

**"Mountains of Money: A Colorado Story"  
Exhibit Opens April 26  
at Money Museum**

Gold and silver extracted from the mountains and minted into coins, tokens and medals in mining camps, towns and cities transformed the wilderness of the Colorado Territory into the booming Centennial State. The story of the people and the state they shaped is told in "Mountains of Money: A Colorado Story," an exhibit opening April 26 at the Money Museum at 818 North Cascade Avenue in Colorado Springs.

"Gold strikes, the silver boom and the Denver Mint are three primary forces that shaped Colorado," says Curator Lawrence J. Lee. "This exhibit traces the early saga of the state, from the first major gold rush following the discovery of gold near the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River in 1858, through the late 1800s when silver was king to the founding of the United States Mint in Denver and the end of gold-backed American currency in 1933. It is the most complete collection of such material ever brought together and includes original paintings and other artwork of Colorado mountains scenes created in the 1880s."

Throughout those 75 years, Colorado's fortunes were linked directly to the precious metals hauled from its mountains. Almost immediately after the discovery of gold, private minting firms set up operations to transform nuggets and dust into coins for general circulation. Dr. John Parsons, a multi-talented medical doctor from Quincy, Illinois, assayed and struck gold coins from the back of his wagon in the Tarryall Mining District in South Park in 1861. At the same time, John J. Conway & Co., jewelers and bankers, briefly struck gold pieces in Summit County. However, the most successful private minter in Colorado was Clark, Gruber & Co., which operated in Denver from 1860 to 1861. The firm later was purchased by the federal government as the foundation for the Denver Mint.

Only a handful of the coins produced by these early minters remain in collections today, and the finest examples from the Frederick R. Mayer Colorado Pioneer Gold Collection are included in this exhibit. Of particular interest are the obverse designs for Clark, Gruber's \$10 and \$20 gold pieces. An engraver in Philadelphia, who had never been west, made Pikes Peak look like a pile of whipped cream.

A special section in the "Mountains of Money" exhibit describes of the creation of the United States Mint in Denver, from its early days in 1863 as an assay office to the striking of the first coins there in 1906.

Colorado's first fortunes waned by the late 1860s, when the days of "easy" gold disappeared. The second boom began the next decade, when silver was discovered near Leadville and prices rose because of a congressional mandate for the precious metal. Mining towns sprouted like wildflowers, and the state's population grew by 676 percent from 1860 to 1880.

"Along with these towns rose a proliferation of tokens used by merchants, saloons and laborers," Lee says. "Visitors to the exhibit can see the bewildering assortment of shapes, denominations, metallic compositions and imagery. We also have a wide assortment of tokens and medals issued by fraternal organizations, political parties, and local and state governments for a wide variety of uses, from club rituals and tax payments to chauffeur badges and military medals."

While new fortunes blossomed during the Cripple Creek-Victor gold rush of the 1890s, lifestyles supported by silver collapsed when the federal government stopped buying the metal. The Gold Standard Act of 1900 finally killed Colorado's silver boom, but protests continued. One silver advocate was Victor miner Joseph Lesher, who had his own "dollars" produced in 1900 and 1901. Merchants who signed on with his program could have their name engraved on the silver pieces. Some of the finest examples of these rare items are included in the exhibit.

"Mountains of Money: A Colorado Story" opens April 26 and runs through January 31, 2004. The Money Museum is free and open to the public Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For more information about this exhibit, contact the ANA Museum at 818 N. Cascade Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80903-3279; phone 719-632-2646; e-mail [museum@money.org](mailto:museum@money.org); or visit the exhibit online at [www.money.org/museum/coloradoexhibit.html](http://www.money.org/museum/coloradoexhibit.html).

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