The image of the OCTOPUS: six cartoons, 1882-1909

1882

Nob Hill

(Mob Hill neighborhood of the San Francisco powered elite)

Mansion of Charles Croker

(Southern Pacific Railway magnate)

U.S. Bonds

Mark Hopkins & Leland Stanford

(Southern Pacific Railway magnates)

Wine

“Killed by the Railroad Monster”

Mussel Slough

(1880 shootout between farmers and federal marshals over land disputes with the Southern Pacific Railway; climax of the 1901 Frank Norris novel The Octopus)

Wheat Export

Wheat Warehouse

Stage Lines

Lumber Dealers

FREIGHT

The Farmers

Mining

G. Frederick Keller, Wasp illustrator


Reproduced by the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle Park, NC, 2005, by permission of The Bancroft Library, UC–Berkeley.
Forty Nickname for the corrupt New York City officials in the mid 1800s who took bribes for granting exclusive street railway franchises (based on “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” from Arabian Nights).

Baba Character representing the United States (above, draped in a U.S. flag).

Jonathon “Brother Jonathon” was a common nickname for the U.S. before “Uncle Sam” replaced it after the Civil War.

Ali Baba, merchant with three donkeys (monopoly)

William A. Rogers, The Forty Thieves: Baba Jonathon: I don’t like your looks, Mr. Merchant, you had better move on, Illustration, Harper’s Weekly, 17 March 1888

Birth of the “Forty Thieves”

“Forty Thieves” Nickname for the corrupt New York City officials in the mid 1800s who took bribes for granting exclusive street railway franchises (based on “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” from Arabian Nights).

“Baba Jonathon” Character representing the United States (above, draped in a U.S. flag).

“Brother Jonathon” was a common nickname for the U.S. before “Uncle Sam” replaced it after the Civil War.

In January 1899, after years of orchestrated delay in beginning the New York City subway, the issue came to a head. On one side were Tammany Hall and the businessmen who monopolized the city’s street railways — and who wanted no competition from a subway. On the other side was the public demanding improved and less crowded urban transit. When a contract was awarded to one of the companies with no bidding, the public outcry led to huge mass meetings throughout the city. Gov. Theodore Roosevelt settled the immediate dispute (contributing to the Republican leaders’ expelling him from state politics).
“I am in politics working for my own pocket all the time.”

R. Croker

“An English country seat and racing stable cost a lot of money — and he knows how to get it.”

(Croker purchased an 18th-century estate in England, Antwicks Manor, where he kept a stable of racing horses.)

In 1905, the State of Missouri sued Standard Oil for operating as a monopoly in violation of the state’s antitrust laws. Four years later, Standard Oil offered a novel proposal to the State of Missouri — that it form a partnership with Standard Oil to administer the company’s three subsidiaries in Missouri. This cartoon was published the day after Standard Oil’s proposal, which raised suspicions in many observers.