

Great Salt Lake City, Utah Territory

Mormon Gold Coins (1849 and 1850 Issues)

At Mount Pisgah, Iowa Territory, during the summer of 1846 many Mormon men joined the United States Army to fight in the Mexican War. Known as the Mormon Battalion, this group of approximately five hundred men marched to the Mexican province of Alta, California, during the winter of 1846–47 under the command of Colonel Stephen W. Kearny. After their discharge, the battalion members began arriving in the Great Salt Lake Valley on 29 July 1847.

Some stopped at Sutter's Mill on the American River in California Territory. James W. Marshall, Mormon Battalion veteran, was first to discover gold. His discovery on 24 January 1848 (Arthur B. Tregagle and Louetta B. Tanner, comp., *California Gold* [Salt Lake City: Pyramid Press, 1953] [pamphlet]) led to the California gold rush of 1849 and 1850. However, Marshall and other battalion veterans only stayed at Sutter's Mill long enough to dig sufficient gold to equip themselves for the trip to the Great Salt Lake Valley. When the miners and others of the battalion brought their wages and gold into the valley, this alleviated the lack of a medium of exchange.

Because the gold dust was difficult to weigh and exchange, causing waste and inconvenience, Church leaders decided to convert the dust into coin. While waiting for the necessary dies and crucibles to be made, Dr. Willard Richards, Second Counselor in the Mormon Church's First Presidency, weighed the gold dust into paper packages (from \$1 to \$20). This made it much easier to use (Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958], p. 55; hereafter *Great Basin*).

This was the first money issued in the Great Salt Lake Valley. The gold dust was weighed into brown envelopes marked with the date and value (fig. 44). The dust and granules were wrapped in tissue paper, placed in a brown envelope, and the envelope was sealed with wax. Each envelope was certified by the personal signatures of Brigham Young and Willard Richards, and the private seal of the Twelve Apostles. (The embossed seal can be seen on the note in figure 73.) The packages could be redeemed at full value as soon as gold coin became available.

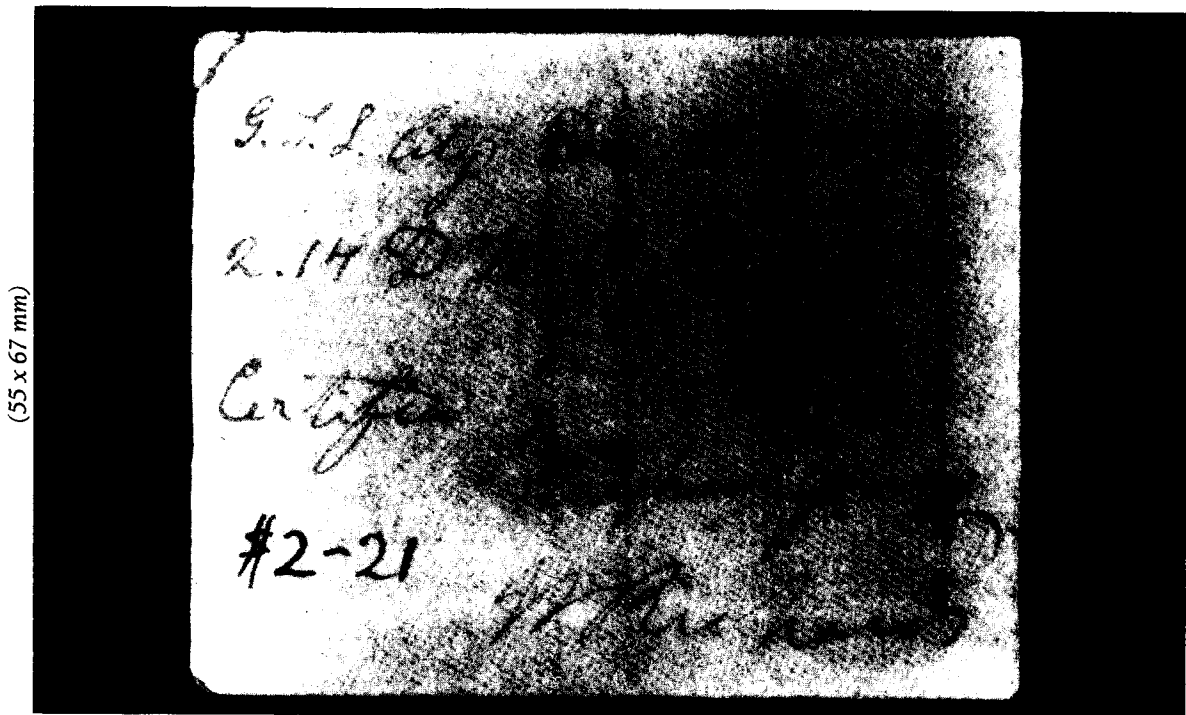


Figure 44. Gold dust package (This package contained 2.14 pennyweight* valued at \$2.21, and was dated 15 December 1848.)

On 25 November 1848 Brigham Young, John Taylor, and John Kay drew designs and inscriptions (*Journal History of The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 25 Nov. 1848; hereafter *JH*) for the \$2½, \$5, \$10, and \$20 gold coins. On the obverse was the motto Holiness to the Lord with the emblem of the priesthood—a three-pointed Phrygian crown over an All-Seeing Eye of Jehovah. On the reverse of the \$10 coin were the words *Pure Gold*, the value, two clasped hands representing friendship, and the date 1849. On the reverse of the other three denomina-

*Twenty pennyweight equals one troy ounce.

denominations were the initials *GSLCPG* (Great Salt Lake City, Pure Gold), the value, the two clasped hands, and the date 1849. These gold coins were struck with uniform weight, fineness, and value.

The Deseret Mint was established on South Temple Avenue just west of the old Church administration building, near where the Hotel Utah garage is now located. The first gold dust was deposited at the mint on 10 December 1848 by William T. Follett, a battalion veteran whose 14½ ounces were credited for \$232 at \$16 per ounce (*Brigham Young's Daily Transactions in Gold Dust*, 10 Dec. 1848; hereafter *Transactions*).

A number of people were involved in the coinage. Robert Campbell engraved the first stamps for the coins. Alfred B. Lambson forged the dies (figs. 45 through 49), punches (fig. 50), and tools and collars (fig. 51). A drop hammer was forged by Martin H. Peck. John Kay engraved the dies and minted the coins. William Clayton and Thomas Bullock served together as accountant and weigher. Brigham Young, assisted by Dr. Willard Richards, oversaw the entire mint operation.



Figure 45. Dies used in minting the Mormon \$2½ gold coins of 1849 (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

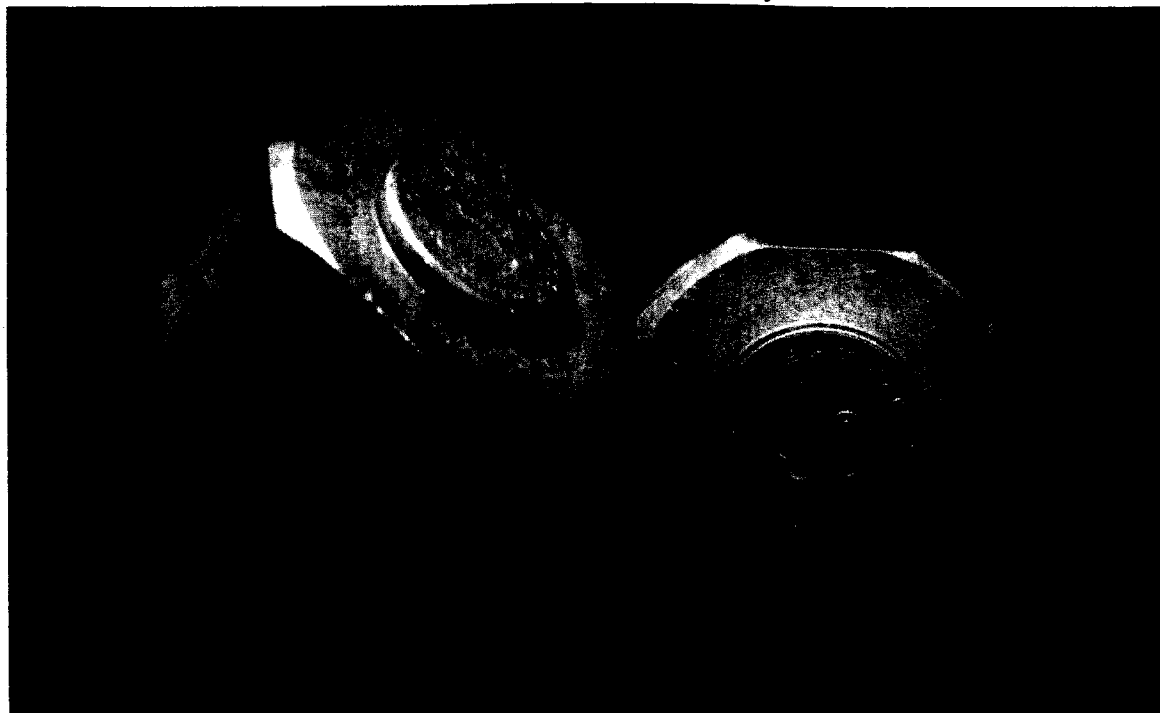


Figure 46. Dies used in minting the Mormon \$5 gold coins of 1849 (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

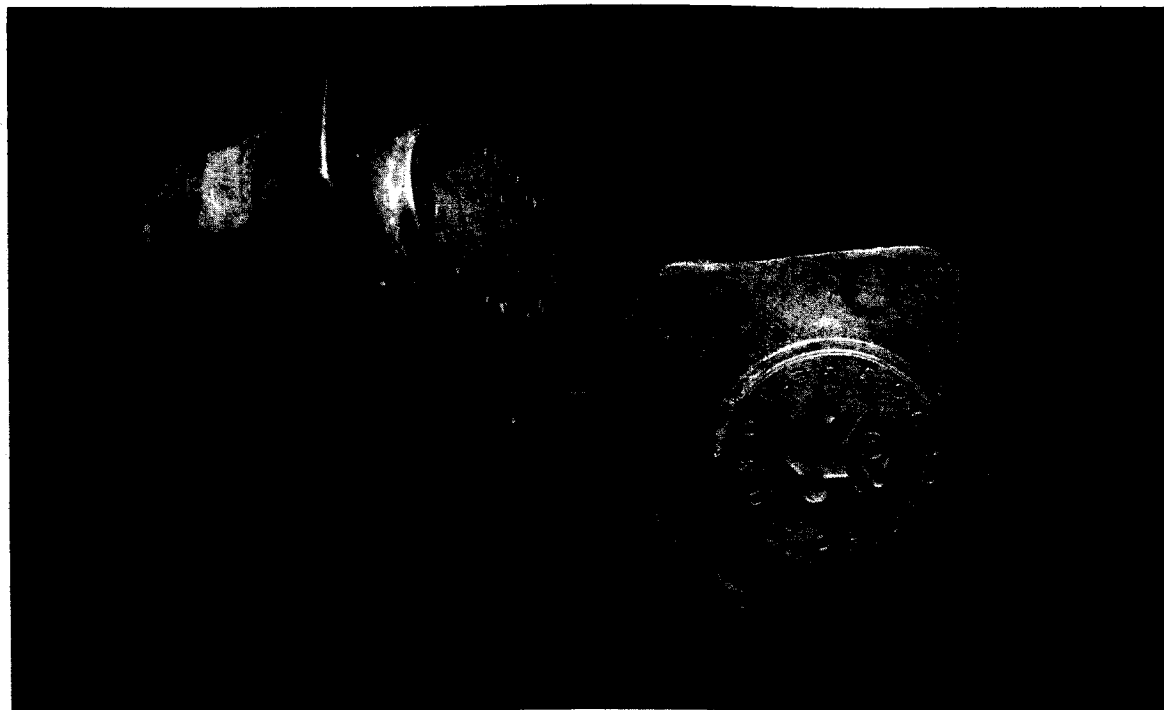


Figure 47. Dies used in minting the Mormon \$10 gold coins of 1849 (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)



Figure 48. Dies used in minting the Mormon \$20 gold coins of 1849 (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

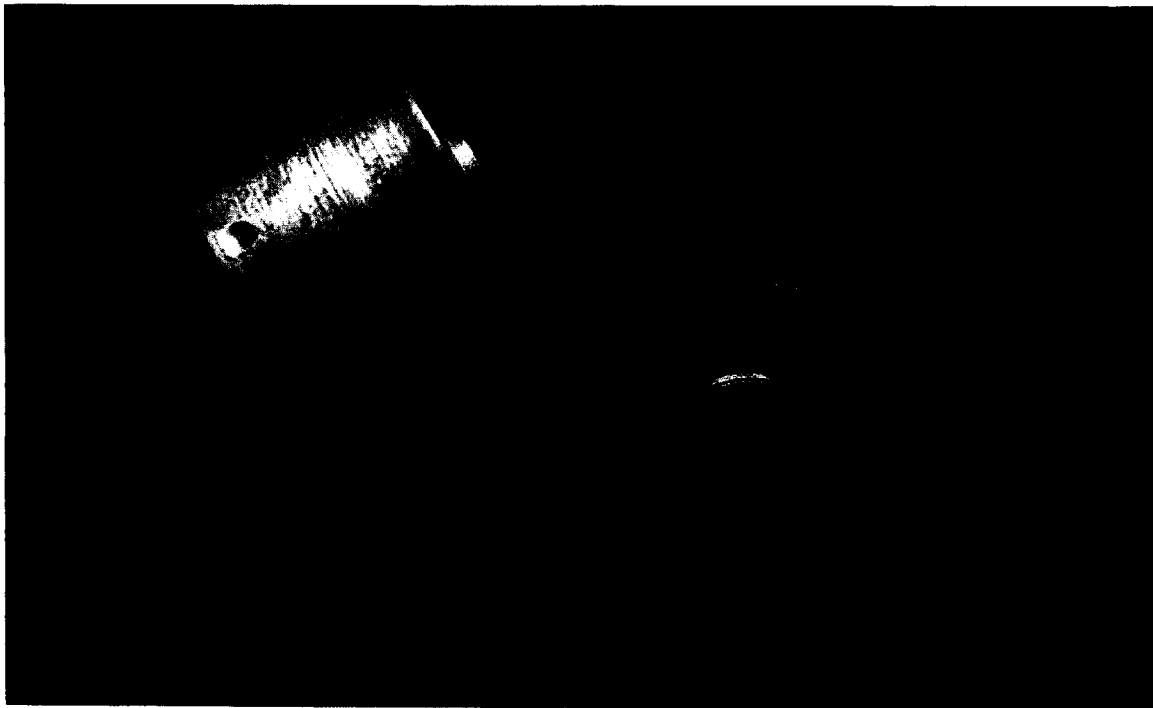


Figure 49. Dies used in minting the Mormon \$5 gold coins of 1850 (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)



Figure 50. Punches used in minting the Mormon gold coins (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

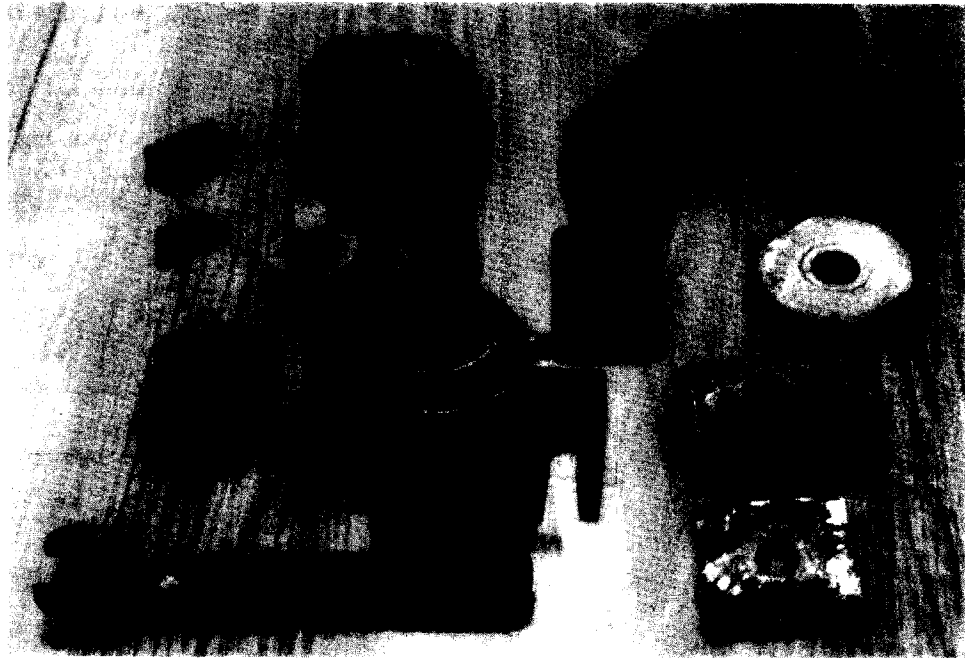


Figure 51. Tools and collars used in minting the Mormon gold coins (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

The \$10 denomination was the first coin struck, and only twenty-five were minted on the first day. They sold at a premium of 50 cents each; no reason was given for the premium. The author can only guess that the extra charge could have been because the coin was a novelty or to offset the cost of minting. The first \$10 coin was paid to William T. Follett on 12 December 1848. He received five \$10 gold pieces (*Transactions*, 12 Dec. 1848).

The second minting took place just one week after the first issue, with only twenty-one pieces of the \$10 denomination coined and charged out at par. At this time the crucibles cracked and operations ceased until September 1849 when new crucibles were obtained. The new minting began with the striking of all four proposed denominations dated 1849 (figs. 52 through 55). The following year a new type of \$5 denomination was coined, dated 1850 (fig. 56). The slight variation between the \$5 denominations of 1849 and 1850 can be seen in figures 53 and 56. The 1850 coin has nine stars added around the priesthood emblem. There is also a slight change in the design of the emblem. None of the Mormon gold coins have reeded edges. (It is noted that the Mormon \$20 gold coin was minted prior to the first of that denomination struck in the United States. The first U.S. double eagle was minted in 1850.)



Figure 52. Mormon \$2½ gold coin (1849 issue)

Mormon and Utah Coin and Currency

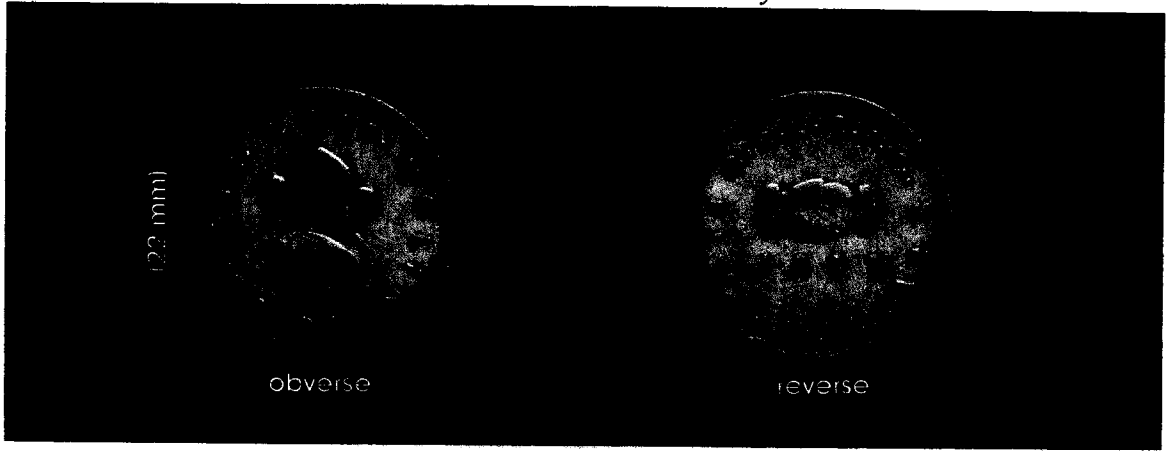


Figure 53. Mormon \$5 gold coin (1849 issue)



Figure 54. Mormon \$10 gold coin (1849 issue) (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)



Figure 55. Mormon \$20 gold coin (1849 issue) (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)



Figure 56. Mormon \$5 gold coin (1850 issue)

The first coins were minted without alloy. Because gold is a soft metal, these coins wore rapidly. In the next coins, a small percentage of silver was added to increase the hardness (JH, 17 Nov. 1849). The actual gold weight of these coins varied as shown by a United States Mint report (Reva H. Stanley, "The First Utah Coins Minted from California Gold," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Sept. 1936, 15:246). The report states that Mormon \$20 gold coins varied in intrinsic value from \$16.90 to \$17.53. It was not unusual for private mints to coin gold with less intrinsic value than indicated. Edgar H. Adams states that nearly all territorial gold coins lacked full weight and fineness. In fact, the Pacific Company's \$10 gold coin when assayed by the United States Mint showed an intrinsic value of only \$7.86 (*Various Californian Private Mints, 1849–55* [New York: American Journal of Numismatics, 1912], pp. 58–61). The Mormon gold coins were of excellent quality, taking into account the poor equipment the Church had available for minting. Every effort was made to give full assay and fineness, with no intention of fraud. "Coin and Currency in Early Utah" by Leonard J. Arrington indicates a possible \$70,000 in gold was coined from 1849 to 1851 (*Utah Historical Quarterly*, 19 June 1952, 20:72).

Journal History of the Church does not record any Mormon gold coins being minted after 19 June 1851 when the last entry is recorded for gold dust being melted and rolled into bars (JH, 19 June 1851). This indicates that nearly all of the coins were struck in 1849 and 1850.

The most significant purpose for minting gold coins was to buy goods from large cities in the eastern United States. The Mormon leaders wanted to coin gold of recognized fineness and weight to be used as a medium of exchange. The non-Mormon traders in the Great Salt Lake Valley, such as Thomas L. "Pegleg" Smith, also accepted the coins as payment for their goods. It should be noted that a non-Mormon firm, Livingston and Kinkead, bought a great deal of gold that came into the valley. They did not coin it, but shipped gold and silver East by wagon train.

In turn, Livingston and Kinkead brought in great quantities of goods to their store in the Salt Lake Valley.

Brigham Young stated that by the summer of 1851 the Mormon gold coins had practically disappeared from the local market. Most of them had been sent to businesses in the East for goods that could not be manufactured in the valley (JH, 31 Aug. 1851). Certainly the gold coins brought about brisk trading and served a worthwhile purpose in Mormon settlements. As soon as U.S. gold coins became available, the majority of the Mormon gold coins were sent as bullion deposits to the United States Mint. The coins were melted down and the gold minted into U.S. gold coins. These were paid to the owners at par.

In 1852 and 1853 Enoch and John Reese brought in gold from Carson Valley, Nevada, and had John Kay at the Deseret Mint manufacture their gold coins. Because of the impurities in their Nevada gold, the new coins contained only \$11.50 instead of the \$18.50 an ounce found in the California gold. Reese had the coins called in because they were not of full value, and they were redeemed by the Mormon Church. The Reese coins were probably struck with Church dies. Afterward, the Deseret Mint building became the Bikuben Printing Company offices until it was torn down in early 1900 (*Deseret News*, 3 Feb. 1900, p 8; hereafter DN).

A list of Mormon gold coins that have appeared in auction sales and established collections can be found in Kimmell's *Analysis of Pioneer Gold*. On pages 33 to 38 a detailed list gives the coins' availability and relative rarity, and indicates where each was auctioned or who had ownership. On pages 42 to 44 the following Mormon gold coins are tabulated (*Kimmel's Analysis of Pioneer Gold* [from Alvin Rust's private library]).

Table 1. Mormon Gold Pieces Known

Coin Date	Coin Denomination	Number of Coins
1849	\$2½	43
1849	5	71
1849	10	10
1849	20	21
1850	5	54
1860*	5	55

*The \$5 denomination of 1860 will be discussed later.

The above tabulation is not an inventory of outstanding Mormon gold coins, but does indicate their rarity.

Handwritten Valley Notes

As mentioned earlier, in December of 1848 the crucibles cracked and minting of Mormon gold coins was stopped for several months. In place of the coins, paper notes were issued, backed 80 percent by the gold dust in the local treasury.

These gold-backed notes were called "Valley Notes." On 28 December 1848 Brigham Young assigned Thomas Bullock and Robert L. Campbell to write out the notes (*JH*, 28–31 Dec. 1848). All handwritten valley notes were approximately 50 by 98 mm. However, since they were cut by hand, they vary by about 2 to 3 mm.

The handwritten valley notes were stamped with the official seal of the Twelve Apostles, which consisted of the emblem of the priesthood—a three-pointed Phrygian crown over an all-seeing eye. Encircling the emblem were the sixteen initials: *PSTAPCJCLDSL DATW* (Private Seal of the Twelve Apostles, Priests of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the Last Dispensation All Over the World). The seal was designed by Brigham Young and John Taylor on 23 January 1845 in Nauvoo, Illinois (*John Taylor's Nauvoo Journal*, p. 39 [personal possession of Brent Ashworth, Provo, Utah]).

what McKenzie burned (because we do not know if he was speaking only of his own currency or of a store of it) and accepting the burning on 1 December 1867 of \$93,544, the most Deseret Currency that still could be outstanding is \$1,626.

In 1984 just at publication time a large number of engraved Deseret Currency scrip notes in \$1, \$2, and \$3 denominations surfaced. This find proved that the \$1,626 in outstanding notes is most probably not an accurate figure. Since the scribes for Deseret Currency Association were meticulous in preparing their ledger sheets of currency issued, the author stands behind table 10 and believes the figures to be accurate. The only explanation seems to be that a bundle of each of the three denominations was held back at the burning on 1 December 1867. Studies will be made and any additional information will be included in a future publication.

The typeset notes in all denominations are scarce and are difficult for the collector and hobbyist to obtain.

Mormon \$5 Gold Coin (1860 Issue)

After gold was discovered in 1858 in Colorado Territory, a better quality gold dust than the California dust found its way into the Salt Lake Valley. So in 1859, Brigham Young asked J. M. Barlow, a local jeweler, to mint another Mormon gold coin. Assisted by Dougal Brown, Barlow set up a mint in the rear of his jewelry store and began to design and make the dies. David McKenzie, who engraved the plates for the Deseret Currency, was employed by Barlow and probably engraved the dies for the new coin (Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Geo. Q. Cannon and Sons Co., 1892], 1:387).

The obverse of the coin was designed with a crouching lion in the center and a small stretch of water in the foreground. Around the edge written in Deseret Alphabet* were the words *Holiness to the Lord* and the date 1860. The reverse had an eagle with outstretched wings, a beehive on its breast, and an olive branch and arrows in its talons. Around the edge were the words *Deseret Assay Office Pure Gold and 5 D*.

*The Deseret Alphabet was a form of phonetic writing compiled to assist the pioneers from various nations to communicate more effectively. However, the experiment failed to interest the people. It was used sparingly between 1852 and 1869.



Fig. 99. Mormon \$5 gold coin (1860 issue)

Mintage began 27 May 1859. John Kay, who coined the Mormon gold coins of 1849 and assisted Barlow in minting the 1860 \$5 gold coins (fig. 99). There were 202 pieces minted on 27 July and 12 December 1859 (*New Gold Valley Coin Account*, Brigham Young papers, Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter *New Gold*). Even though these coins were minted in 1859, they bear the date 1860.

From 14 January 1860 through 8 March 1861, 587 pieces were coined, making the total mintage 789 coins (*New Gold*). The coins struck in 1861 bear the date 1860.

Raw gold purchased for coining the 1860 \$5 gold coin consisted of 206 troy ounces, 1 pennyweight, 10 grains. This included 4.5 troy ounces of Pikes Peak gold, which was melted on 12 May 1859 and used for bullion (*New Gold*).

On 21 September 1859 Barlow received the old dies used in 1849 and 1850 for possible re-minting new coins after changing the dates. However, the dies were not changed nor used. Workmanship on the 1860 coin was excellent. No other gold coins of this era are more massive, including those made at the United States Mint. The coin was alloyed with silver but maintained full weight in gold. It measures 18 mm in diameter and weighs 7.9 grams.

Two sets of dies exist for this series, but both sets are similar. One set has a mountain range behind the crouched lion (fig. 100), and the other set omits the mountains (fig. 101).

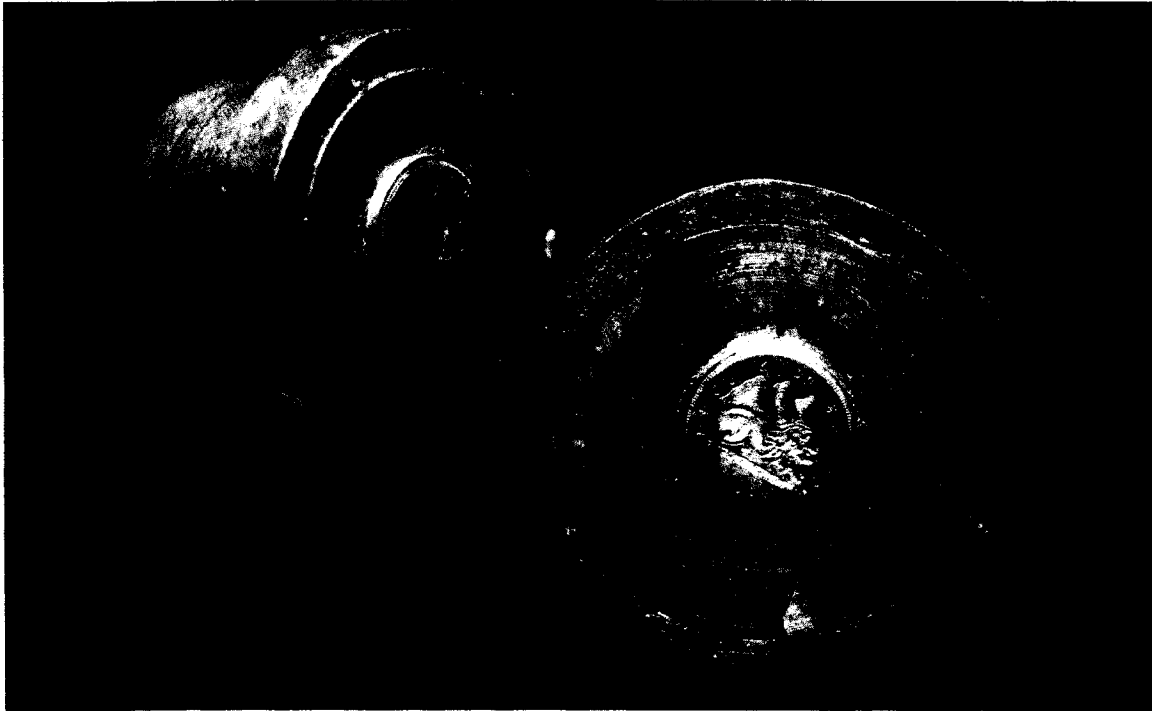


Figure 100. Dies used in minting the Mormon \$5 brass pattern of 1860 (with mountains) (Photograph courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

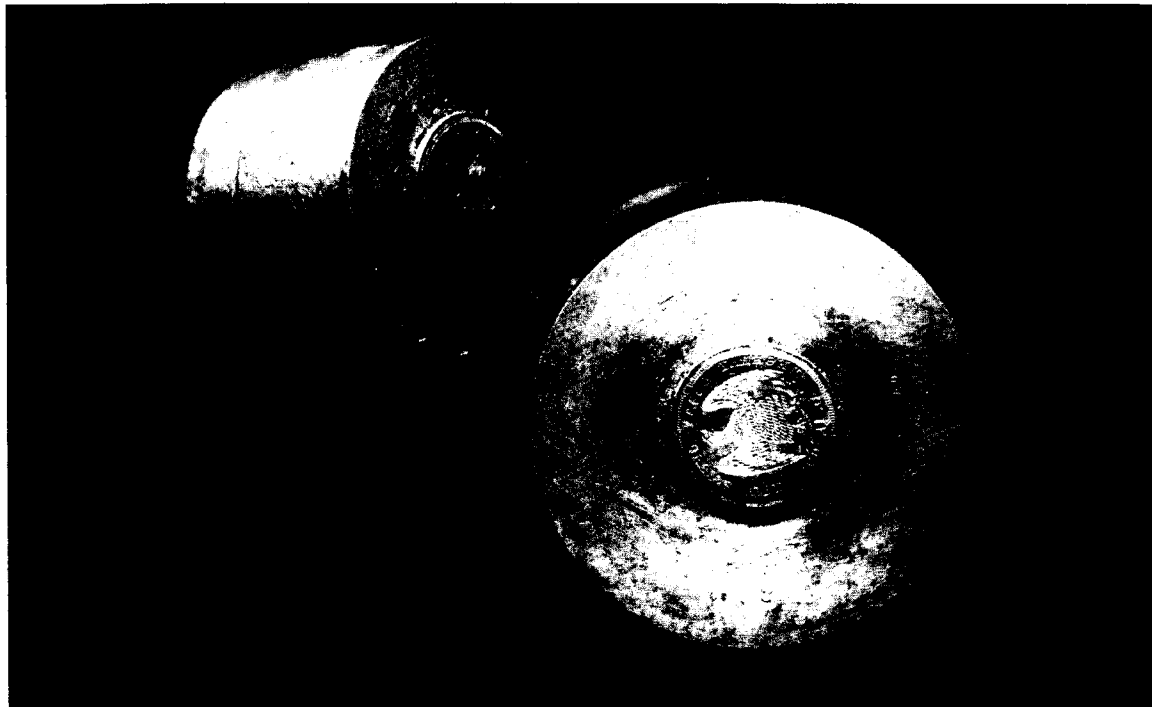


Figure 101. Dies used in minting the Mormon \$5 gold coin of 1860 (without mountains) (Photograph courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

In 1912 in the book *Various California Private Mints*, Edgar H. Adams states that George Ferdinand Albrecht Kuner, an early California engraver, was commissioned to engrave the Deseret assay office \$5 gold coin dated 1860 of Utah Territory. Mr. Adams indicated this was the mass pattern piece with mountains behind the lion. Edgar H. Adams was a respected authority on territorial gold coins, but one would question his statement that Mr. Kuner made the dies for the 1860 Mormon \$5 gold coin, without providing evidence to substantiate it.

After examining the two sets of dies, it is evident there is considerable difference in the touched lions. The reverse is also different in the design of the eagle, the beehive is smaller, and the legend is located in a different position. The differences are significant enough to make one believe different engravers made the two sets. It is possible that George Kuner engraved the first set of dies with the mountains (fig. 100). As a trial piece was struck in brass, these dies cracked. Mr. Barlow then was called in to make the new dies (fig. 101). No gold coins were ever issued from the dies with the mountains.

Minting was stopped in 1861 by a prohibitory order from Alfred Cumming, the new governor of Utah Territory. Most of the \$5 gold coins of 1860 were exchanged at the U.S. Mint for U.S. gold coin. Minting of Mormon gold coin and printing of Mormon Valley currency officially ended on 26 February 1862, when Wilford Woodruff and Thomas Bullock delivered to Brigham Young a small box containing the remaining gold dust, Kirtland Bank bills, and mint papers (JH, 26 Feb. 1862).

On 8 June 1864 the United States Congress enacted a law forbidding the private coinage of gold.

The dies, holders, fittings, and cleaning tools used in minting the 1849, 1850, and 1860 Mormon gold coins were purchased by the Mormon Church from outside interests on 24 April 1909 (fig. 102). The Church had previously owned them, but they had fallen into private hands. Certainly, the Deseret Museum (LDS Church owned) must have been pleased to regain control of these priceless items.

Mormon and Utah Coin and Currency

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS that I, ALFALES YOUNG, of the City and County of Salt Lake, State of Utah, party of the first part, and JAMES E. TALMAGE, TRUSTEE, of the same place, party of the second part, WITNESSETH:

That the said party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Five hundred (\$500.00) dollars to him in hand paid by the party of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, does hereby grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said party of the second part all of the following described personal property, to-wit:

Seven dies from which the coins known as the "Deseret Coins" were struck, each of which sets comprises two pieces, obverse and reverse, of the following denominations and dates severally:

- Two and one-half dollar piece of 1849;
- Five dollar piece of 1849;
- Ten dollar piece of 1849;
- Twenty dollar piece of 1849;
- Five dollar piece of 1850;
- Five dollar piece of 1860 of "Lion and Mountains" design;
- Five dollar piece of 1860 with "Lion" only.

TOGETHER with the holders, fittings and cleaning tools necessary for the use of said dies.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same unto the said James E. Talmage, as Trustee, for the use and benefit of the Deseret Museum, and to his successor and assigns forever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 24th day of April, A. D., 1909.

Done in the Presence of:

Alfales Young (Seal)

STATE OF UTAH,)
) #
County of Salt Lake.)

On this 24th day of April, A. D., 1909, personally appeared before me ALFALES YOUNG, signer of the foregoing instrument, who duly acknowledged to me that he executed the same.

James E. Talmage
Notary Public.

Commission Expires July 24, 1911

Figure 102. Affidavit certifying repurchase of dies by the Mormon Church (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

Base-metal Patterns of Mormon Gold Coin Issues

Possibly around 1900 the original dies were used to mint brass patterns of all Mormon gold coin issues. Each pattern was struck uniface. The only known 1849 \$20 brass pattern is of the obverse. The rest of the patterns minted for the 1849 and 1850 issues used both obverse and reverse dies. The 1860 brass pattern (fig. 103) was struck only from the dies with mountains (fig. 100). Photographs of the 1849 and 1850 brass patterns are not included in this book since they are identical to the \$2½, \$5, \$10, and \$20 Mormon gold coins (figs. 52 through 56). However, estimated collectors' value of the patterns are given in the Price Index (Appendix 2).

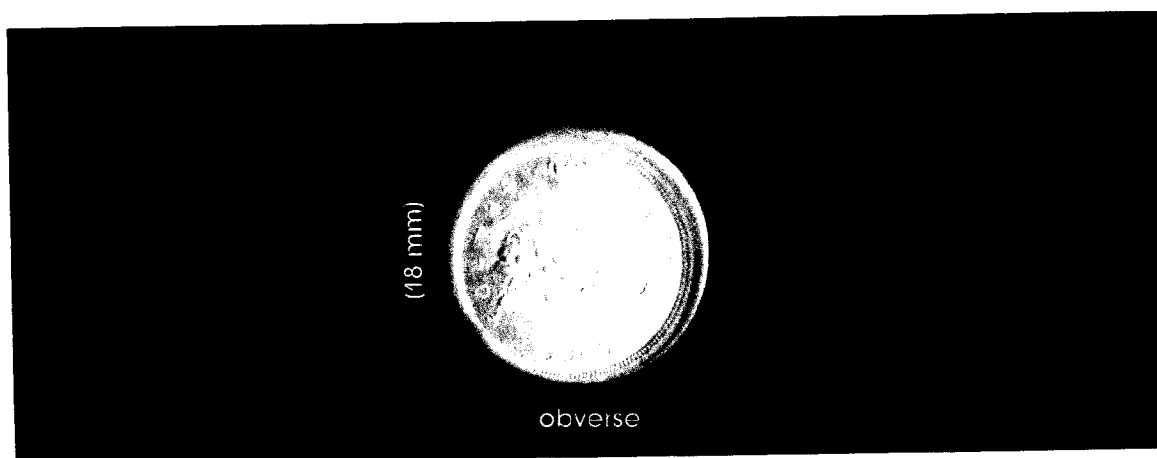


Figure 103. Mormon \$5 brass pattern of 1860 (with mountains)

In *Various California Private Mints*, Edgar A. Adams mentions a watch fob struck in nickel and worn by Brigham Young (fig. 104). The watch fob was struck from the dies without mountains (fig. 101).

Mormon and Utah Coin and Currency

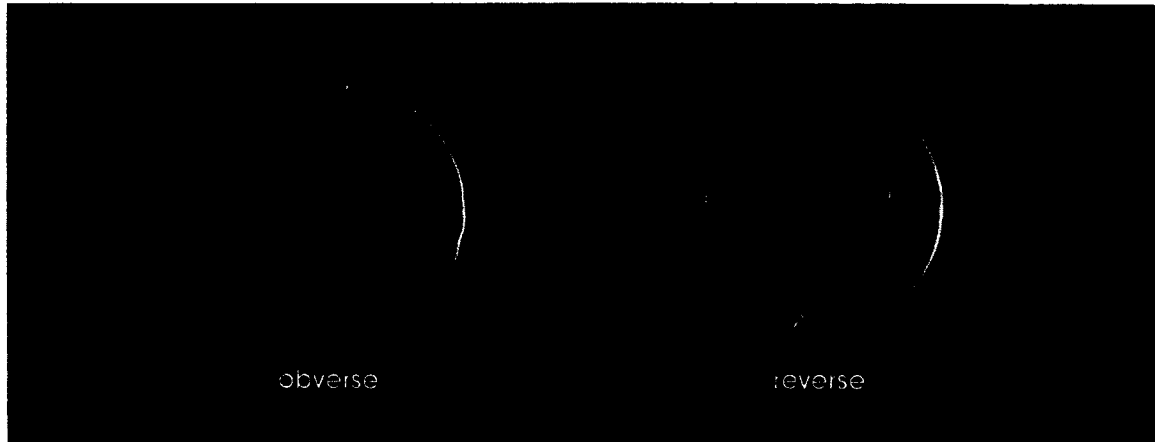


Figure 104. Nickel watch fob worn by Brigham Young (Photo courtesy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

While the patterns are of Mormon origin, they were probably minted by private individuals. The patterns were probably minted prior to the repurchase of the dies by the Church in 1909. Speculation has it that the patterns were minted in 1897, the fiftieth anniversary of the pioneers entering the Salt Lake Valley. No evidence is available, however, to substantiate this claim.

Utah Territory Mercantile Currency

The \$3 Utah Territory mercantile currency note shown in figure 105 represents a twentieth-century reprint from the original plate. There are no known original notes of this issue and only a few reprints.