The Carson City Mint: The Legendary "CC" Mint of the American West




E·PLURIBUS·UNUM
LIBERTY
1878


UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
In God We Trust
ONE DOLLAR



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Few United States Mint facilities have captured the imagination of collectors quite like the Carson City Mint. Operating for only a brief period compared to other mints, it produced some of the most sought-after coins in American numismatics. Today, a tiny **"CC"** mintmark on a coin immediately signals rarity, history, and the excitement of the American frontier.

The Carson City Mint was born from one of America's greatest mining booms and became closely tied to the famous Comstock Lode. Although it operated for only 21 years of actual coin production, its legacy continues to influence coin collecting more than a century after its final coins were struck.

The Discovery That Made the Mint Possible

Everything began with the discovery of the **Comstock Lode** in 1859. Located near present-day Virginia City, Nevada, the Comstock was the first major silver discovery in the United States.

The mines produced enormous quantities of silver and gold, but there was a problem. Every ounce of precious metal had to be transported hundreds of miles over mountains to the San Francisco Mint for refining and coinage.

Transporting bullion was:

- Expensive
- Slow
- Dangerous because of theft
- Difficult during winter weather

Congress realized Nevada needed its own mint.

On March 3, 1863, Congress authorized construction of a branch mint in Carson City. Groundbreaking followed in 1866, and construction was completed in late 1869. Coin production officially began in February 1870.

Why Carson City?

At the time, Carson City was becoming the governmental and commercial center of Nevada.

Several reasons made it the ideal location:

- Close to the Comstock mines
- Easier transportation routes
- Growing population
- New state capital after Nevada entered the Union in 1864

Instead of shipping raw ore to California, miners could now have it refined and coined much closer to where it was mined.

The Mint Building




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The Carson City Mint was designed by Treasury architect **Alfred B. Mullett** in the Renaissance Revival style using locally quarried sandstone.

Construction was supervised by **Abraham Curry**, often called the "Father of Carson City."

Compared with Philadelphia or San Francisco, it was a small operation. At its peak, only about 75 people worked there, yet the quality of the coins was excellent.

Coins Produced at Carson City

Every coin struck there carried the famous **CC** mintmark.

Silver Coins

The mint produced:

- Seated Liberty Dimes (1871–1878)
- Twenty-Cent Pieces (1875–1876)
- Seated Liberty Quarters
- Seated Liberty Half Dollars
- Seated Liberty Dollars
- Trade Dollars
- Morgan Silver Dollars

Among these, the Morgan dollar became the mint's most famous product.

Gold Coins

Carson City also struck:

- $5 Half Eagles
- $10 Eagles
- $20 Double Eagles

These gold coins circulated heavily throughout the mining West.

The mint produced roughly equal face values of silver and gold coinage over its lifetime.

The First Coin

One interesting fact is that the first coin struck at Carson City was not a Morgan dollar.

Instead, on February 11, 1870, the mint produced the **Seated Liberty Dollar**.

Today, these first-year Carson City dollars are prized by collectors.

The Famous Morgan Dollars




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When most collectors hear "Carson City," they immediately think of the **Morgan Dollar**.

Morgan dollars were struck there from:

- 1878–1885
- 1889–1893

The years 1886, 1887, and 1888 saw no Morgan dollar production because the mint was temporarily closed.

Many Carson City Morgan dollars survived because millions remained in government vaults for decades. Beginning in the 1970s, the U.S. government sold these coins in the famous General Services Administration (GSA) sales, making original GSA holders especially desirable to collectors.

The Twenty-Cent Piece

One of Carson City's most unusual products was the Twenty-Cent Piece.

Congress hoped the denomination would improve commerce in the West.

Instead, people constantly confused it with the quarter.

The denomination lasted only two years.

Today, Carson City twenty-cent pieces are among the rarest and most valuable U.S. coins.

Why Carson City Coins Are Valuable

Several reasons explain why Carson City coins command strong premiums:

Short operating life

The mint produced coins only from 1870–1885 and again from 1889–1893.

Low mintages

Many issues were produced in relatively small numbers.

Western history

Every coin represents the American mining frontier.

Collector demand

The "CC" mintmark is one of the most popular mintmarks in American numismatics.

Even common Carson City Morgan dollars often sell for hundreds of dollars, while rare dates can reach six- or seven-figure prices.

The Temporary Closure

Politics affected the mint.

By 1885, declining silver production and changing political priorities led to a suspension of coinage operations.

The mint remained idle for several years.

After the election of President **Benjamin Harrison**, support for silver coinage increased, and the mint reopened in 1889.

The Final Years

Although operations resumed, the glory days of the Comstock Lode had passed.

Silver production declined.

Transportation had improved.

The San Francisco Mint could efficiently handle the remaining production.

The Carson City Mint struck its last coins during the spring of 1893.

Coinage operations never resumed.

In 1899, its official status as a mint was withdrawn, and the building became a U.S. Assay Office, remaining in that role until 1933.

What Happened to the Building?

Rather than being demolished, the historic mint survived.

In 1939, the federal government sold the building to the State of Nevada for $10,000.

Today it is home to the Nevada State Museum.

Visitors can still see:

- Original vaults
- Historic minting equipment
- Coin exhibits
- Press No. 1, the original coining press

The museum even uses the restored press to strike commemorative medallions for visitors.

Fun Facts

- The "CC" mintmark is one of the most recognized mintmarks in U.S. coin collecting.
- Carson City struck only eight denominations of circulating coins.
- It produced over $50 million in gold and silver coinage during its operating life.
- The mint operated only 21 non-consecutive years.
- Some Carson City issues are among the rarest regular-issue U.S. coins ever made.
- Although modern commemorative Morgan dollars have featured a "CC" privy mark, no U.S. circulating coins have been struck in Carson City since 1893.

Legacy

The Carson City Mint occupies a unique place in American history. It represents the silver boom of the Old West, the growth of Nevada, and the nation's efforts to convert the riches of the Comstock Lode into circulating coinage. Though its working life was relatively brief, its influence has endured for generations.

Today, the tiny **CC** mintmark remains one of the most coveted symbols in numismatics. Whether found on a humble Seated Liberty dime or a legendary Morgan silver dollar, it instantly evokes images of frontier mining camps, stagecoaches hauling bullion, and the rugged spirit of the American West. For collectors, historians, and museum visitors alike, the Carson City Mint stands as one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of the United States Mint.