

The Henry F. Muller trade token hoard.

Back in the day, you could look up buyer and seller email addresses directly on eBay, and I was often contacted regarding tokens from persons unknown. One of these times, maybe 20 years ago, a man asked me if I would be interested in tokens from his great uncle's San Francisco business. I certainly was! We met in downtown San Francisco, and I purchased his small group of tokens. I recently found them again in a bag in the back of my desk and realized that I had meant to tell this story when my memory was a bit clearer. Well, better late than never.

The man's uncle was Henry F. Muller and there were about fifteen 21mm tokens in the group with eight different ones from San Francisco. There was only one token with Henry Muller's name on it, but his grand-nephew understandably wanted to keep that one as a family keepsake.

Numismatists and historians who study ancient coins greatly value hoards uncovered by metal detectorists, as they reveal much about ancient commerce patterns and other historical details. When hoards of trade tokens are found, they tend to all be from the same merchant. The Muller hoard is distinctly different in that it was more of a contemporary collection. So why did Mr. Muller put these assorted tokens aside and what does that tell us?

I believe I may know that answer based on a prior experience. I first started collecting tokens from video game arcades. Hey, it was the 1980s and I played a lot of video games so it seemed only natural... Anyway at this time, I was just starting my professional career and had the opportunity to travel. Whenever I went somewhere new, I would check the yellow pages (remember them?) for the locations of video arcades and go there to find what tokens they had. At one arcade in suburban Campbell, California, I was disappointed to learn that they only used quarters. But I asked anyway if they ever used tokens in the past. It turned out that the owner, also in his twenties, had just purchased the business and was frustrated that so many of the tokens used in his games were not sold by him at his arcade. I asked if he still had them and he showed me buckets of them in the back. He was more than happy to sell me some, and I spent hours going through them, finding video game tokens from all over the country. I bought lots and that kept me in traders for a long time.

What does this have to do with the Muller hoard? Slot machines of the era could accept both Liberty nickels and the similarly-sized 21mm tokens. Of course, in San Francisco after laws were passed in 1898, the machines could only pay out in tokens to avoid anti-gambling laws. These trade checks were not officially redeemable in cash, but they oftentimes were illicitly bought back by the bartender or cigar vendor at a discount. And just like the players of arcade video games in the 1980s, slot machine gamblers of the early 20th century could easily insert tokens from one establishment into the machines of another. Whether Mr. Muller was annoyed by

this practice or was amused enough to start his collection, we cannot know. But the variety in his hoard, all but two attributable to San Francisco, suggests that these tokens circulated fairly widely between the saloons and cigar stands of the City.

I now turn our attention to the tokens of the hoard themselves. Most of them can be dated to after the Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906. Tokens with only initials and no other identifying legends are generally very difficult to attribute and require some sort of first hand evidence. Such is the case for this token showing just the initials "H.F.M". According to his grand-nephew, this was Henry Muller's token, thus providing a definitive attribution.



Obverse: H.F.M
Reverse: GOOD FOR / -A- / 5 CENT / DRINK
Brass 21mm

Seven tokens are either self identified as San Francisco and/or have been cataloged by Charlie Kappen or Duane Feisel.



Obverse: CAILLE-SCHEIMER / CSC S.F. (in cross) / 42 / SECOND ST. Reverse: 5 (¢ within curl) / GOOD FOR / IN / TRADE (within outline of 5) / IRVINE
White metal, 21mm. Kappen 395, TC-456299

The 1903 San Francisco business directory lists George E. Letcher as the manager of Caille Bros Co. (Detroit), coin operating devices at 42 Second Street in San Francisco. Today this area is referred to as South of Market Street or SOMA for short. This

token is somewhat more worn than other tokens in the hoard, suggesting that it had circulated more.



Obverse: FRED W. CHAMBERS / 702 / KEARNY / ST. / COR CLAY / PATRICK & CO. S.F.

Reverse: GOOD FOR / 1 / CIGAR

Brass, 21mm. Kappen 471, TC-215461

Mr. Chambers is listed at this downtown address under “Cigars” in only the 1909 San Francisco business directory.



Obverse: HERBERT'S / 1718 / FILLMORE ST.

Reverse: 10

Brass, 21mm. Kappen 1101, TC-285970

The July 7, 1906 edition of the *San Francisco Call*, with the headline “Police Commissioners Make the Hearts of 200 Liquor Men Glad,” informs us that Albert H. Herbert was granted a liquor license for his saloon at 1718 Fillmore Street, along with over 200 others. Recall that the Great Earthquake was April 18th of that year and Mayor Schmitz had closed all of the saloons. It was about time that they opened the saloons - folks needed a drink!



Obverse: SEAL / ROCK / HOUSE / J.C. IRVINE S.F.
Reverse: GOOD FOR / 5¢ / IN TRADE
Brass, 21mm. Kappen Supplement 2383, TC-450939

The Seal Rock House was at Ocean Beach, just down the hill from the Cliff House. Opened in 1858, it was the earliest beach resort destination for San Franciscans and was very popular throughout the 19th century. At the time this token was used, the gymnasium at Seal Rock House served as a training facility for amateur and professional boxers. The most important of these was Jack Johnson, the first African American heavyweight champion. Seal Rock House closed in 1914.



Obverse: CARROLL / 3200 / MISSION ST. / MOISE, K. CO.
Reverse: MOISE, K. CO.
Brass, 21mm. Kappen Supplement 3064, TC-620659

According the San Francisco business directories, Jeremiah P. Carroll sold cigars at this address on the corner of Valencia and Mission Streets from 1907-1913.



Obverse: THE PIONEER SALOON / 2029 / FILLMORE ST. / S.F.
 Reverse: GOOD FOR / 5¢ IN TRADE
 White metal, 21mm, diamond cutout. Feisel 123, TC-92191

There were Pioneer Saloons all over the western US, but this one was robbed on August 5, 1902. In a series of robberies, the thieves broke open the “nickel-in-the-slot” machine and also made off with a half dozen bottles of champagne. Police suspected a pair of recently escaped convicts. The *San Francisco Call* did not report if they took the tokens... This saloon was in the Western Addition neighborhood and was well outside the area burned during after 1906 earthquake. The residential neighbors complained that there were 5 saloons on this block of Fillmore Street, which really wasn't that many compared to other parts of town. But it was burgled again in 1907.



Obverse & Reverse: CHAS. H. J. TRUMAN & CO. / UNDERTAKERS / 1909 / MISSION ST. / PHONE / MISSION 109
 Brass, 21mm. Kappen unlisted, TC-620620

This token was previously unknown prior to the Muller hoard. In February 1902, Truman & Company announced in the *San Francisco Call* that they were moving to their own building at 1909 Mission Street, between 15th and 16th Streets. Funeral announcements from this company continued in the *Call* until 1910. But it seems odd that a funeral parlor would issue slot machine tokens. While there are 101 funeral and undertaker pieces listed at the online token catalog, most are

advertising pieces and this is the only 21mm slot machine token. As there is no indication of a value on this token, perhaps it was also intended for advertising. Or perhaps the City's gambling addiction was so powerful that there was a slot near the chapel. You can't take it with you, in any event...

Two tokens in the hoard are mavericks and definitive attribution is elusive.



Obverse: LYNCH BROS.

Reverse: GOOD FOR / 1 / DRINK OR CIGAR

Brass, 21mm

Although the entry "LYNCH JEREMIAH, liquors and cigars, 2699 Howard" in the 1907 San Francisco business directory is tantalizing (see Kappen 1501, TC-232063), there is no indication that he or the others saloon keepers named Lynch had a brother in the business. A more plausible attribution is the brothers Peter and Edward Lynch, who ran a saloon at 34 South El Dorado Street in Stockton, California in 1902. There is also a self-identified 21mm brass token issued by Lynch Bros. from Milner, Idaho (TC-126524), but that seems like a long way away from Henry F. Muller.



Obverse: THE / NEW / IDEA

Reverse: GOOD FOR / 5 / ¢ (in curl) / IN / TRADE

Brass, 21mm

"New Idea" men was a term often used to describe supporters of the Anti-Saloon League, a well-organized temperance group prior to Prohibition. While not without

political influence in San Francisco, they were particularly unsuccessful in reducing liquor consumption in the City. This was the case in the wild and woolly Barbary Coast part of town even after Prohibition. But they were more influential in other California towns and, with varying degrees of success, attempted to supplant saloons with coffee houses. It may be that The New Idea token was used at one of these. But on the other hand, it is hard to imagine a temperance group supporting gambling or cigars, given their conservative religious overtones. So this token remains a mystery.

So who was Henry F. Muller? To slightly confuse matters, there were four different Henry Mullers in the liquor business in San Francisco at the same time. Henry P. Muller sold groceries, liquor and cigars from 1894 to 1921 at 1701 Devisadero Street (now Divisadero Street) with the bar probably at that back of the store, as was a common practice. He issued three tokens (TC-29005, TC-588321, TC-562628) but he is not our man. Neither is the Henry Muller who partnered with August Meyenburg from 1900 to 1908 and issued an aluminum token (TC-221843) with a bottle of Fredericksburg lager on it. And the Henry Muller who ran a saloon at 399 Eddy Street did not issue any tokens. Rather, Henry F. Muller operated his saloon at 300 Howard Street at the southwest corner of Beale Street from 1907 until Prohibition and then sold soft drinks until 1922. It appears that he moved down the block to this location from the corner of Fremont and Howard Streets after the 1906 Earthquake when most of this SOMA neighborhood was destroyed. He issued this self-described token in addition to the one with just his initials. The example shown here is not from the Muller hoard but is out of the late Ron Lerch's vast collection.



Obverse: H. MULLER / N.W. COR. / BEALE & / HOWARD STS. / S.F. CAL.
Reverse: GOOD FOR / 5¢ / IN TRADE
Brass, 21mm. Kappen 1787, TC-425553

It is unusual for a contemporary collection of trade tokens to be found, even a small one such as the Muller hoard. At the very least, this collection definitely attributes Henry F. Muller as the issuer of the HFM initials token. The tokens in this hoard span a range of San Francisco neighborhoods from downtown to Muller's SOMA to the deep Mission to the Western Addition to the ocean shore itself and even possibly far out of town, suggesting that this type of slot machine token circulated fairly widely between different saloons and cigar stands.

Sources:

Tokens listed in the online token catalog (tokencatalog.com) are denoted by "TC-" followed by their assigned number.

From the California Digital Newspaper Collection, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu>

San Francisco Call, Volume 87, Number 67, 6 August 1902

San Francisco Call, Volume 87, Number 78, 16 February 1902

San Francisco Call, Volume 100, Number 37, 7 July 1906

San Francisco Call, Volume 100, Number 67, 6 August 1906

San Francisco Call, Volume 102, Number 97, 5 September 1907

National Park Service "Vestiges of Land's End"

https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/historyculture/upload/Seal_Rock_House_sr_2014.pdf

1902 Stockton city directory

https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~nmpelton/genealogy/sk02_127.pdf

Various San Francisco city directories from the San Francisco Public Library

<https://sfpl.org/>

This article is dedicated to Jerry F. Schimmel.