

## An 1876 San Francisco Centennial Pictorial Double Eagle Shell



Brass shell, 45.2mm

America celebrated the 1876 centennial of nationhood with a grand exposition in Philadelphia. Nearly twenty percent of the American population visited the exposition over the seven months it was open. Across the country, smaller towns and cities celebrated the birth of the nation in their own fashion. San Francisco celebrated the Fourth of July with a four-mile-long, ten-thousand-man procession through the city. Two hundred thousand people lined the streets and rooftops along the route to watch the passing mounted police followed by the Grand Marshal and his aides. Among those in the procession were veterans of America's wars, the National Guard, distinguished citizens, and a host of government employees, social societies, and economic guilds. A variety of formal balls, picnics, musical performances, souvenir tchotchkies, and undoubtedly a lot of unruly drinking at the city's bars afforded everyone the celebration opportunity of their choice.



C.F. Mohrig's 1876 Centennial Medal. Musante GW-879  
(Image courtesy Stack's Bowers.)

Two rare California centennial medals are known that were produced by San Francisco jewelry manufactures. The first, a product of Christopher F. Mohrig, celebrates California's earlier days with images of an overland stagecoach, a pony express rider, and the first ship entering the Golden Gate with the bust of George Washington above on the obverse. The reverse illustrates the first overland train and a steamship arriving at port with the coat of arms of California above. Struck in silver, brass, and white metal, the 40.2mm piece celebrates the father of our country and the progress of the past one hundred years in California. The medals could be purchased at jewelry stores in San Francisco. Although the dies were reportedly destroyed, uniface copies of the Washington obverse also exist in brass.



Brand's 1876 San Francisco Centennial Medal. 30.95mm

Herman J. Brand copied a French or Belgian, depending on the source, medal designed by French/Belgian medallist Adrien Veyrat struck to celebrate the American centennial. The obverse features a bust of goddess Athena Pallas. Her feather-crowned helmet is decorated with a lion destroying a chain representing America's freedom. Brand's engraving is not an exact copy. For example, the relief of the crest of the helmet is copied as a raised relief element resembling a pipe. The inscription declares Centennial and San Francisco. The reverse image of two crossed flags representing 1776 and 1876 declares United States of America Independence. I suspect these silver medals were produced to appeal to the large French population in San Francisco. I suspect they were not popular as they are rare today.



Veyrat's 1876 bronze medal struck to celebrate the American centennial. 50.77m

I recently acquired a heretofore unrecorded brass shell “twenty-dollar” gold piece with an accordion-fold paper insert. The old 2x2 envelope is stamped H. A. BRAND / 1008 INGALLS BLDG / CINCINNATI. An ad in *Hobbies Magazine* in 1944 places Brand at that location. A few years before and after, his advertisements had different addresses. A date on the inside flap is 4-14-45 with a pencil notation below states 1876 Centennial. With no other indication besides the 1876 date on the gold piece, how can it be attributed to the national independence celebration?

The ceremonial driving of the “golden spike” at Promontory Summit on May 10, 1869, linked the east and west coast for the first time in American history. San Franciscans exhibited pride in their great state by promoting the natural wonders of the environment, along with the developing built environment. The twenty-dollar shell is one example of a souvenir produced to extoll the virtues of the city and state in the centennial year. The choice of the twenty-dollar double eagle for the container recognizes the importance of the San Francisco mint in producing the gold coins in the 1870s. An analysis of the engravings demonstrates my logic.



Eighteen engraved vignettes appear as the accordion fold is expanded to approximately 36 inches. The first image is a view of the Golden Gate from within San Francisco Bay looking towards the rays of the sun setting in the clouds. Clipper ships, sailing ships, a steam ship, and Fort Point are illustrated. A view of San Francisco from a hill overlooking the young city, with Alcatraz Island in the distance, follows. Two horse drawn carriages pass as farmers tend to their livestock. The third view, Mission San Juan Capistrano, founded in 1776, ties the images to the centennial year. Mission Delores (Mission San Francisco de Asís) was also founded in 1776. I suspect San Juan Capistrano was selected, as it was better known throughout the nation for its famed swallows, and it expanded coverage into southern California. The opening images tie the souvenir to San Francisco while acknowledging its roots in the Spanish Mission Period.



Continuing through the images, the fourth shows the famed San Francisco Cliff House. The next three vignettes relate to the discovery of gold and gold mining. The first illustration shows Sutter's Mill, the site of the discovery of gold in California. The next portrays a quartz mill and mining operation where gold was extracted from the pulverized quartz rocks. The seventh shows the operation of hydraulic mining using water to dislodge ore rocks from the sides of streams in the Sierras. Vignette eight is a view of Fort Point at the mouth of the Golden Gate. The University of California at Berkeley founded in 1868 across the bay from San Francisco with Alcatraz and Golden Gate in the distance is seen in the ninth scene.



The next six images take the viewer around the natural wonders in the northern part of the state and the Sierra Nevada Range. Scene ten is the famous Yosemite Falls followed by the sequoia Big Trees. Two sequoia groves became the Calaveras Big Trees State Park in 1931. Another image of Yosemite's famous falls, in the case Vernal Falls comes next. Geyser Cañon in Sonoma County north of San Francisco was a spiritual site for Native Americans and later a

popular spa in 1876. President Grant was one of the more famous visitors. Donner Lake, as viewed from the summit of the Sierras, is the fourteenth vignette. The fifteenth vignette presents a view of Uncle Sam Mountain in Napa County as seen from Lakeport in Lake County. In time, the Pomo name, Konocti, endured as the official name for the mountain as the Uncle Sam designation vanished in California history when the Uncle Sam community became Kelseyville.



Two additional famous mountains follow. First is Mount Diablo as seen from Benicia. Why Benicia? In 1851, Benicia became the third incorporated city in California. It became the state's third state capitol in 1853. The establishment of a military arsenal in 1849 secured its strategic location on the major water route into the state's interior and gold fields. Mount Diablo was established as the initial point for the Mount Diablo Base Line and Meridian for land surveys spanning two-thirds of California and all of Nevada. Mount Shasta, the second highest peak of the Cascade volcanos, and the fifth highest peak in California, can be seen well into California's

Central Valley and has long attracted attention from tourists and artists. The final vignette is that of the California State Capitol, modeled after the U.S. Capitol was completed in 1874 just in time for the U.S. Centennial.

I believe the choice of the twenty-dollar double eagle, a denomination closely tied to the discovery of gold in California and the development of a U.S. mint in San Francisco, the inclusion of a California mission founded in 1776, and the newly completed State Capitol argue for its identification with the 1876 centennial.

#### References:

Bowers, Q. David, 2014, *U.S. Liberty Head \$20 Double Eagles: The Gilded Age of Coinage*. Stack's Bowers Galleries, Irvine, California.

Short vignette descriptions summarized from Wikipedia entries.

Stack's Bowers auction archives. <https://archive.stacksbowers.com>.