

Nevada State Museum Robbery
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It was just another warm August night, the 4th day of the month, in the year of 1952. Two dark silhouettes crept stealthily in the night, quietly traversing their way through the narrow alleyways and streets to their appointed destination—the Old Mint building on Carson Street. Their sights had been set upon the hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of gold and silver treasure housed in the building now known as the Nevada State Museum. Having planned their route carefully, they headed toward their designated place of entry, the exit area of the model mine located in the basement. Blocking the mine outlet were eight feet of two-by-four laggings (lathing) bolted down over the opening. Somehow they managed to remove the lathing, thereby exposing the dark mouth of the mineshaft. With flashlights in hand, they entered the shaft, being careful not to trip on the mine-cart tracks as they quickly made their way toward the treasure they lusted for. One of them picked up a heavy rock and stuck it in his pocket for a later purpose.

After exiting the main entrance to the mine, they made their way to the 1st floor via the wide staircase. Knowing the exact location of the objects of their desire, they proceeded to the first floor exhibition room and then over to the large glass case that contained some of the most coveted coins ever made at the Carson City Mint in its 23-year history, as well as other valuable coins and medals of various countries and mints. As their flashlight beams glided over the items in the case, they were rewarded with the glow of gold and silver gleaming in the light. Soon there was a loud crash as the heavy rock from the shaft was removed from the pocket and hurled at the

glass, shattering it and thereby exposing the treasure to their greedy hands. The thieves stuffed their pants and shirt pockets with Carson City-minted silver dollars, several Carson Mint Trade dollars, a \$20 gold piece, gold nuggets, a specimen of leaf gold, a Philadelphia Centennial Medal of 1876, and 28 rare foreign coins from the Dr. S.L. Lee collection.

Having collected what they had come for, the two retraced their steps, exited the mineshaft without notice, and slipped into the night. The two thieves were never caught and it is unknown what ever came of their valuable stolen booty.

The official estimate of the value of the museum's loss was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars—Dr. Lee's collection alone was valued at over \$10,000 at the time. It is estimated that over 90 coins were stolen in all. Among the most valuable items taken was a pine tree, fashioned entirely from leaf gold—its gold content alone valued at about \$1,500 and its workmanship making it worth many times that amount.

After hearing of the theft, several Nevada residents proved their dedication to preserving the history of their state, and their wonderful generosity, by donating coins from their collections in order to fill the newly vacant holes in the museum's collection. Several of those generous donors included Fred Monteagle, an avid Carson mintmark collector, and Ms. Kathryn Van Sickle, who was a member of a pioneer western Nevada family who were among some of the first settlers in Carson Valley. Miss Van Sickle had inherited several old silver dollars from her great uncle who had been a Carson City Mint coin collector throughout his lifetime. It was those coins that she donated, of which one included a very rare 1872-CC silver dollar in Uncirculated condition.

Through the generosity of the community, within just three months



A high-grade example of the 1871-CC Liberty Seated silver dollar; from an incredibly low mintage of 1,376 pieces.

of the robbery, the museum's coin display case was once again filled with gleaming pieces of Carson City coinage—with the exception of just two pieces—the 1871-CC and 1873-CC silver dollars. In order to prevent a repeat of the recent theft, new safety locks were installed on the coin cases and a watchman was hired to guard the building during the nighttime hours. The coin display was re-opened to the public on Nevada Day, October 31st, 1952.

(Images courtesy of Southgate Coins)