of Events 11

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CONTENTS

The Gold Rush and Argonauts: The Story of Mormon Gold By Robert Campbell **3**

Sin City Was Settled By Saints: Las Vegas Springs By Robert Campbell **7**

The Flying Buzzard? By Joe Cavallaro..... **22**

Las Vegas Numismatic Society Coin Show | May 17-19, 2018

Bourse Map **20**

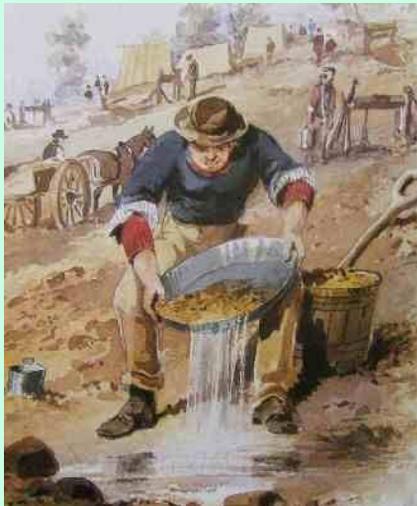
Dealer Directory **18**

Schedule of Events **11**

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The Gold Rush and Argonauts: **The Story of Mormon Gold** *By Robert Campbell*

To really understand how Mormon Gold Coins were made, we must go back to who discovered gold at Sutter's Mill and to where it all started in what was then called the Iowa Territory. In June 1846, President James K. Polk asked Brigham Young for volunteers to help fight in the Mexican American War. Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint wanted to prove their loyalty to the United States



and have warranted permission for their upcoming western flight. President Polk needed the Mormon militia, remnants of Nauvoo Legion, to act as a show of force and to build a new southern wagon road from Santa

Fe to the Pacific Ocean. This newly formed battalion became the only religiously based unit in US military history.

Brigham Young needed the money the army allocated for yearly uniform expenses, approximately \$2,100.00, for outfitting the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois. The “Saints” were being forced out of the homes because

of religious persecution and were seeking religious freedom plus they wanted to temporarily isolate themselves from the rest of the world. Five

hundred men were recruited and enlisted in the United States Army from

Mormon camps stretching from Nauvoo, Illinois to Council Bluffs, Iowa. The army permitted 31 women, some were wives bringing 42 children, and they served as camp associates (cooks) and laundresses.

The Mormon Battalion began what has become the longest U.S. infantry march in history, some 2000 miles to the west coast. It was some of these “battalion boys” that were there at Sutter’s Mill on the South Fork of the American River when gold was discovered. It is widely recognized that these Mormon boys were responsible for the California Gold Rush. This volunteer Mormon unit gave most of their pay to their families when they were mustered out in San Diego on July of 1847. Some men felt the need to return to their families as soon as

possible, while other men were trying to find work and earn money and gather supplies for their return to the main body of Saints.

Some of the ex-Mormon Battalion men found work with a Swiss entrepreneur, Captain Johan Augustus Sutter, at his Fort, in the Sacramento Valley. Sutter thought of his land holdings as a country and being

granted a large tract of land tried to turn it into one, himself being the ruler. Forty miles east of the Sutter’s Fort a new endeavor was sought for and a new partner in the building of a saw mill was initiated. His name was James

Wilson Marshall



[Mormon Persecution](#)

a veteran of the California Battalion and skilled carpenter from Oregon Territory. He was to become the discoverer of gold in Indian country at the future site of Sutter’s saw mill. He was the foreman for construction, and was instructed to hire skilled laborers including carpenters, blacksmith, wheelwrights, and millwrights. They were looking for men that would not shy from hard work and not leave before the job was completed. These former frontiersmen and veterans of the Mormon Battalion, fit the bill. Of the 10 Caucasians that were present on January 24th 1848 (9 men, 1 woman) at least 6 were Mormons, hired along with native American Indian laborers. At Sutter’s saw mill, the most important component of the excavation was the “tail race.” Beginning with dammed up

water, water flowed under the flutter wheel, which in turn activates the cog that move the whipsaw up and down and cuts timber. But it's in the tail race (ditch), from the mill back to river, that James Marshall is credited with finding small gold scales (nuggets) in the washed out banks.

Henry W. Bigler, a Mormon Battalion Veteran recorded in his diary: "Monday, 24th this day some kind of mettle [metal] was found in the tail race that looks like gold first discovered by James Martial [Marshall], the boss of the Mill." Mormons there that day include: James Stephens Brown, William James Johnson, Alexander Stevens, and Azariah Smith, all were Mormon Battalion Boys. What they wanted most, instead of money was the supplies and equipment to reunite with their families and friends in Utah.



Building the saw mill was a means to that end.

Probably the best complete story of how gold was found in California was written by James Brown, 46 years to the day after when gold was discovered. Some historians believe Bigler's accounts are more accurate because they come from his diary instead of recollection.

James Brown said it best, "I tested the small scales with my teeth and as it did not give, I held it aloft and exclaimed, gold, boys, gold! Then I stepped to the workbench and put it to the second with a hammer. I then made the third test by placing it upon the point of an old shovel blade, and then inserted it in among the coals, and blew the coals until I was blind for a moment, in trying to burn or melt the particles; and although it was plated almost as

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thin as a sheet of note paper, the heat did not change its appearance in the least. Then we were all looking for it. Each put his mite into a small vial that was provided by Marshall, and we made him the custodian. We repeated our visits for three of four mornings to the tail race, each time collecting some more of the precious metal, until we gathered somewhere between three and four ounces.

The next move was to step and stake off two quarter sections beginning at the mill, one running down the river and the other up. Then we cut and hauled logs and laid the foundation of a cabin on each of them; one was for Sutter, the other for Marshall. Now this matter being finished, Mr. Marshall was prepared to dictate terms to us, for every tool and all the provisions in that part of the country belonged to Capt. Sutter and Mr. Marshall, and they had full control, and we were depending on the completion of the mill for our pay. He said if we would stay with him until the mill was completed and well stocked with logs, he would supply us



Sutter's Saw Mill



with provisions and tools and the first right to work on their gold claims. So we agreed to his proposition, and also that we would not disclose our secret of the gold discovery until we

learned more about it and had made good our claims. Not having the remotest idea of its extent, we pushed the mill as rapidly as possible, for as yet we had not received one dollar's pay for our four months' labor.

Sutter's capital and enterprise and Marshall's shrewd sagacity has been given the credit of the great gold discovery of California. The facts are that James W. Marshall discovered the first color, and in less than one hour six Mormons found color as well, and in less than six weeks had discovered it in hundreds of places that Mr. Marshall had never seen, the most notable of which was Mormon Island, to where the first rush was made, and from where the news was spread to the uttermost bounds of the everlasting hills and to all the nations of the earth.

As to Sutter's enterprise and capital, he did furnish the graham flour and mutton, wheat and peas, black coffee and brown sugar, teams

and tools, while we, the members of the Mormon Battalion, did do the hard labor that discovered the metal, and it is also true that we were in Sutter's employ at that date, and that we did not get paid for our labor.

To say that the Mormon's had a monopoly on the area where the gold rush started is an understatement. They founded most of the towns, established most of the hotels, mercantile supply stores, outfitters, and started farms to raise crops for 'the sure to come' masses. They discovered most of the gold strikes and creamed the easy gold that was found in the early development of gold mining in the areas. It wasn't until April of 1848 that the rest of California woke up and started to invade the mining claims of the Mormons, but the second year the rest of the world arrived Hollywood movie style. It was like the Wild West, no law and order, and vigilantism was the rule of the land. Every man for himself, claim jumping was commonplace. Murder showed its ugly head and went unanswered. Mining equipment and supplies brought outrageously inflated prices, including necessities like clothing and food.

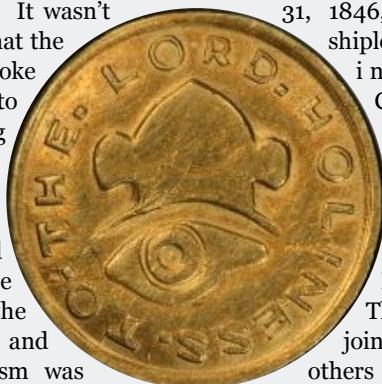
Samuel Brannan, an excommunicated but reinstated Mormon leader arranged travel on the *Brooklyn* that sailed from New York to Yerba Buena (future San Francisco) and is credited with spreading the news of the gold strike with a small story in the *California Star* reporting he waved a small vial of gold and "took off his hat and swung it, shouting



Building the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City

aloud in the streets that gold was found near Coloma." It emptied the streets! These 238 Saints more than doubled the population when they arrived in San Francisco Bay on July 31, 1846, becoming the first shipload of immigrants into American California. They sailed for six months via: Cape Verde Islands, Cape Horn, Juan Fernandez Islands, and the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). Thinking they might be joined in California by others traveling overland, they took with them enough agricultural and mechanical tools for 800 people, including three grain mills, turning lathes, saw mill irons, a printing press and the beginnings of a library.

The gold rush may have waited indefinitely if it were not for these Mormons venturing out and finding the real great lodes or best places to prospect. The Mormon Church, may not have survived in the Great Salt Lake Valley if gold wasn't found at this critical time in the west. Gold seekers stampeded from the East in a frenzy, dropping their heavy loads of supplies and sold their comfort goods for 10¢



on the dollar. These gold crazed fortune seekers only wanted fresh horses, light wagons and food stuffs to get them to California fast, to make their fortunes and beat out everyone else 'come hell or high water.' Dreams filled their heads and they literally believed that gold littered the ground ready to scoop up. If it wasn't for Mormons



Mormon Gold Coin Dies Pre-1909

willing to help build Sutter's sawmill, gold may never have been discovered in California and we might not be calling it the Golden State.

James Marshal tried to force the Mormon Battalion boys to keep the gold discovery private.

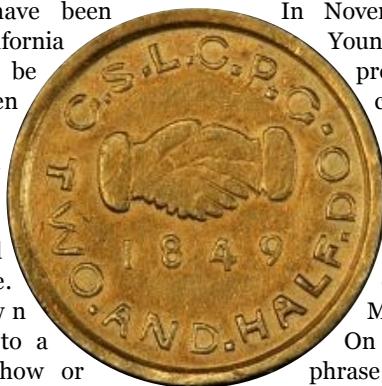
James Brown compared the find to a bag of cats, "somehow or other the bag came untied and our old cat and all the kittens ran out, and to the camps they went, until everybody heard them." The secret was out, the gold rush was on, and the rest is history.

After the gold was discovered at Coloma, the Mormons "were allowed" to prospect during their off hours and on Sundays. They found the best places to prospect for placer mining. One of these best places was a sand bar, that later was called Mormon Island. It proved to be one of the richest strikes in the entire 49'er gold rush era. The Mormon Battalion boys returned across the western desert to

their families in Salt Lake City, with these gold pokes in hand, proudly depositing them into the church's gold accounts, for tithing and general funds. This gold was later made into coin to help a fledging and desperate economy in the 'Valley of the Saints.' Mormon gold coins were the first coins made from the California gold rush

and in the West. In November 1848 Brigham Young, John Taylor (third president of the LDS church) and John Melbourne Kay (a blacksmith) drew up designs with inscriptions of the first four denominations of Mormon gold pieces.

On the obverse is the phrase "Holiness to the Lord" in circling an emblem of priesthood – a three-pointed Phrygian crown over an All-Seeing Eye of Jehovah. The Phrygian cap or liberty cap is a soft conical cap, associated in antiquity with peoples in Phrygia (in the area south of Constantinople). A story is told how the ancient Greeks and Romans hated to fight these soldiers because they fought to the last man, choosing death than give up their freedom. Because they were defending their homeland they battled like wild men and would kill more than their numbers. The Greek and Roman leaders would complain, "do we have to fight these guys again?" since it



would diminish their armies more than the value of the land they would gain. The cap signified freedom for emancipated slaves of ancient Rome (think of the movie Spartacus). On early United States coinage, it was the symbol of Liberty and Freedom, likewise Brigham Young wanted this icon to symbolize the religious freedom they found in the crossroads of the west. On the reverse side of all four 1849 dated denominations (\$2 1/2, \$5, \$10, \$20) in the center is the clasped handshake representing brotherhood, association and friendship. The date is then underneath the clasped hands. Around the edges are the initials G.S.L.C.P.G. which stands for Great Salt Lake City Pure Gold and the value of the coin written out, with one exception, the ten-dollar denomination is slightly different, it says Pure Gold

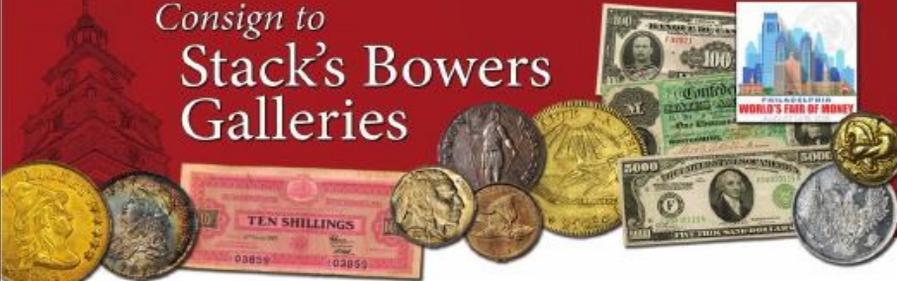


Deseret Mint

written out instead of all the initials.

On December 10, 1848, the first gold was deposited into the Deseret Mint, located in the home of Dr. William Sharp, a dentist. Sharp's home was an adobe building containing six rooms and located on the north side of South Temple (street) just east of the old Hotel Utah, and now the Joseph

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Smith Memorial Building, right where the underground parking entrance is now. The method of manufacture was with a gravity fed Drop Hammer Press apparatus. Two days later the first 25 \$10.00 Mormon gold pieces were minted and put into circulation by Brigham Young. One week later 21 more of the same denomination, were minted.

A minor tragedy occurred when the crucible, used to melt the gold dust, fractured and gold could not be melted into bars, then into strips/plates and cut into blanks or planchets. There were no other crucibles in the valley or anywhere they could buy them. The winter of 1848/49 was unusually cruel, and cold for the Saints. It was not until April that Brigham Young could send word and money east to buy new ones. In

September 1849 coinage restarted on all four denominations.

From examining the original dies, numismatists have determined that thousands of coins were struck in all four denominations, contrary to some popularly held notions that only 46 \$10 Mormon gold pieces were struck, however, the \$10 coin is still the rarest of this series with an estimated survival of only 14 coins. The \$20 denomination (the first of this value in America) doesn't fare much better with approximately 25-29 survivors. Estimated remainder of the \$2 1/2, in my opinion, is 80-90 and the \$5 (two minor types), the most common, about 125+ still out there.

It should be noted that most Mormon gold pieces have uneven strikes, planchet flaws, cleaning and/or polishing, or jewelry mounted, this

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Wednesday May 16

12:00 noon Dealer Registration and Exhibitor Set-up

12:00 noon Visiting Dealer Admission

7:00pm Show Closes to Dealers

Thursday May 17

9:00am Dealer Entry

10:00am Open to Public

6:00pm Show Closes to Public

6:30pm Show Closes to Dealers

Friday May 18

9:00am Dealer Entry

10:00am Open to Public

6:00pm Show Closes to Public

6:30pm Show Closes to Dealers

Saturday May 19

8:30 am Boy Scout Stamp Merit Badge Workshop

9:00am Dealer Entry

10:00am Open to Public

10:00am Meet Cousin It from Addams Family & Buck Rogers- Felix Silla

12:00 Noon Silver Dollar Seminar

John Highfill

Mike Fararone

2:00 Mormon Gold Seminar

Robert Campbell

1:30pm ANACS Submission Center Closes

5:00pm Show Closes to Public

7:00pm Show Closes to Dealers

EXHIBITS

\$1,700,00 Mormon Gold –Complete Certified 6-Coin Set

Mormon Fort Reenactment by Nevada

Civil War History Association

Carson City Coins & Memorabilia by Las Vegas Numismatic Society

is why finding a nice strike with clean fields is worth a premium over anything that's just average or what is usually seen. When you understand these coins were minted is what is called "while you wait" coinage service, it was remarkable that any came out somewhat decent. The customer, if he so desired, could follow the metal with his eyes, from his pouch, through the crucible, press and stamp of the Mormon mint workers. No fee was charged and coinage was absolutely free.

Third party grading company (like PCGS, NGC and ANACS) population reports of Mormon gold coins are mostly misconstrued due to constant resubmissions because of the difficulties of grading these coins. I also might say that authentication is usually a good idea when purchasing these historical pieces. The 1850 Mormon \$5 gold denomination was redesigned slightly. The obverse has again the three-pointed Phrygian cap but it is more pronounced by the folds protruding upward and a banded crown with divots holes that looks like it could hold jewels in its design, is now between a more realistic Eye of Jehovah with eyelids intact, the design is then surrounded by nine five-pointed stars and again the legend Holiness to the Lord around the outside. The reverse side now has stylized cuffs on each side of the hands and a more sculpted handshake, the date again underneath and the same G.S.L.C.P.G. around the outside.

Thousands were minted, but only about 110+ survive today.

Many numismatists consider 1849/50 issues to be some of the worst artistic designs of territorial and private issues, on the other hand the 1860 design was considered by many as the most beautiful of all territorial issues. Some people thought the 1849 issue was a mountain with an eye peering from underneath it and the clasped hands were a seagull in flight, keeping with the tradition of the "miracle of the seagulls." Others thought they looked like a giant bee with small wings and a large eye. They called them whimsically "Brigham's Bees."



The 1860 design differs significantly, using an obverse centered lion facing left lying down with head up with date at six o'clock. This lion is an allegorical personification of the "Lion of Judah." Some historians think of Brigham Young as the Moses of the west, comparing the exodus of Mormon pioneers with the Israelis exodus from the land of Egypt. Around the outside is the phrase "Holiness to the Lord" written in Deseret/Mormon Alphabet, a phonically designed & written alphabet of 38 characters much like modern day shorthand and spoken in English. The reverse has an eagle with outstretched wings facing left holding in its talons arrows and olive branch with denomination 5.D. below. A large roped style traditional design beehive is on the eagle's chest. This beehive symbolizes industry and the 'busy as a bee' attitude in Mormon culture. The

outside edge reads Deseret Assay Office Pure Gold and this edge differs from early issues, from smooth or plain, by mimicking federal design with a reeded edge. Of the 789 minted only 60-70 remain.

Coins were made merely for the convenience of not weighing the gold dust. It alleviated the problem in commerce of merchants hiring the man with the biggest thumb and forefinger. An interesting note to remember is most Mormon gold coins were spent once! The West's need to purchase goods from the east when no one would accept local paper script spawned territorial, private and foreign issued gold and silver coins (including Mormon gold pieces). This private coinage worked its way through local eastern banks and back to the Philadelphia mint where they were melted, refined and made into federal coinage. The 1849/50

issues were found after they were minted to be light weight and less pure than originally thought. Anti-Mormons declared this was another fraud of this sect and made a big deal of it at the time. The truth is, many territorial and private issues were light weight either due to the inexperience of the assayers and/or primitive equipment and circumstances at the time of production. Mormon minters believed that gold out of the ground was pure and alloyed it with silver because they knew federal coinage was only 90% pure. So, the issues of 1849/50 can be anywhere from 80% - 87% pure, but the 1860 \$5 Mormon

gold piece is "right on the money" as far as purity and weight. But the best thing about this wonderful design, again is the story behind the coin. Where did the gold come from?

One of the most successful, if not the wealthiest, Mormon Argonaut in California at the time of the discovery of gold was Thomas Foster Rhoades. When he came back to Utah they measured his accumulation of gold not in ounces, but in pounds! Rhoades deposited his raw gold into the Mormon Church's gold accounts. This gold was eventually made into Mormon gold pieces dated 1849/50.

Brigham Young's policy concerning the Indian was that "it's easier to feed them than to fight them." Thomas Rhoades in the late 1850s, being a friend to the Indians and having Brigham Young's confidence was sent by him to befriend the Indians on the south slopes of the Utah mountains. Rhodes left Salt

Lake City by horseback only to return two plus weeks later, traveling in a westbound direction on South Temple street on his way to Brigham Young's residence, with horse trotting and gold nuggets falling out of his saddlebags. It was quite the sight.

Legend says these Indians thought he was a great white leader, almost godlike, and arranged to bring them food stuffs enough to get through the winter. They took Rhoades to a cave or old Spanish mine and showed him gold beyond description. The Indians gave him large quantities of gold nuggets because gold had no



value to them, but they knew the white man revered it. The gold came from their Spanish captors who enslaved them as they came northward looking for the lost mines of El Dorado. The Indians killed their enslavers and took the gold back. Gold from "The Lost Rhoades Mine" is what much of the 1860 Mormon \$5 gold pieces are made from. We know that some of the gold (4.5 troy ounces) also came from Pikes Peak from Colorado 1858 gold strikes. Modern date X-Ray Fluorescence testing confirms, through trace elements, that gold of this issue is indeed from Colorado. The mine cave was said to have a vein of gold at its



mouth the width of a man and as you continued inside to the end it stretched out to the length of a man and that there was more gold here than in all the discoveries of mankind! With everyone searching no one has found it..... yet!
 Almost two years ago, I sold the finest known 1849 Mormon \$20 for almost \$800,000.00 the finest \$10 is in the Mormon

History Museum and is choice uncirculated. It came from the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Mormon Temple that was started in 1853. Five different Mormon gold pieces were recovered in a burlap wrapped cloth. All were in mint condition except one. My complete six piece set of Mormon Gold contains the finest known 1850 and 1860 issues. The recovery of Mormon gold pieces from the Temple cornerstone are compelling and wants to be told, but that's another story. ●

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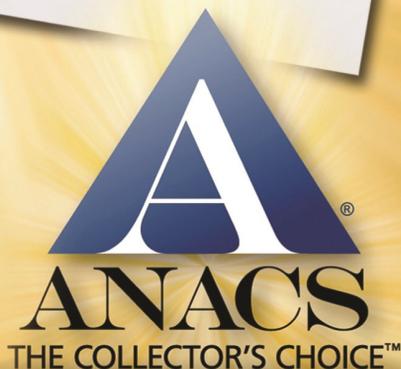
Robert Campbell served as Past President, American Numismatic Association (ANA), 1999-2001 and is considered the largest active private collector of Mormon coins, currency, medals, and tokens. He is an ANA Summer Seminar Instructor of Counterfeit and Alteration Detection on Coins, where he teaches Secret Service agents as well as seasoned numismatists and other dealers. He currently organizes five coin and/or collectible shows in Utah. Author of seven numismatic books and cited frequently in numismatic publications, Bob is a professional numismatist who owns and operates All About Coins Inc., in Salt Lake City for over 38 years. **CONTACT: Robert Campbell, Numismatist, All About Coins, 1123 East 2100 South, Salt Lake City, UT 8410, (801)-467-8636, info@allaboutcoins.com, www.AllAboutCoins.com**

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Sin City Was Settled By Saints

Las Vegas Springs

By Robert Campbell

Jefferson Hunt and Orrin Porter Rockwell, Mormon Leaders, traveled the “Southern Route” as it was called in the fall of 1847 because there was snow already in the Sierra Nevada Mountains on the “Northern Route” to California. This was the same route that the ill fated Donner Party tried to use in November of 1846. Because of its lower elevation the “Southern Mormon Road” became the preferred route for those Mormons and other Argonauts wanting to go to California in the wintertime. The first Mormons traveled along the Old Spanish Trail to Las Vegas which means in Spanish “the meadows.” This was an oasis for the Southern Paiute Indians who occupied the area. Nothing but dessert on both sides of the trail, this infant station was next visited in the fall of 1848. After learning of gold being found by his brethren near Coloma, Brigham Young started to call worthy men on “gold missions” to mine gold in California. Later because Las Vegas was in the middle of the Southern Route it



became a Mormon Fort and then a Mormon Mission. Brigham Young wanted to protect the large State of Deseret that included access to the Pacific Ocean.

In 1855 homesteading Mormons permanently settled Las Vegas Springs. There they found the Southern Paiutes who the church had ordered homesteaders to “cultivate” the land. Not being sure whether the Paiutes were friendly, the Mormons followed a creek about four miles northeast and built their fort-mission on a natural bench, now the corner of the Las Vegas Boulevard North and Washington Avenue.



[Las Vegas Springs Flowing Then](#)

The Mormon Mission found it difficult trying to convert the nomadic Indians



to Mormonism. This effort lasted only two years. Later in 1857 Brigham Young called all Mormons back to Utah



Las Vegas Fort and Mission

because of the impending “Utah War” with the United States Government. After the Mormons left Las Vegas, the old outpost and Mormon Fort served as a ranch and quasi resort in the valley. The fort, which is Nevada’s oldest building, became the home of Las Vegas pioneer Helen Stuart. She later sold the land to the railroad. That sale led to the land being sold again at auction on May 15th 1905. Its buildings were the beginnings of the town on Las Vegas. Mormons had a great impact on the development of rural Clark County.



Las Vegas Strip Flowing Today

Today Mormon followers are in abundance but in 1856 when the Republican Party was formed, its platform was “to prohibit ...those twin relics of barbarism, polygamy and slavery.” To most Americans, Mormons were outlaws, because of their belief in polygamy. It seems ironic that Las Vegas has the nickname of “Sin City” because of its interesting colloquial dichotomy. It fits right in with the history of “the strip.” ●

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1794 Enterprises	105
A Coin & Stamp	904
A Coin Shop	200
A J B Currency	1001
A N A C S	1506
Abbot, Michael	603
Alamo Antique Currency	901
ALASCOIN	202
Alex & Son	1007, 1107
Alhambra Coin Center	801, 802
All About Coins	300, 301
American Numismatic Assn	Lobby
Ancient & US Coins	208, 209
Ankerman, Walt	603
Archangel Coin	204
Argent Group, The	700
Arnold Coin Exchange	207
Arrowhead Coin & Jewelry	804
B W Coin	601
Bear Country Coins	604
Berger Coins	1105
Beymer, Jack	1100
Black Eagle	408
Bob Foster Rare Coins	1206
Bruce Braga Rare Coins	505
C H Coins	108
Cal John 66 Silver	1305
Carson City Exhibit	405
Chalfant, Jon	506
Coin Buyer	110, 111
Coin Buyer Supplies	1502
Coin Buyer Supplies	113, 114
Collectible Coin & Currency	1004
Comnick's Coins	504
Currency Treasures	904
Customized Numismatic Portfolios	503
D E I Fine Jewelry	705, 706

D E I Rare Coins	707
Dave's DCW Collection	205
Del Rosa Stamp & Coin	100 -102
DFW Coin & Jewelry	106
DJ's Coins	907
Eagle Eye Coins	808
Ed Bishop Rare Coins	806
Errors & More	1307, 1308
Excelsior Coin Gallery	805
Eye Appealing Coins	1205
Forbis Numismatics	1305
Foster, Coleman	502
Fragner & Fragner	500
Frydman, Howard	1508
Gallegus Enterprises	1108
Gamble Bay Coins	1301
Gary Greenberg Currency & Stamps	1002
Granata, Chris	307
Green, Robert	708
Greenberg, Frank	104
Gresser, Jeff	605
Hannigan's Rare Coins	1306
Harlow, Robert	906
Hart, James	609
Heritage Actions	1303
Herrman, Kurt	606
In God We Trust Coins & Currency	705
J M S Coins	907
Jankowski, John	605
Jim Coad Rare Coins	400
John Franklin Coins	404
K & K Collectibles	405
Kagin's Inc	1108
Kittle's Rare Coins	902
Las Vegas Coin Company	605
Las Vegas Numismatic Society	Lobby
Las Vegas Numismatic Society	410

DEALER DIRECTORY

Le Boeuf, Dorian	1306
Leo Frese, Numismatist	1102
LVG Collectibles	607
Marathon LTD	605
Martin Shupe Stamps	610
Maverick Designs	406
McKinn's Coins	1202
Medusa's Antiques	206
Meet Cousin Ift Saturday- Felix Silla	510
Micky's Currency	103
Mike Bianco Rare Coins	401
Mike Fararone Rare Coins	203
Mint & Print	601
Moloian Rare Coins	305
Morman Fort Exhibit	1208
Mormon Gold Coin Exhibit	300
National Silver Dollar Roundtable	910
Nevada Civil War History Assn	1008, 1108
Nevada Numismatics	502
Nevada Stamp Club	310
Northern Nevada Coin	600
Numismatic Financial Group	900
Original U. S. Rare Coins	1105
Oxbridge Coins	1006
Pahrump Coin Shop	807
Penny Lady, The	905
Pieropan Numismatics	803
Pincock, Hollis	108
Powell, Ed	704
Prospector's Gold and Gems	1402
Q A Check	907
Raines, Brian	901
RAM Rare Coins	1005
Renton Coin Shop	502
Rhodes Investments	302
Robinson, Jay	902
Royalty Coins Inc	703

Santee Coins	1200, 1201
Schinke, Glen	701
Schwartz, Mark	709
Scott Loos World Coins	606
Sergio Sanchez Coins & Currency	910
Shelby Coins	906
Shupe, Martin	710
Sierra Gold & Coin	1003, 1004
Sierra Gold & Coin	1005, 1006
Something Old Something New	407
Southwestern Gold	402
Stacks Bowers Currency	501
Stacks Bowers Galleries	501
Stagg, David III	104
Standley, Leonard	1203
Tangible Investments	800
Texas Estate Brokers	1507
The Duke of Fremont Street	1400
Trader Vic	603
Tudor Coins	507
Unique Coins & Tokens	1104
US Classics	1000
Uzelac, Bob	108
Valley Coins	303
Waddell, Justin	301
Ward, John	1305
Watch & Coin Center	306
William Langs Currency & Stamps	1002
Wright Coins	1207, 1307
XYZ Coins	1401
Yarborough, John	304



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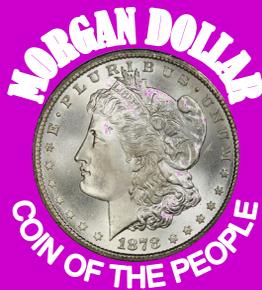
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The Flying Buzzard

In My Humble Opinion

By Joe Cavallaro

While the obverse of the mint's latest and greatest has stirred up some controversy with beautifully sculpted African American Liberty depicted for the first time, it's overshadowed in my humble opinion by the terrible reverse. Look up in the sky, is it a bird, a plane or Superman? None of the above. The US Mint has done it again. They have insulted the magnificent American Bald Eagle and the new Lady Liberty with this flying buzzard rendition on the new 2017 American Liberty 225th Anniversary Gold Coin. I mean, I am no artist, but it seems to me this cartoon edition of a flying eagle is so out of proportion and so overweight I can't believe it can fly. This new offering is designed by Chris T. Costello, whose other numismatic credits include America the Beautiful quarters and some recent commemorative coins. Maybe I am a little too old fashioned in my taste, but I would have preferred an Eagle like the reverse of the Walking Liberty half dollar designed by Adolph A. Weinman, or even some of the older



eagle reverses that have appeared on US coins. If I ever saw this monster flying overhead I would probably run and get my shotgun. Oh, how I long for the days gone by when BOTH sides of the coin were real works of art. And another thing, when are we going to get all these dead Presidents off our coins?

What will happen in about 25 or 30 years from now, will there be a new Trump coin? The Ancient Greeks and Romans designed and struck beautiful masterpieces that have survived the centuries. What do you think collectors will say a couple of hundred of years from now when they see an IKE dollar? Well to each his or her own, this is just one collector's opinion. Till the next time, keep on collecting! ●

Joe Cavallaro is president of the Las Vegas Numismatic Society Coin club. He has been a collector and dealer for over 30 years. His additional interests in daguerreotypes and exonomia, Victorian and Civil War era, led him to stock and run an antique shop for several years. **CONTACT: (702) 860-6032, archangel3@cox.net**



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