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- SFGate Home
- Today's Chronicle

- Sports
- Entertainment

News & Features

- Business
- Opinion
- Politics
- Technology
- Crime
- Science
- Weird News
- Polls
- Photo Gallery
- Columnists
- Travel
- Lottery
- Obituaries

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- Classifieds
- Jobs
- Personals
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- Rentals
- Vehicles
- WebAds

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- Traffic
- Weather
- Live Views
- Maps
- Bay Area Traveler
- Wine Country
- Reno & Tahoe
- Ski & Snow
- Outdoors
- Earthquakes
- Schools

Entertainment

- Food & Dining
- Wine
- Movies
- Music & Nightlife
- Events
- Performance
- Art
- Books
- Comics

New California quarter features conservationist John Muir

Monday, March 29, 2004
AP Breaking News

JIM WASSERMAN, Associated Press Writer



(03-29) 13:26 PST SACRAMENTO (AP) --

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger unveiled the design of California's new quarter Monday, which shows conservationist John Muir, a California condor and Yosemite National Park's Half Dome mountain on the coin's tails side.

More than 2 billion of the coins will be placed in national circulation in January 2005, said California State Librarian Kevin Starr.

Los Angeles graphic artist Garrett Burke, 42, designed the coin that Schwarzenegger selected from five finalists including images of sun and waves, a redwood tree, the Golden Gate Bridge and a gold panner.

"I'm thrilled with the outcome," said the self-described nature enthusiast, calling Yosemite Valley and John Muir the "real stars."

California's new quarter commemorates the state's Sept. 9, 1850, entry into the United States, and is the 31st 25-cent coin to be unveiled as part of a 10-year, 50-state quarters program conducted by the U.S. Mint. States release their quarters to mark the order in which they ratified the U.S. Constitution and joined the union.

California entered between Wisconsin and Minnesota.

"These three images will show California's wildlife, California's magnificent landscape and our commitment to preserving the Golden State for generations," said Schwarzenegger, unveiling a coin that emerged from thousands of designs submitted between September and November 2002.

Among those who helped winnow those to 20 finalists for Schwarzenegger, actress, director and coin collector Penny Marshall said Monday the three-themed design is a "nice" representation of California, "especially now when our land is being used up so rapidly."

Schwarzenegger, who spent two months reviewing the designs and personally added the condor to the coin as an example of an "amazing comeback," reserved special words for Muir, a Scottish immigrant who first saw Yosemite Valley in 1869 and became

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known as the father of the conservation movement, a prolific nature writer and founder of the Sierra Club.

"Muir has been a role model to generations of Californians and to conservationists around the world," Schwarzenegger said.

Starr called Muir a non-divisive "healing, reconciling figure" in California and similarly cited Yosemite Valley as a place that northern, southern and central Californians all claim as their own.

Schwarzenegger's wife, Maria Shriver, dubbed the coin the "people's quarter."

California's design, like that of other states, replaces until 2008 the traditional eagle that has long graced the side of the quarter. The "heads" side of the coin will continue to bear the likeness of George Washington, the nation's first president.

The 10-year program, in which the quarter's design will change five times yearly, began in January 1999 and ends in 2008. It represents the first change to the 25-cent coin since the 1975-1976 Bicentennial quarter.

The 50-state quarter program grew out of a 1997 law passed by Congress to commemorate the nation's states.

It's one of numerous changes to the 208-year old quarter first minted in 1796. Across the decades it has featured varying female representations of "Liberty" on one side and the eagle on the other. The likeness of Washington replaced "Liberty" in 1932, the bicentennial of Washington's birthday.

The U.S. Mint estimates an average quarter's commercial life at 30 years.

On the Net:

Visit the U.S. Mint's 50 state quarters program at: www.usmint.gov/mint_programs/index.cfm?action=50_state_quarters_program



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