

DRAWN & QUARTERED

The U.S. Mint's newest commemorative quarter, from pencil sketch to history in your pocket

By Morgan P. Yates

Dig through your spare change and chances are you'll find at least one state commemorative quarter. The U.S. Mint first began issuing these coins in 1999—one design every 10 weeks to honor each of the 50 states in the order that they entered the Union. California's quarter, featuring naturalist John Muir, Yosemite National Park, and the California condor, will be issued in January 2005. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced his final design selection this past March, culminating a vigorous discussion over how California's wondrous complexity should be represented on an inch-wide disc.

Submissions were accepted from native-born Californians and current residents, and the winning submission came from Los Angeles graphic artist Garrett Burke, whose wife, Michelle, a longtime coin collector, persuaded him to take part in the competition.

Burke began by asking himself: "What is California?" In his sketchbook, he recorded words such as "nature," "technology," "sunshine," and "diverse state," then drew rough ideas.

"When considering the state quarter concepts, it was more writing than drawing, focusing on ideas and not on designs because we knew the U.S. Mint would reinterpret all finalist submissions," Burke says. Over the course of two months, and with the help of Michelle and their daughter, Katie, then eight years old, he winnowed his bulging sketchbooks into 15 design concepts that he submitted.

There were more than 8,000 contest submissions, from which an advisory committee, chaired by then-State Librarian Kevin Starr, identified 20 finalists, including Burke's Yosemite concept. After much refinement of the designs and consultation between the state and the U.S. Mint, the governor selected Burke's tribute to nature and conservation.

Controversy has inevitably swirled around the design selections for the state quarters. For California, critics asked, why not the California Gold Rush, or the Golden Gate Bridge, or the entertainment industry, or Native Americans? Starr described to the *Sacramento Bee* the problem of settling on a universal symbol: "If you have the Golden Gate Bridge, that is wonderful, but what about Southern California? If you have a 'Hollywood' sign, that is wonderful, but what about the rest of the state? Yosemite doesn't belong to Northern California. It doesn't belong to Southern California. It doesn't belong to Central California . . . it belongs to everyone."

The final design elements—the spectacular landscape of Yosemite, the founder of the American conservation movement, and the awe-inspiring raptor that was rescued from the brink of extinction—are surely significant not only to Californians, but also in the views that others hold about the Golden State. The final design incorporates nature, notable human efforts to save nature from the forces of progress, and a singular yet cautionary success story of those conservation efforts.

When Governor Schwarzenegger announced his choice at the unveiling ceremony in March 2004, he spoke about the ideals that the final design represents: "Here in California, growth and progress and wilderness protection and the protection of the environment goes hand in hand, even though some people believe that you can only have one or the other, but we want to be committed to make it go hand in hand." This balance between conservation and progress might say more about our aspirations than our accomplishments, but that is part of California's broader meaning as well—a message of hope for the future. **W**

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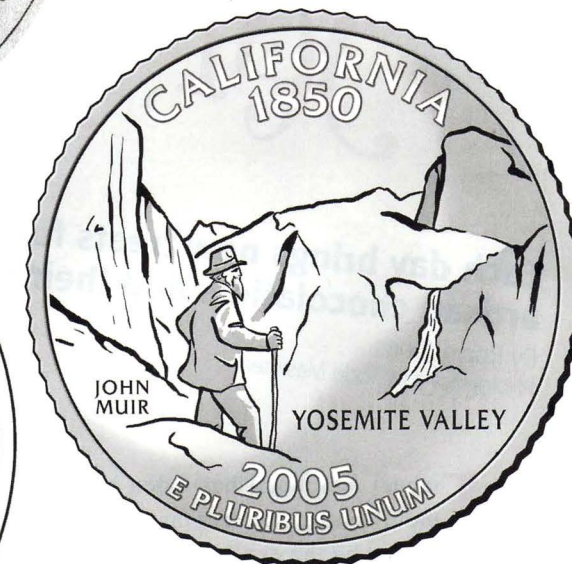
Garrett Burke's sketchbook drawing

Burke's sketchbook featured dozens of concepts, including this first rendering of the eventual winning design.



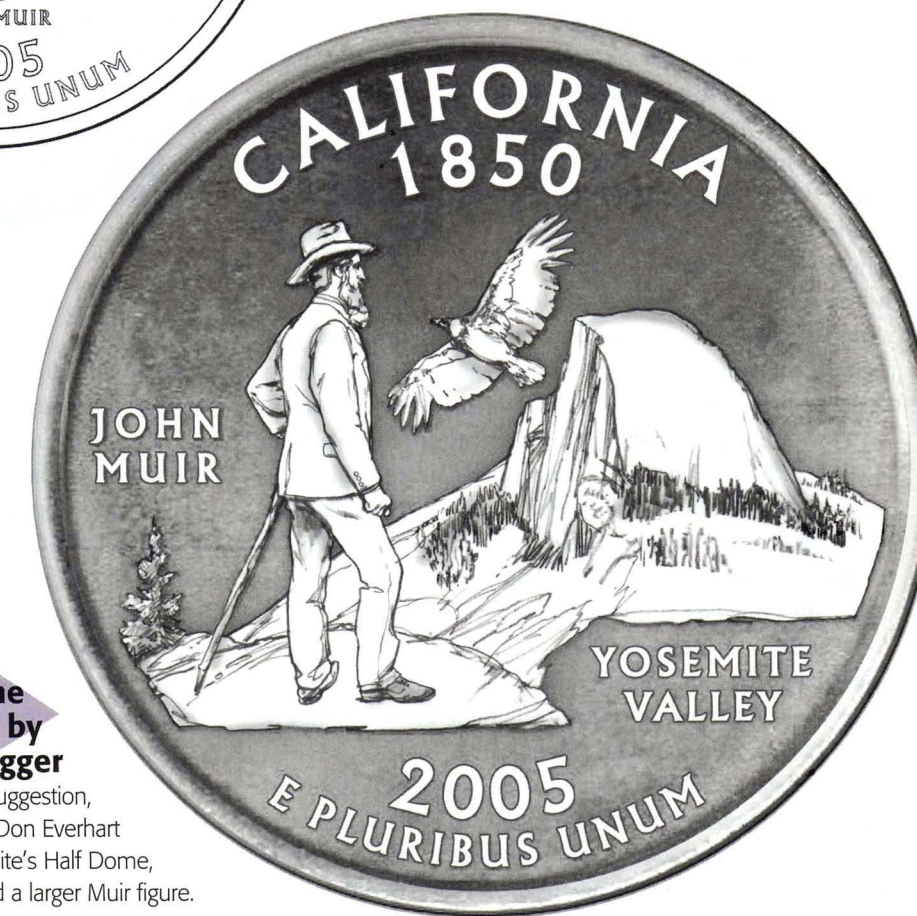
The winning submission

Burke combined two of his initial concepts to create this entry. "The Yosemite idea needed a human element," he says. "The Muir idea was strong but lacked a specific location. It became obvious that Yosemite and Muir belonged together as a single concept: citizen and nature coexisting and enriching each other."



U.S. Mint-revised design returned to Governor Schwarzenegger for consideration

The Mint suggested revisions to the five finalist designs, including the revisions to Burke's concept shown here. Burke believes that Muir would have embraced the addition of the California condor to the design.



Final design, approved by the U.S. Mint and selected by Governor Schwarzenegger

At Governor Schwarzenegger's suggestion, the U.S. Mint's final rendering, by Don Everhart and Al Maletsky, included Yosemite's Half Dome, the California condor, and a larger Muir figure.