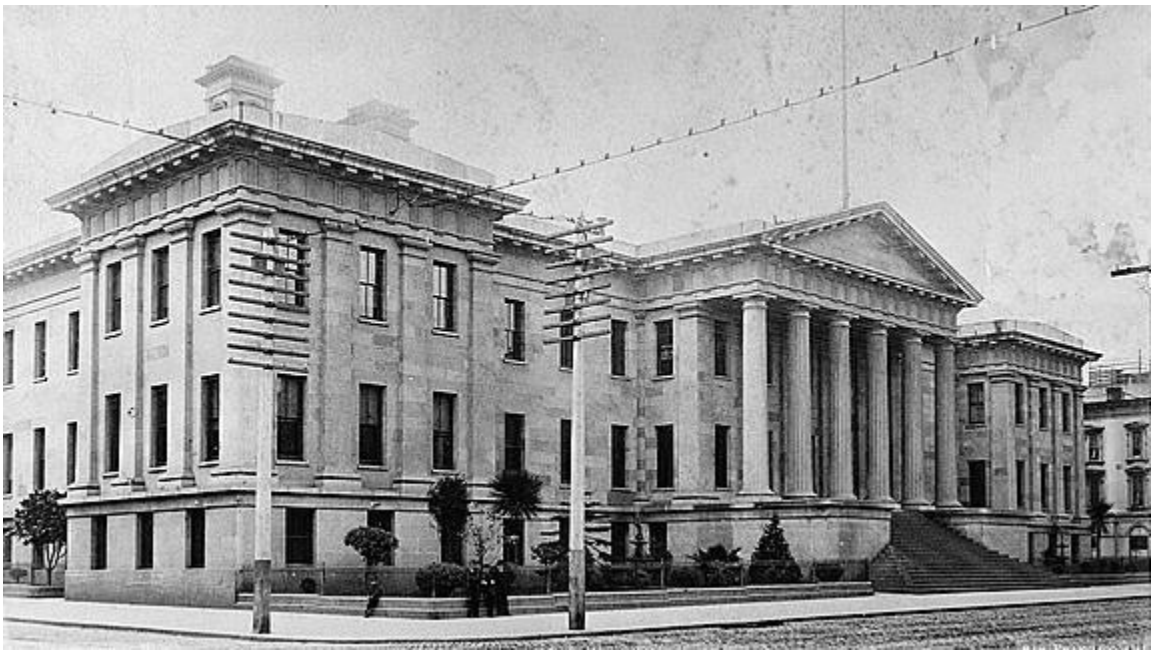
The History of the San Francisco Mint




GOD WE TRUST
1874



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The United States Mint facility in San Francisco has long been one of the most famous minting facilities in American history. To collectors, the small **"S" mint mark** represents quality, rarity, and a direct connection to the California Gold Rush. The San Francisco Mint has produced everything from circulating gold coins to some of the finest proof coins ever struck by the United States.

This article explores the history of the San Francisco Mint, its buildings, famous coins, role in the nation's economy, and its lasting legacy.

The California Gold Rush Creates a Need

Everything began with the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1848. News spread rapidly around the world, beginning the famous California Gold Rush.

By 1849, thousands of miners flooded into California carrying raw gold dust and nuggets. Transporting that gold across the continent to the Philadelphia Mint was expensive, slow, and dangerous.

Congress realized California needed its own mint.

The San Francisco Mint officially opened in **1854**, becoming the second branch mint established west of Philadelphia. During its first year, it converted approximately **$4 million in California gold into coins**, helping stabilize commerce in the growing western United States.

The First Mint Building (1854)

The original mint occupied a modest brick building on Commercial Street.

Although functional, it quickly became too small.

California's booming economy generated enormous amounts of gold, and within only a few years, the Mint was overwhelmed.

The government soon approved construction of a much larger and stronger building.

The Old San Francisco Mint (1874)







Construction began in 1869 and was completed in 1874.

Designed by Treasury architect Alfred B. Mullett in the Greek Revival style, the building featured massive stone columns, thick walls, and enormous underground vaults. Construction cost over **$2.1 million**, a tremendous sum at the time.

Collectors affectionately know this building as the **"Granite Lady,"** although much of its exterior is actually sandstone resting on a granite foundation.

Surviving the 1906 Earthquake

Perhaps no chapter in the Mint's history is more remarkable than the disaster of April 18, 1906.

A devastating earthquake struck San Francisco.

Fires burned for several days afterward, destroying much of the city.

The Old Mint survived.

Because of its exceptionally strong construction and determined employees who fought fires around the building, the Mint remained standing while much of San Francisco lay in ruins.

Inside the vaults sat approximately **$300 million in gold**, an amount worth many billions of dollars today. Had that treasure been lost, the financial consequences for the United States would have been enormous.

The survival of the building became a symbol of hope during the city's rebuilding.

Gold Coin Production

The San Francisco Mint became America's premier gold coin producer.

Among the denominations struck were:

- $1 Gold
- $2.50 Quarter Eagle
- $3 Gold Piece
- $5 Half Eagle

- $10 Eagle
- $20 Double Eagle

Many of these coins were produced from freshly mined California gold.

Today, San Francisco Mint gold coins remain among the most sought-after American coins.

Silver Coins

The Mint also struck:

- Half dimes
- Dimes
- Twenty-cent pieces
- Quarters
- Half dollars
- Silver dollars

Morgan Dollars bearing the "S" mint mark are especially popular with collectors.

Some dates, such as the 1893-S Morgan Dollar, are among the greatest rarities in American numismatics.

Famous Rare Coins

Several legendary rarities originated in San Francisco, including:

- 1893-S Morgan Dollar
- 1909-S VDB Lincoln Cent
- 1916-S Standing Liberty Quarter
- 1913-S Type II Buffalo Nickel
- 1894-S Barber Dime

These coins routinely sell for thousands—or even millions—of dollars depending on their condition.

Moving to a New Mint

By the 1930s, the Old Mint had become outdated.

A new, modern mint building opened in **1937** on Hermann Street, where production continues today. The old building ceased minting operations and later became an important historic landmark.

The Proof Coin Era

Beginning in **1968**, San Francisco assumed primary responsibility for producing America's proof coinage. Since **1975**, it has been used almost exclusively for proof coins and commemoratives, with only a few exceptions for special collector issues and limited circulation strikes.

Proof coins feature:

- Mirror-like fields
- Frosted designs
- Multiple strikes for sharp detail
- Special handling and packaging

Today, nearly every annual U.S. Proof Set comes from San Francisco.

The "S" Mint Mark

Collectors immediately recognize the **S** mint mark.

It signifies that the coin was struck in San Francisco.

Depending on the year, an S mint mark may indicate:

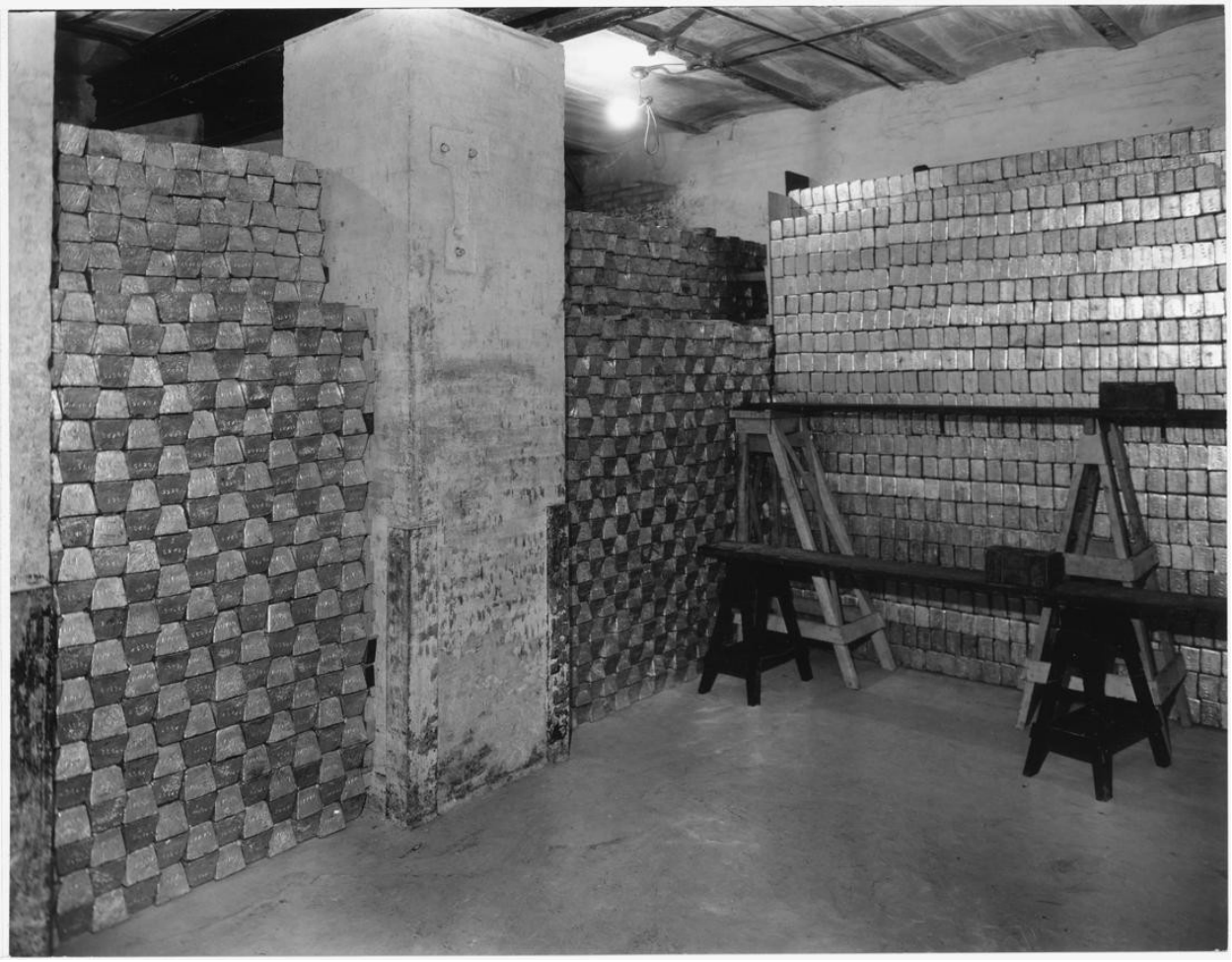
- Regular circulation coins
- Proof coins
- Silver proof coins
- Commemorative issues
- Collector-only releases

For many modern coins, the S mint mark generally indicates a collector issue rather than a coin intended for everyday circulation.

The Old Mint Today




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The Old San Francisco Mint is recognized as one of America's most important historic federal buildings. It has undergone preservation efforts over the years, and the city continues working toward expanded public use while preserving its architectural and historical significance.

Collecting San Francisco Coins

Collectors enjoy assembling complete sets of San Francisco issues because they span more than 170 years of American history.

Popular collecting specialties include:

- Gold coins
- Morgan Dollars
- Peace Dollars

- Lincoln cents
- Buffalo nickels
- Mercury dimes
- Walking Liberty half dollars
- Modern Proof Sets
- Silver Proof Sets
- American Silver Eagles struck at San Francisco

Fun Facts

- The San Francisco Mint opened in **1854**.
- It was established because of the California Gold Rush.
- The Old Mint survived the 1906 earthquake and fire.
- The modern mint building opened in **1937**.
- It is the primary producer of U.S. proof coinage.
- The "S" mint mark is one of the most recognized mint marks in the hobby.
- Many of America's greatest coin rarities were struck in San Francisco.

Conclusion

Few institutions have shaped American numismatics as profoundly as the San Francisco Mint. Born from the excitement of the California Gold Rush, it transformed raw gold into the coinage that fueled westward expansion, survived one of the nation's greatest natural disasters, and evolved into the premier producer of proof coins for collectors.

Whether admired for legendary rarities like the 1893-S Morgan Dollar and the 1909-S VDB Lincoln cent, or appreciated through the annual proof sets cherished by collectors today, the San Francisco Mint continues to represent craftsmanship, history, and the enduring legacy of American coinage.