

Jules Charbneau's 1909 AYPE GOLD DOLLARS

Tiny gold medals commemorated the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle, Washington.

THE ALASKA-YUKON-PACIFIC Exposition (AYPE) was gearing up to open in Seattle, Washington, on June 1, 1909. Local resident Julius L. (“Jules”) Charbneau envisioned a souvenir medal to commemorate the event, and on January 22 of that year, he applied for a patent on the design of tiny commemoratives struck from Alaskan gold.

The February 13, 1909, issue of *The Seattle Star* identified Charbneau as one of the city’s biggest boosters of the forthcoming exposition. The *Star* credited him with distributing more than 10,000 promotional brochures, and noted that everyone who entered Ye Olde Curiosity Shop (on the Colman Dock), where Charbneau worked with his father-in-law, left talking about the fair. Exposition representatives accepted his proposal for a three-piece set of official souvenir “coins,” and the *Star* reported the medals were already in great demand by collectors and were sought as charms



PHOTOS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

▲ **TWO INUIT FAMILIES** posed with a reproduction of an igloo, one of the many displays at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (below) held in Seattle. The fairgrounds occupied the forested campus of the University of Washington.



PHOTOS: GOOGLE PATENTS

and ornaments for stick pins.

Very popular today, Charbneau's 10kt-gold AYPE medal is cataloged in Harold E. Hibler and Charles V. Kappen's 1963 book, *So-Called Dollars*, as HK 360. It was issued in three sizes: 1, 1/2 and 1/4 pennyweight ("DWT"). This unit of measure, typically used for weighing precious metals, is equal to 24 grains or 1/20 of a troy ounce (approximately 1.55 grams).

The obverse depicts a miner standing with a pick over his right shoulder, his left hand on his hip. Behind him, a shovel and gold pan lie at his feet. The legend ALASKA GOLD appears above, with A.Y.P.E. below, and the date flanking the miner ("19" at the left, "09" at the right). The medal has a beaded border with a plain edge.

Several obverse and reverse die varieties are known with subtle differences in the engraving of the miner and the lettering. In their 1965 book, *Alaska's Coinage through the Years*, Maurice M. Gould, Kenneth E. Bressett, and Kaye and Nancy Dethridge listed seven varieties of the 1 DWT, seven of the 1/2 DWT, and five of the 1/4 DWT. Their brief descriptions appear to be based on R.H. Burnie's 1955 catalog, *Small California and Territorial Gold Coins, Quar-*

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

JULIUS L. CHARBNEAU, OF SEATTLE, WASHINGTON.

DESIGN FOR A MEDAL OR EMBLEM.

No 39,866.

Specification for Design.

Patented March 9, 1909.

Application filed January 22, 1909. Serial No. 473,783. Term of patent 3 1/2 years.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, JULIUS L. CHARBNEAU, residing at Seattle, in the county of King and State of Washington, United States of America, have invented a new, original, and ornamental Design for a Medal or Emblem, of which the following is a specification, reference being had to the accompanying drawing, forming part thereof. In the drawing, Figure 1 shows the ob-

verse face of the medal or emblem, and Fig. 2 the reverse face thereof.

I claim—

The ornamental design for a medal or emblem, as shown.

JULIUS L. CHARBNEAU.

Witnesses:

N. L. MILLAR,
C. P. SWEET.

ter Dollars, Half Dollars, Dollars. Neither publication adequately describes die varieties by today's standards. We have

no estimate of die life, but the evidence suggests the gold tokens were popular items at the time, since multiple dies were needed to meet demand.

Over the years, these medals have been incorrectly identified as products of the M.E. Hart Co. of San Francisco. Although the firm might have marketed numerous gold tokens between 1908 and 1915, as is often cited in numismatic literature, we have found no evidence that the M.E. Hart Co. operated prior to 1915. It most likely acquired surplus AYPE pieces from Charbneau and sold them along with other souve-nir medals.

Most notably, it appears Hart packaged 36 souvenir medals together in a copper-framed case with velvet lining and sold the sets at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) in 1915. The set, "Coins of the Golden West," included Charbneau's gold AYPE tokens. The packaging is virtually identical to that used to house the complete set of official U.S. commemorative coins struck for the PPIE (which included the gold \$50 octagonal, gold \$50 round, gold \$2 1/2, gold \$1 and silver half dollar).



▲ IN JANUARY 1909, Jules Charbneau applied for a patent on the design of the gold medals he created for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition.



It is more likely that Zerbe sold the M.E. Hart Co. “Coins of the Golden West” sets at his adjacent “Money of the World” booth.

PHOTOS: WILLIAM D. HYDER/ROBERT B. KELLEY



◀ **FOR THE SEATTLE EXPOSITION**, Jules Charbneau issued tiny gold medals in three sizes (from top): $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 penny-weight (“DWT”). The largest measured 14.86mm, the size of a 19th-century U.S. gold dollar. A boxed set (shown above) could be purchased for \$3.

Shreve & Co. jewelers in San Francisco made the custom frames for both sets.

While some have suggested that Hart sold the PPIE commemorative coin sets as well, we do not believe that is the case. An invoice for one such set was issued and signed by Farran Zerbe, who was in charge of the Coin and Medal Department (and all U.S. Mint sales) at the Exposition. It is more likely that Zerbe sold the M.E. Hart Co. “Coins of the Golden West” sets at his adjacent “Money of the World” booth.

Zerbe’s business relationship with M.E. Hart Co. apparently continued after the close of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, as Hart purchased Zerbe’s remaining stock of PPIE commemorative dollars. These were marketed to labor unions as souvenirs or mounted in charms, stick pins or brooches. While Hart may have

Charbneau later relocated to San Francisco, where he exhibited at the Golden Gate International Exposition and sold small, gold-dollar-sized souvenir medals.

commissioned or produced some or many of the gold medals included in the “Coins of the Golden West” set, the AYPE pieces originated with Jules Charbneau, not M.E. Hart Co.

Jules Charbneau was an active participant and exhibitor at numerous international fairs and expositions. He later relocated to San Francisco, where he exhibited at the 1939-40 Golden Gate International Exposition (GGIE) and sold small, gold-dollar-sized souvenir medals. (Jeff Shevlin described these medals in “Collecting the Charbneau Dollars” in the March 2012 issue, p. 40. The pieces also are cataloged in *Discover the World of Charbneau Dollars*, a book authored by Shevlin and William Hyder and published in August 2011.)

In his autobiography (appropriately printed as a miniature book), Charbneau mentioned the AYPE gold medals, but not the gold souvenirs he struck for the GGIE. In an advertisement for the AYPE commemoratives in the June 1909 issue of *Our Navy*, Charbneau listed himself as the manufacturer and wholesaler, located at 809 2nd Avenue in Seattle. The address places his business in a building that was part of the Joseph Mayer & Brothers jewelry manufacturing and sales complex. We suspect Mayer produced the tokens for Charbneau. Is it possible the company manufactured the other tokens in the “Coins of the Golden West” set?

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Dan Owens and Mick Locke for calling our attention to Charbneau’s advertisement in *Our Navy*. Carolyn Marr, librarian at the Seattle Museum of History and Industry, provided invaluable assistance in our quest to learn more about Joseph Mayer & Brothers’ token and medal manufacturing business. ■

Sources

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“He Makes Pretty Good A.-Y.-P. Souvenir Gold

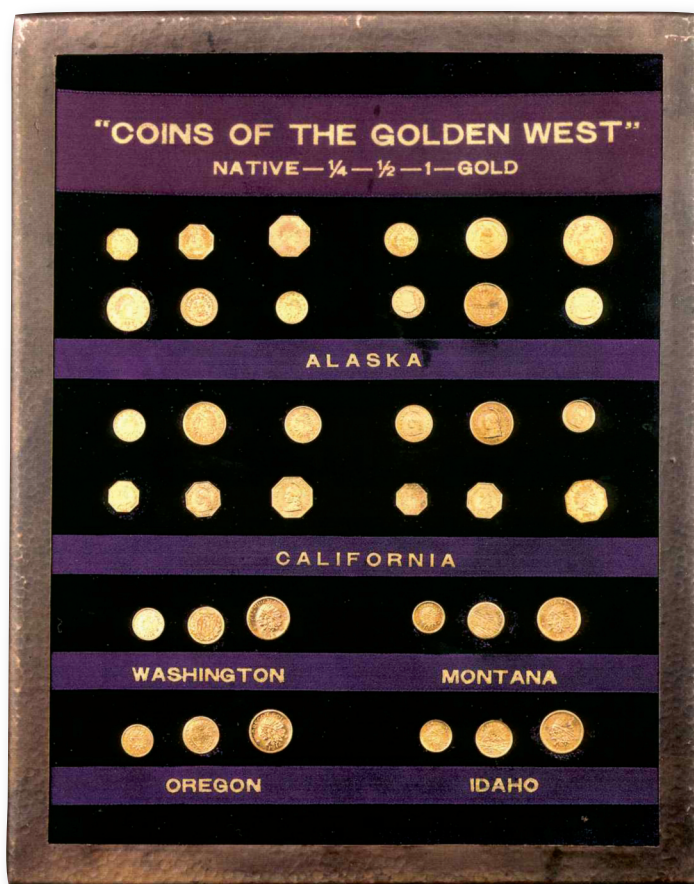


PHOTO: BRASHER BULLETIN/JAY ROE

▲ M.E. HART CO. likely acquired some of Charbneau’s AYPE medals and included them in its “Coins of the Golden West” set, which the firm sold for \$20. Promotional literature described the collection: “The great interest and novelty associated with these original pieces has made a demand which is supplied by the series here offered, all of which are artistic designs, well struck, and guaranteed solid 10K native gold.”

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