

# A Brief History of Gaming Tokens

by Vince Mowery

1965 was a turning point in the history of gaming tokens – a very significant dividing line. In Part I of this history, we briefly review the use of tokens in games of chance before the mid 1960s, and in Part II we will cover gaming tokens from 1965 to the present day, with some speculations of the future. Our attention will be restricted to United States tokens or tokens used in the U.S.

The distinct dividing line was due to the sharp rise in the price of silver. Prior to this epoch, more silver dollars were probably used in games of chance in casinos throughout Nevada than those in use for commercial purposes everywhere else. Part II will review the consequences of the disappearance of silver dollars in gaming.

I recall several coin collecting friends telling me they nearly completed their collections of Morgan and Peace dollars by saving coins from Nevada casinos. Apparently the practice got out of hand, as evidenced by these comments about silver dollars with missing dates: “When the silver dollar boom started in the 1960s, several of the casinos resorted to grinding the dates off the coins so that they wouldn’t be grabbed for their collector value.... The stunt got the casinos in trouble with the government for mutilating coins”<sup>1</sup> And it wouldn’t be long before the coins would be carried off for their bullion value.

We can personally attest to the use of silver dollars in casinos. For example, in 1955 while driving across the country, Bettye and I decided on a side trip to Reno, where our first stop was Harolds Club. Bettye was on a winning streak, placed a dollar coin on four numbers at the bottom of a roulette table, and won. She moved the silver dollar up to the next four numbers in line and won again. Moving the bet this way each time, she worked her way to the top of the table, winning each bet and paid off each time in silver dollars. I stuffed all the coins in my pockets and we walked over to a crap table. Her luck was still with us. Finally, the stick man standing next to Bettye tapped the box of two sixes. Bet boxcars, he said. She did (although a terrible bet) and won. By the time we left, the pockets of my pants and jacket were loaded with silver dollars. (Yes, in those days it was common for men to wear jackets in casinos.)



*Morgan*



*Peace*

*Should we call these gaming tokens?*

Today, although common on blackjack and related games, we seldom see gaming tokens used on crap tables (probably because throwing a heavy metal token halfway down the table to make a bet can be hard on the green felt). And rarely would a metal token be seen on the inside of a roulette layout. It should be recognized that the type and use of tokens can change over time. We will see more of this later and in Part II.

Many would claim, with considerable validity, that silver dollars should not be identified as true gaming tokens, since otherwise we would need to so identify quarters, nickels, etc. which are also used in slot machine play. In the late 1960s or early 1970s, we played a machine in Reno that paid-out some jackpot winnings in Morgan dollars. Should we classify as a gaming token any object used as payment from a slot machine? I think not, unless suitable for replay. But we will have more to say about the definition of gaming tokens later.

Slot machines and the tokens accompanying them, have been with us sometimes more – sometimes less, for over a hundred years.

## I. The First Half Century of Slots

“If there is a ‘first’ original chance slot machine, it has to be the card machine created for saloon and cigar counter placement, ... the ‘Free

Drinks and Free Cigars' trade stimulator card machines made rapid... advancements, moving... into card drop, hold and draw, and a wide variety of other formats."<sup>2</sup> The basics of these machines were developed by the end of the 1880s, with Patent Pending notations appearing on machines before the end of 1890.

### 1901 Draw Poker Machine

"Two Chances for One Nickel"

1. Drop Nickel and Pull Lever Down

2. Hold any Card you wish by Pressing Down Corresponding Button on Top

3. Prizes paid on **SECOND CHANCE**

Sound familiar? Only the buttons and prizes have changed. These early mechanical marvels should be considered forerunners of today's electronic video poker machines.



Note "FREE CIGARS" on payout schedule card on front of machine.

Payout of winnings on slots was the responsibility of counter attendants. It wasn't long before manufacturers, attempting to ease this burden, "added a swivel base so the bartenders could swing the machine around fast to see if a claimed winner was a liar."<sup>3</sup> But this probably did not suffice for the bustling bartenders on a busy Saturday night, and further help was soon forthcoming.

The use of tokens as a medium of exchange or a promise to pay a stated amount was quite likely familiar to most at this time, following the widespread use of tokens during the Civil War as substitute money when hoarding caused government specie to disappear. "The trade check, or 'good for,' started coming into its own in the 1866-1889 period, but the 1890-1900 period saw issues of trade checks increase dramatically."<sup>4</sup> It is only reasonable therefore, to expect proprietors to use nickel size tokens to pay slot winnings, particularly when the winning combination indicated 5, 10, 20, or more "Free" cigars or drinks. Cigar smokers and nickel beers were very common in those days; but proprietors expected the tokens would be replayed – for obvious reasons.



A.H. ROUNSEVELL  
CONFECT. & CIGARS  
5  
TONOPAH, NEVADA



MONTE CARLO SALOON  
GOOD FOR ONE DRINK  
TONOPAH, [sic], NEV.



RHODES CIGAR STAND  
GOOD FOR 5¢ IN TRADE  
GOLDFIELD, NEV.



ROTHOLTZ BROS  
GOOD FOR 1 CIGAR  
Tonopah, Nevada

The use of trade stimulators (slots) and “Good For” gaming tokens to supplement income for small businesses spread rapidly, as did the number of machine manufacturers and the variety of machines. “A substantial number of cigar makers made machines that they gave away as free premiums..., with some of them ending up as coin machine makers after dropping their cigar lines.”<sup>2</sup>

One of many collectible cigar tokens, this one in aluminum—made possible by a drastic reduction in price when the electrolytic process for refining aluminum was introduced in late 1888. “In the 1891-1894 period, aluminum came into extensive use in the manufacture of tokens”<sup>4</sup> contributing to their proliferation.



*THE ST. JOHN CIGAR CO  
G.F. 2 1/2 CENTS I.T.  
MUNCIE, INDIANA  
(Two for a nickel)*

The economic depression of 1893 was a severe jolt to the economy, but also served as a stimulus to the spread of trade stimulators. Small merchants struggling to compete or survive and attract customers, paid out, “at least as much in trade as... played, and sometimes more,”<sup>2</sup> by means of “trade” or “merchant” tokens with the proprietors name on one side and “good for” 5¢, 6 1/4¢, 12 1/2¢, etc. in

trade (or in merchandise) on the reverse side. This practice continued for many years. Some likely examples follow:



*COMMERCIAL HOTEL  
GOOD FOR 6 1/4¢ IN TRADE  
BRASS  
ELKO, NEVADA*



*J.D. LOTHROP CO.  
GOOD FOR 5 IN MERCHANDISE  
ALUMINUM  
GOLDFIELD, NEV.*



*RUTH POOL HALL  
GOOD FOR 5¢ IN TRADE  
BRASS  
Ruth, Nev.*



*W.J. DRYSDALE  
GOOD FOR 6 1/4¢ IN TRADE  
BRASS  
TONAPAH, NEV*

Part of the pleasure of collecting these older tokens is uncovering the history and circumstances surrounding their use. We are not aware of any research on the above examples and many other similar tokens from around Nevada. (Not all Trade or Merchant tokens were used in games of chance). But some interesting research has been carried out for gaming tokens of this time period

used in San Francisco, a hot-bed of slot activity. An example is shown in outline form below:



HENRY LODERHOSE GROCERY  
ASH AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO

“Loderhose’s grocery store was at 318 Polk Street on the northeast corner of Polk and Ash Avenue.”<sup>5</sup> This is an area wiped out by the fire of 1906 and occupied today by the Civic Center Plaza. “Loderhose [was] a groceryman in 1897 and 1898... Like many such stores..., it had a bar. The practice had been almost universal in town since the Gold Rush... The 316 street number indicates that the bar was [as common practice or required by regulations] separate from the food sales section. The token was made for slot machines and issued in the late 1890s after the use of coins had been declared illegal.”<sup>5</sup> “Objections were raised to the use of coins because, it was claimed, this was open gambling. In the late 1890s, the city voted to permit the devices [machines] as long as tokens were the only means of setting them in motion. ‘Trade Checks,’ as they were also known, were commonly brass..., 21 mm in diameter [nickel size],... Larger sizes were used for higher denominations.”<sup>5</sup>

Ownership and operation of slot machines was very turbulent everywhere at the end of the 1800s and into the twentieth century. For example, an 1898 San Francisco ordinance “decreed that the machines were prohibited from paying out in money, but operators soon circumvented this law by substituting payouts in trade checks redeemable only in merchandise.”<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, cash exchange was common. All this probably stimulated the spread of gaming tokens.

Machine manufacturers responded to the shifting morals and regulations. In the late 1890s the Leo Canda Company of Cincinnati produced “an automatic check or token payout model...called THE EXCELSIOR.”<sup>2</sup> The Mills Novelty Company of San Francisco, “made a tall boxed vertical cabinet machine in 1897 with a token payout... calling it the FIGARO CHECK MACHINE.”<sup>2</sup> In this time period, manufacturers were freely copying each others’ machines.

There was one side excursion, however. Machine Paper Payouts, becoming prevalent today, were predated by almost a hundred years by the payout scheme used in the Mills SUPERIOR 5 card machine, produced between 1904 and 1916. “With each winning play the machine advances a pre-printed fortune ticket from a roll, which is then rubber stamped with the number of the payout, be it one cigar, or 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 16, 24 or 100.”<sup>3</sup> Today these old “fortune tickets” are very rare. We will have more to say about Paper Payouts in Part II. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

Early on, some manufacturers were renting machines or serving as slot route operators by maintaining their own machines on a profit sharing basis. (We will have more to say about this practice also in Part II). In

1904, the Puritan Machine Company Ltd. of Detroit manufactured a machine called, appropriately, PURITAN with “a mechanical gimmick whereby every fifth or seventh coin – was tossed into a separate cash box inside the machine. The operator could use this extra cash box as the merchant split...”<sup>2</sup>

Some slot tokens used by slot operators:



MILLS NOVELTY CO.  
GF 5¢ IT  
SAN FRANCISCO  
(Used with CRICKET introduced in 1904)



ROYAL NOVELTY COMPANY  
GF 5¢ IT  
411 Market Street,  
SAN FRANCISCO  
(Founded in 1900 to make machines to sell & operate)

**Some Great Early Gaming Tokens**



*SILVER CUP – CHAS, FEY & CO  
GOOD FOR 5¢ IN TRADE  
PAYOUT TOKEN FOR 1907 SILVER  
CUP MACHINE [6, P. 70]*

*“Charles Fey... issued several  
tokens, as did other manufacturers.”  
[7, p. 7]*



*MILLS NOVELTY CO.  
SAN FRANCISCO  
(COUNTER-STAMPED DM)  
GOOD FOR 2 BITS IN TRADE, WITH 2  
HORSE BRIDLE BITS.  
CENTER STACKING PIN HOLE.*

Counter-stamps with initials, as seen on some operator tokens, could have been used to distinguish a proprietor’s token from others.

What about all those tokens (checks) with holes? Well, they allowed machines to accept both coins and tokens while paying out only tokens, as required by law in some jurisdictions. Note, this automation further eased the payout burden of proprietors and attendants.

“Originally, a small hole was punched in trade checks for storage on a vertical pin inside the machine. Charlie Fey enlarged the stacking hole in the check to permit a detecting pin... to pass through the token, thus allowing it to remain in the coin chute leading to the payout tube. A nickel, obviously having no center hole, would be pushed into the cash can. The first Check Separator token, used on the 1898 Fey LIBERTY BELL is shown.<sup>6</sup>



Gaming tokens with stacking-pin holes:



*L. DEL PAPA & CO.  
GF 5¢ IT  
(Tonopah, nv.)*



*MODEL CIGAR STORE  
GOOD FOR 6 1/4¢  
(Tonopah, nv.)*



*H.E. SAWYER  
GF 12 1/2¢ IT  
MCGILL, NV*



TEXAS BAR  
GF 6 1/4¢ IT  
(Goldfield, nv.)



NEVADA SMOKE HOUSE  
GF 12 1/2 CENTS  
RENO



HOTEL LAMOILLE  
GF 12 1/2¢ IT  
(Lamoille, nv.)

And tokens for use in check separator machines:



MAMMOTH CLUB  
GF 5¢ IT  
(Tonopah, nv.)  
Note cancellation punch.



THE PIONEER  
GF 12 1/2¢ IT  
ELKO, NEV.

The large number of nickel size tokens with center holes is testimony to their widespread use over decades. "The slot machines of the years between World War I & II used tokens extensively, principally of the type with a hole in the center."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this triggered the use of a round washer with a string tied to it as a simple means for slot cheating. Many token holes appear to be drilled or punched, rather than stamped; and some holes obscure lettering, indicating the tokens were modified for use in check separator machines.



DEWEY TRADE CHECK  
GF 5¢ IT  
ELY, NEV.  
(no hole)



*DEWEY TRADE CHECK  
GF 5¢ IT  
(Ely, nev.)  
(stacking hole)*



*31524*



*38450*



*4114*



*2804*



Attempting to create an air of legitimacy or willing acceptance. Slots were developed with the appearance of vending machines, dispensing gumballs, packs of chewing gum or rolls of mints. In addition to a candy treat, some “vending” slot machines also paid out good for tokens euphemistically called “profit sharing coupons”.



*ALL QUALITY MINTS  
GOOD FOR A 5¢  
PACKAGE OF MINTS*

It may be difficult to conclusively identify some trade checks as definite slot tokens. For example, a cataloger of the common tokens above stated: “...these Dewey tokens were thought to have been used in Dewey slot machines.”<sup>8</sup> However, in my opinion, the hole for a stacking pin in some Dewey tokens from Ely, NV is rather conclusive evidence that the tokens were used in slot machines.

There is one large class of tokens that are clearly slot tokens. Some samples are shown below. “Tokens with thousands of different numbers are known. The numbers represent individual machines or machine operators or businesses.”<sup>9</sup> Although we are certain these are slot tokens, uncertainty remains as to what the numbers designated. Reverses of all the tokens below read Good For 5¢ In Trade.

“The full story behind these numbered tokens remains unknown at this time. Most of the numbers are probably serial numbers of specific machine operators.”<sup>7</sup> But, in my opinion, with numbers in the thousands, this appears unlikely.

Moreover, the token shown here, which reads Machine – 109 on obverse and Good For Five (with plain numeral 5) In Trade on reverse, could lead one to conclude that numbers were associated with machines. But the questions remain: Why? And what made economic sense?



35054  
GOOD FOR ONE  
PACKAGE OF MINTS



TILLITSON SPECIALTY CO.  
AURORA, ILL.  
MACHINES RENTED  
MINTS SUPPLIED



“When [Frank] Costello was questioned about the legality of his machines during the 1951 Kefauver Investigation proceedings, he answered, ‘Ya got mints every time ya put in a nickel.’”<sup>6</sup>

Slots spread extensively over the first few decades of the twentieth century, tempered now and then by on-and-off moral backlashes. Machines and their tokens graduated from pennies and nickels to higher denominations. Vigorous moralists,

anti-mobsters and crusading politicians often led to confiscating and destroying tons of machines and tokens. For example in New York City on February 24, 1934, police raided the Mills Novelty Co. office “seizing 350 slot machines and 30,000 slot tokens. Simultaneously they confiscated 300 machines and 10,000 tokens at the Tru Mint [Vending Company, a front for mobster Frank Costello] warehouse and snapped up 32 slots and 20,000 tokens at the hotel headquarters of Frank’s brother, Edward Costello.”<sup>vi</sup> So many gaming tokens lost forever!

In 1944 the U.S. government decreed it illegal to make or use tokens of the same size or very close to the diameter of U.S. coins in use. “A new style of reverse appeared (probably due to the above law, as most stock reverses were now the wrong size). The new reverse style has the denomination as a large number with ‘In Trade’ or ‘In Mdse’ in a superimposed panel.”<sup>9</sup> Some examples are shown here:



REGAN BROS.  
5¢ IN TRADE  
Reno, Nevada



KEITH'S MODEL 'T'  
CAFÉ & CASINO  
25¢ IN TRADE  
Winnemucca, Nevada

After World War II there was a resurgence of slot machines, often-times with the law winking or looking the other way. But the use of tokens probably did not follow. Nickels, quarters and dollars were good enough. Cigar stores and neighborhood general stores had become passé, along with their trade stimulators. Suburbs and supermarkets changed our way of life, and anti-gambling sentiment changed the public outlook. Many states passed anti-slot laws. The death knell for slots came on January 2, 1951 when a federal law prohibiting interstate shipment of “gambling devices” became effective. Shipment to states where gambling was legal was exempt, and the rest is history.

## II. American Gaming Counters

The previous section identified gaming tokens as tokens (or checks, as they were often referred to) used in slot machines. In this section, we broaden the definition to include tokens (frequently called counters) from private, non-government mints used in games of chance. The beginnings of gaming counters are lost in



the shadows of antiquity; but some evidence indicates that tokens were used in games of chance in the Roman Empire, and most likely much earlier.

“Originally counters were, as their name implies, small metallic discs used to ‘count’ beyond the limit of one’s fingers and toes. The use of reckoning counters was a fairly well-established practice in the Roman world, ...”<sup>X</sup> Doing arithmetic with Roman numerals was not simple. It is only natural to presume that these counters also were used in games of chance.

“Metal counters were used in parts of Europe from the 13<sup>th</sup> century through at least the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in conjunction with counting ‘boards’ as a reckoning mechanism. It was probably largely during the 1600s that the use of Arabic figures came to dominate the practice of reckoning accounts in Europe,... American counters were issued after this transition period. Consequently, even the earliest known American counters probably served as game counters rather than as counting board counters.”<sup>11</sup> Game counters are intimately tied in with the fascinating history of arithmetic.

As in the previous section, we restrict our use of the name “token” to coin-like metal discs. (This will require some modifications in Part II). Nearly concurrent with the use of metallic game counters, this country also saw the use of chips made of bone, mother-of-pearl, ivory, etc. (also called counters).<sup>12</sup> Which came first, metallic discs (tokens) or non-metallic chips, is probably a chicken and egg question. Both share similar heritage. We review here several early American metal gaming tokens.

“Success” game counters show a uniformed bust of George Washington on the obverse with his name around the rim and a Radiant eye surrounded by 15 stars and the words SUCCESS TO THE UNITED STATES around the rim of the reverse. “Originals of these tokens appeared in 1793, honoring the second inauguration of the president on March 4, 1793. Their maker is unknown but probably they were struck in England.”<sup>X</sup> Photos of these tokens can be found in RS. Yeoman’s Red Book<sup>xiii</sup>, where they are called Medals and state they “are believed to have been made in the mid nineteenth century”. Apparently Yeoman is referring to “Restrikes of the tokens,... made about 1860”<sup>10</sup>.

“Henry Kettle was a button and buckle maker of Birmingham, England at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ...but he also executed the first-known imitations of United States gold coins for use as game counters”<sup>10</sup>. Many of his early game counters used in this country were patterned after 1803 U.S. gold coins. However, he also “copied” an 1805 Eagle (\$10 U.S. gold coin), despite the fact that no U.S. Eagles were struck dated 1805 to 1837. These early game counters did not need to be truthful representations of U.S. coins. Early Kettle counters are quite scarce, with fewer than 200 known for many varieties and far fewer for some varieties. So far we have not acquired any for our collection, but photos can be found in the Rulau-Fuld article.<sup>10</sup>

“Whist counters were a series of British tokens sold at street shops or given away as advertising cards from the time of George III [1760-1820] through the reign of Victoria”.<sup>14</sup> Whist, a popular game during this time period, was a forerunner of Bridge. “...most of Thomas Kettle’s exonomia products issued after the

mid 1830s served primarily as counters for use in the game of Whist”.<sup>15</sup> Thomas was the son of Henry and ran the kettle from from about 1812 to the 1830s or later. “Although Whist counters had been issued prior to... Thomas Kettle, his were probably the first to portray a woman playing Whist”.<sup>15</sup> Some examples from our collection are shown below: (There are many varieties.)



“Cards in left hand, playing a card with right, four counters on table (3 under 1), no table leg shown... two curls in front of ear”. Legend: KEEP YOUR TEMPER<sup>14</sup>



“open collar and puff sleeves at shoulder, holding cards in left hand..., right hand playing a card...”. Legend: KEEP YOUR TEMPER<sup>xiv</sup> Some gilt remains on this token

Also, many varieties have a male player facing left. Some claim they were issued as male-female counter pairs. An example of the male card player is shown here:





Cards in both hands, card on table does not touch border of dots, four counters on table arranged two under two, no table legs show, carpet plain. Legend: KEEP YOUR TEMPER<sup>14</sup> Other side: Young queen head, Legend: VICTORIA REGINA. Almost full gilt (gold-like plating) remains on this token

“Keep Your Temper’ is a reminder to the players – especially to the men – to keep their emotions in check and to abide by the rules of the game”.<sup>15</sup>

Many early game tokens portray the head of Victoria, crowned queen in 1838 at the age of eighteen. Another example – one of many:



Obv: VICTORIA QUEEN OF GREAT BRIT around young head of Victoria.

Rev: Prince of Wales crown and three plumes surrounded by Order of Garter motto: HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENS.<sup>15</sup> Gilt is rubbed off high points on this token.

“According to German law, a woman was not permitted to occupy the throne of Hanover. Consequently, Victoria’s uncle, the Duke of

Cumberland, was granted that position in 1837. It is quite likely that the rider on both the Kettle varieties and non-Kettle varieties of To Hanover counters is the Duke of Cumberland.”<sup>15</sup> A kettle game counter:



Obv: VICTORIA QUEEN OF GREAT BRIT sides of large head.

Rev: TO HANOVER above crowned rider on horseback, sword in scabbard, three-headed short dragon beneath horse, date 1837.<sup>xv</sup> This is a beautiful, worn Kettle piece.

“To Hanover varieties by the firm of Kettle most easily can be distinguished from those by other die sinkers by the absence of a raised sword”.<sup>15</sup> There are many different non-Kettle imitations with drawn swords: large and small dragons, large and small crowns, horselegs up and down, etc., and different obverses. Copying game counters during this time period seems to be about as prevalent as copying slot machines in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To Hanover game counters undoubtedly were take-offs of the British 20-shilling gold sovereign introduced in 1817, with a portrait of the British ruler (starting with George III) on the obverse and portrayal of St. George slaying a dragon on the reverse.

Nuremberg, Germany was the center of token production for a few hundred years, culminating with the Lauer family in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Many game counters that found their way to this country were the product of Ludwig Christian Lauer (1817-1873). An example of German made Whist counters is shown below:



Obv: VICTORIA QUEEN OF GREAT BRIT: around head of queen, WHIST MARKE in small letters under head. Rev: SPIEL MARKE inside wreath..

Definitions of Spiel include play, game, etc., and Marke means money, token or coin. Compositions means to adjust a debt, to facilitate, etc.

Some imitations of United States gold coins made to be used as game counters appear below.

### Half Eagle (\$5) Counters:



Obv: Liberty Head left 11 stars around, SP. MARKE below<sup>x</sup>. Spotted gilt on token



Obv: Liberty Head left 10 stars around, COMPOS. SPIEL-MUNZE below<sup>10</sup>. Dark patina on token



Common Rev: Eagle with shield on breast, COMPOSITIONS-SPIEL- MARKE: around, one star below.

**Eagle Counter:**



Obv: Liberty Head left, eight stars around, COMP. S. MARKE below.



Rev: Eagle with shield on breast, COMPOSITIONS SPIEL-MARKE around, three stars above eagle, and three stars below.<sup>10</sup> Considerable gilt remains.

**And Double Eagle Counter:**



Obv: Liberty Head left, 15 stars around, COMP. S. MARKE below.

Rev: Eagle early type U.S. Double Eagle, IN UNITATE FORTITUDO above, COMPS. SPIEL – MARKE below. Reference nice patina.

This token is a close copy, both Liberty Head and Eagle, of the U.S. twenty dollar gold piece first minted for circulation in 1850.<sup>13</sup> “Die sinking was an infant industry in the United States until the mid 1830s...<sup>15</sup> This was the reason for use of tokens minted in England and Germany. But not all gaming tokens of this era were imported.

The gold rush in California was a rush of people, and a legendary spread of gambling, with inadequate supplies of circulating hard money. Resourceful forty-niners resorted to the use of counters, usually imitations of United States gold, with values determined at the start of the games. “Only a few of these California counters emanated from German sources. Most seem distinctly American in style and were probably struck by several of the brass works then in operation in San Francisco.”<sup>10</sup>

**Gold Miner Counter:** (This example shows pleasing wear which may evoke images of many card games, unlike many of today’s casino “collectibles”.)



Obv: Copy of Coronet Type Half Eagle with 13 stars, dated 1849.

Rev: Gold miner kneeling left, with pick, spade and ore sack. CALIFORNIA above, 1849 in exergue. Horizon shows to left of spade handle; a mountain overtops two hills right background; two palm trees in distances.<sup>10</sup>

**Flag Counter:**



Obv: A so-so copy of 1847 Coronet type Eagle coin, but correct diameter.

Rev: American flag displayed right has 24 stars. CALIFORNIA above, COUNTER below, two stars each side.<sup>10</sup> & 15



*A montage of early card counters and jetons with playing cards and card suit symbols.*

## Summary

So we have early American gaming counters evolving out of ancient reckoning counters at least as early as the end of the 1700s, leading to a variety of types, interrupted somewhat by the Civil War when many tokens were used as substitutes for hard money. This probably led to the ready adaptations of tokens for use in a variety of trade stimulators and three-reel slots by the end of the 1800s, sometimes to evade laws and sometimes to satisfy them. The Gay 90's evolved into the Roaring 20's with a tolerant attitude and use of gaming tokens, even surreptitiously through the depression days of the 30's. Again there was a wartime interruption, when slot machine manufacturers turned to other outputs during the 40's. After the war, gambling sentiment shifted, as it had many times in the past. "A demand for further gaming regulations developed after 1950 when the U.S. Senate Committee for the Investigations of Organized Crime, headed by Estes Kefauver, exposed a gangster element..."<sup>6</sup>

And gaming tokens didn't flourish again until another dramatic event in 1965. This will be part of the history reviewed in Part II.

<sup>1</sup> Alan Herbert, "Coin Clinic," Numismatic News, May 8, 2001, p.58.

<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Bueschel, "Guide to Vintage Trade Stimulators & Counter Games," Schiffer Publishing, Alghen, PA, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Richard M. Bueschel, "An Illustrated Price Guide to 100 Most Collectible Trade Stimulators," Coin Slot Books, Wheatridge, CO, 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Russell Rulau, "Tokens of the Gay Nineties 1890-1900," Krause Publications, Iola, WI, 1987

<sup>5</sup> Jerry F. Schimmel, "The Old Streets of San Francisco, Early Street Names on Some Brass Tokens", Pacific Coast Numismatic Society, San Francisco, Monograph No. 1, 1993

<sup>6</sup> Marshall Fey, "Slot Machines, A Pictorial History of the First 100 Years", Fourth Edition, Liberty Belle Books, Reno, Nev. 1994. (Beautifully illustrated Slot machines and early gaming tokens).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen P. Alpert and Kenneth E. Smith, "Video Arcade, Pinball, Slot Machine and Other Amusement Tokens of North America", Amusement Token Collectors Association, Redondo Beach, CA, First Edition, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Holabird Americana, "Auction #10", Reno, NV., August 3, 2001, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen P. Alpert and Lawrence E. Elman, "Tokens and Medals, A Guide to the Identification and Values of United States Exonumia", Stephen P. Alpert, Los Angeles, CA, First Edition, 1992

<sup>10</sup> Russel Rulau and George J. Fuld, "American Game Counters", TAMS Journal, Volume 12, Number 6 (Part II) December, 1972, reprint.

<sup>11</sup> L.B. Fauver, "American Counters, Part 1, Double Eagle & Eagle Gold", Oak Grove Publications, Meno Park, CA, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Dale Seymour, "Antique Gambling Chips", Revised Edition, Past Pleasures, Palo Alto, CA, 1998 Part I Historical Perspective.

<sup>13</sup> R.S. Yeoman, "The Official Red Book, A Guide Book of United States Coins", 55<sup>th</sup> Edition, St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Melvin Fuld, "English Card Counters, Gaming House Inns, Lottery Pieces, Racing Tokens' Spiel Marken, German Whist, Whist and Other Gaming Pieces", TAMS Journal, Volume 14, Number 4 (Part II), August 1974.

<sup>15</sup> L.B. Fauver, "Exonumia Symbolism & Classification", Oak Grove Publications, Menlo Park, CA, 1982. ♦