

# Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



# NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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Historical Society Quarterly

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# THE MANY IMAGES OF THE COMSTOCK MINERS' UNIONS

Guy Louis Rocha

There are three Miners' Unions, one at Virginia City, one at Gold Hill, and the third at Silver City . . . [T]hus far, the principal officers and leading spirits of the several organizations have been men of such honesty of purpose and have shown such fairness in all of their demands that there has been no trouble between miners and mine owners.

—Dan DeQuille, *The Big Bonanza*, 1876

The miners' unions on the Comstock Lode are unworthy champions of the labor cause, for they substitute might for right, and place personal interest in the room of justice. There is no question here of self-preservation, but rather of self-aggrandizement, and it is a disgrace to the Washoe district that such despotism should have existed within its limits for fourteen years without one effective revolt.

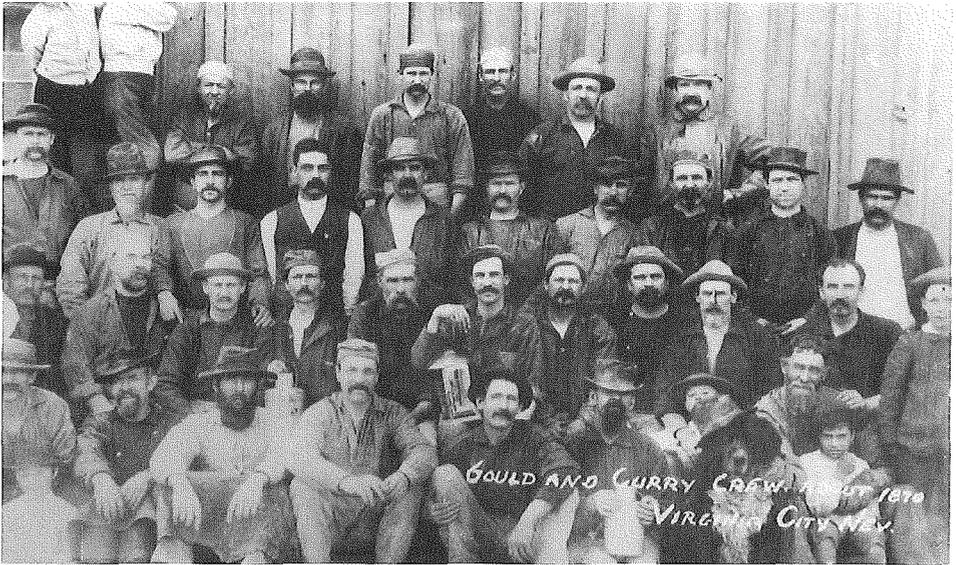
—Eliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners*, 1883

The organizations by which the Comstock miners have maintained wages, have ruled in this respect under all administrations, and still continue to rule, are simply "Unions." At Virginia City, Gold Hill, and Silver City their word long ago became law.

—Charles Howard Shinn, *The Story of the Mine*, 1896

The first miners' unions of the American West were those organized on the Comstock. Four years after the 1859 discovery of the great gold and silver quartz lodes at Gold Hill and Six-Mile Canyon, underground miners attempted to unionize. During the formative period of unionization in and around the mines, disputes between corporate capital and organized labor soon led to confrontations, particularly over the four-dollar-a-day wage and closed-shop issues. Blacklisting by the mining companies and a show of military force, directed by Nevada Territorial Governor James W. Nye against the Storey County Miners' League during the mining depression of 1864, inaugurated a "heritage of conflict" in the western hardrock-mining industry that continued well into the twentieth century.

Guy Louis Rocha is the Nevada State Archivist and a longtime student of Nevada labor history. His writings have discussed not only Comstock labor but also labor disputes in Goldfield and at the Hoover Dam construction site during the Great Depression.



Miners from the Gould and Curry crew in Virginia City, c. 1870. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

While militant in their tactics, the unions of Virginia City, Gold Hill, and Silver City accepted the basic tenets of a capitalistic, industrial economy. The union miners discovered, following their initial setbacks, that the means to power in a locality dominated by one industry was to influence or control essential elements of local government through the ballot and volunteerism—especially in law enforcement, fire protection, and the militia. Beginning in 1868, and for more than a decade, the Storey County sheriff was either a present or past president of the Gold Hill or Virginia City miners' union. Most of the police chiefs of the three Comstock municipalities were either union miners or men who relied upon union support to get elected. The first president of the Storey County Miners' League, William Woodburn, was elected district attorney in 1870. The unions also influenced legislation affecting their interests by electing miners and other partisans to the state legislature and the United States Congress. Woodburn, a member of the Virginia City union, was elected to Congress in 1874 and again in 1884 and 1886. In 1870, James Phelan, Virginia City union president, won a seat in the state Senate, and Angus Hay and George W. Rogers, both of the Gold Hill union, were elected to the state Assembly. Many other union miners were elected to the state legislature in succeeding years. Although union officers were required to resign their positions if elected to public office, it is evident that these men's allegiance remained with their unions.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, the miners' unions succeeded in wresting basic concessions involving wages, working conditions, and union security from the absentee-owned mining corporations because they were able to maintain community support

during times of dispute and negotiation. The business sector, especially, was heavily dependent upon the income of the miners who bought the merchants' products and services. A strike could paralyze commerce, and flood the deep mines by stopping the pumps, exciting the stock market into a selling frenzy. In addition, both the communities and the mining corporations had become reliant on union miners for their fire and militia protection. Absorbing the lessons from their earlier confrontations with mine owners, the unions now pursued coercive tactics directed at management. For example, in negotiating a minimum wage for underground miners in February 1867, a Gold Hill union official none too subtly assured the president of the Imperial Mine that "the Military Co's, Fire Co.'s, etc. of Gold Hill and vicinity were ever ready to protect the property and officials of mines paying \$4.00 per day." Despite the underlying industrial tension, the miners and their unions were an integral part of Comstock social and civic life, sponsoring or supporting numerous public events, the only public library, and a private hospital—Saint Mary's—in Virginia City.<sup>2</sup>

The efforts of organized mining labor in perfecting their unions on the Comstock by the early 1870s established the general pattern of union organization and labor-management relations throughout the mining West for the next two decades. Comstock miners, in search of new bonanzas and job opportunities, exported their union principles to such camps as Bodie, California; Deadwood, Dakota Territory; Leadville, Colorado; Tombstone, Arizona Territory; and Butte, Montana Territory. Almost without exception the new unions adopted the constitution and bylaws of either the Virginia City or the Gold Hill miners' union and with little more revision than altering the meeting day or raising the sick benefit. Few miners' unions, however, enjoyed the sustained level of success achieved by those on the Comstock.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning in the early 1880s, the focus of union activity in the western mining industry shifted elsewhere as the Comstock rapidly declined and a general mining depression settled on Nevada. No longer the Gibraltar of unionism, the Comstock labor organizations, while still a viable force in Storey and Lyon counties and in state politics, found themselves on the fringe of the mining union movement. No representative from the Comstock unions attended the organizational meeting of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) in Butte, Montana—the new Gibraltar—in 1893. In fact, the three local unions did not join the regional federation until 1896, and they maintained an on-again, off-again affiliation until their demise in the 1920s. The remaining union miners and mining companies on the Comstock made hard concessions on both sides in coping with a faltering local industry in the 1880s and 1890s. The four-dollar-a-day wage survived, but at the expense of lengthening the work day to ten hours in the upper levels of the mines.<sup>4</sup>

With the mineral discoveries at Tonopah, Goldfield, Ely, and elsewhere in the state, mining in Nevada sustained a tremendous upsurge after 1900, and brought some new investment and prosperity to the Comstock and its miners' unions.



Union men blocking the entrance to the McGill smelter during the strike of 1912. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Nonetheless, the controversial and sometimes violent activities associated with the socialist-oriented WFM locals in Tonopah, Goldfield, Rhyolite, Ely-McGill, and Manhattan overshadowed the brief resurgence of the Comstock unions. There was a vivid contrast between the socialism of the WFM and its anarcho-syndicalist ally the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) (founded in Chicago in 1905) and the more traditional industrial unionism of the Comstock miners' unions. Viewing this, Nevadans seemingly forgave if not forgot the militancy of the Comstock unions and longed for the apocryphal golden age of mining labor-management relations that they perceived had once existed in Storey County. Commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Virginia City Miners' Union in 1917, former Storey County district attorney and district judge Charles E. Mack, himself a member of the union for forty years, claimed that the "conservatism displayed by the miners' unions of Virginia, Gold Hill and Silver City . . . which should govern all labor unions . . . won the confidence and respect of everyone." Governor Emmet Boyle, who was a native of Gold Hill, graduate of the University of Nevada, and a mining engineer by profession, heartily concurred with Judge Mack in making the closing remarks at the celebration.<sup>5</sup>

The records and other primary accounts of the Comstock miners' unions, however, clearly show that the statements by Mack and Boyle extolling the cordial relationship between management and organized labor were exaggerated and

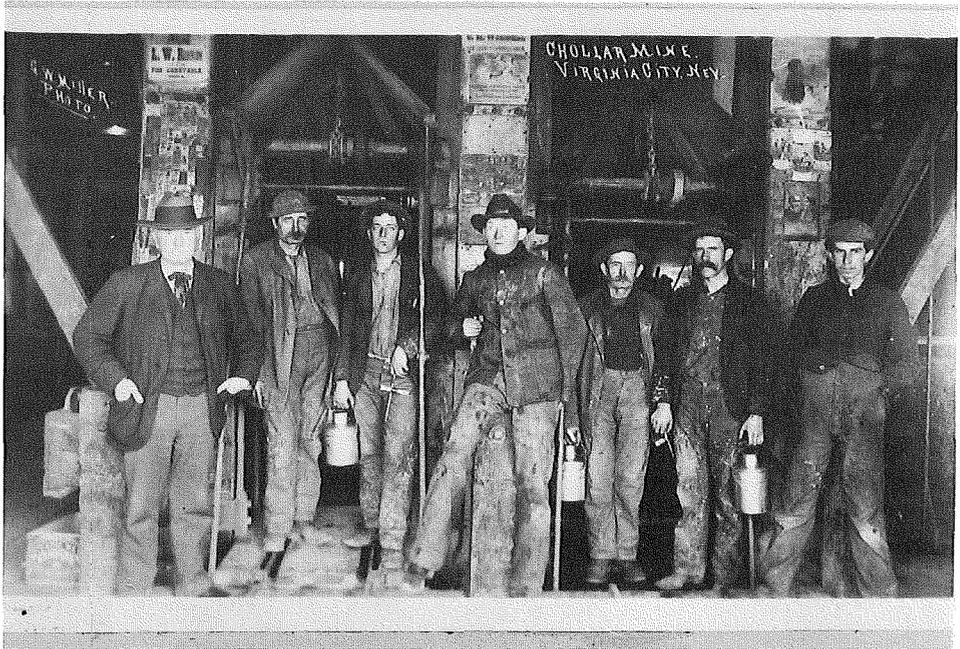
nostalgic. Just the same, the image of the Comstock miner and his unions has been characterized alternately as harmonious and uncontentious, and as despotic and militant, in popular and scholarly works over the last one hundred and twenty years. A review and analysis of the historiography helps to explain the sources and evolution of the disparate images of the Comstock miner and his unions.

While federal troops began occupying southern cities in 1864 at the close of the Civil War, they also marched into a western mining town in a show of force against a newly organized miners' union. Nevada Territorial Governor James Warren Nye, a Lincoln appointee, former New York City police commissioner, and ardent supporter of the North, was opposed to any effort by the Storey County Miners' League to enforce its public notice of September 19 which, in effect, demanded a closed shop in all the Comstock mines after September 27. This union action followed in the wake of an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the mine owners to lower unilaterally the minimum underground wage by fifty cents, to three dollars and fifty cents per hour. Governor Nye, a mine owner himself, hastily dispatched a telegram to the commander of Fort Churchill, Major Charles McDermit, requesting that two heavily armed companies of cavalry be immediately sent to Virginia City. As his communication of Saturday, September 24, forcefully conveyed, Governor Nye was willing to confront the Storey County Miners' League with armed force, and to shoot its members if necessary, in his effort to preserve the peace:

Sir: I am quite apprehensive of trouble with the Miners' League on Tuesday next—perhaps before. They have assumed a belligerent attitude, and have undertaken to coerce the employers into their measures. It must not, it shall not, be done. When this came to my knowledge I telegraphed to General McDowell [commander, Department of the Pacific] to countermand the order for removal of the troops from the fort; hence the order. I have been here from Carson two days, and am fully impressed with the belief that the peace of the Territory depends upon the presence of two companies of cavalry from Sunday evening till Tuesday. I hope you will send them, with plenty of ammunition. Do so, and oblige.<sup>6</sup>

This show of force in late September, and another in early October, substantially contributed to the demise of the Storey County Miners' League. Although no violent clashes occurred between the cavalry companies and league members, primarily because the union had retracted its demand for a closed shop four days prior to the first arrival of troops, the union miners had learned a harsh lesson in labor-management relations. This lesson—that "might is right"—did not go unheeded as the miners of the Comstock organized new and successful unions after the 1864–65 depression in Gold Hill (1866), Virginia City (1867), Silver City (1874), and throughout the mining West in the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Governor Nye's call for troops may be the first use of the military to suppress activities of a labor union in the trans-Mississippi West. Still, many historians and other writers have characterized labor-management relations on the Comstock as having been much more cordial and peaceful than they actually were. Until



The crew of the Chollar Mine in Virginia City. (G. W. Miller photo, Nevada State Museum)

Richard Lingenfelter's *The Hardrock Miners: A History of the Mining Labor Movement in the American West, 1863–1893* was published in 1974, no systematic study had been conducted that closely scrutinized the evolution of organized mining labor on the Comstock. Lingenfelter extended the "heritage of conflict" theme (first introduced in 1950 by Vernon Jensen in his seminal work on the Western Federation of Miners) back to the initial attempts at organizing miners' unions in the American West. Interestingly enough, Lingenfelter overlooked the confrontation between the Storey County Miners' League and the military, and thus the implications of such drastic action on the future of labor-management relations in the region's developing nonferrous metals industry.<sup>8</sup>

William Wright's popular *History of the Big Bonanza* (1876) is the principal source for the mythical image of the contented miner and benevolent mining corporation. This first book-length history of the Comstock, with its many entertaining anecdotes and promotional hype, projected an unqualified positive image of relations between corporate capital and the miners' unions. Wright—or Dan DeQuille, under which nom de plume the Virginia City journalist achieved renown—made no mention of the labor troubles surrounding the Storey County Miners' League in 1864. Referring to the three Comstock miners' unions in 1875, DeQuille wrote that "thus far, the principal officers and leading spirits of the several organizations have been men of such honesty of purpose and have shown such fairness in all of their demands that there has been no trouble between miners and mine owners."<sup>9</sup>

The *History of Nevada* (1881), edited by Myron Angel, helped to dispel the myth of tranquil labor-management relations on the Comstock. As a "mug" or subscription history, it devoted brief space—less than one page—to the development of the Comstock miners' unions. Angel's staff was writing at the time of the Leadville miners' strike in Colorado, which involved the calling out of the state militia by the governor and occurred during a period marked by ugly anti-Chinese demonstrations in the West, inspired by organized labor. These events may explain the article's ambivalence regarding the nature and purpose of the unions. The unions "were on generally good terms with their employers, and in some instances the organizations were approved by [the employers] as giving the mining population a head with which to communicate," it noted, "whether beneficial or not is a question that remains undecided. Like all organizations for especial purposes they are liable to abuse their strength and become in turn the tyrant." By way of illustration, two examples were provided of how the Comstock unions, during the mining depressions in August 1864 and February 1877, garnered concessions from the mining superintendents, not through the use of violence, but rather by exercising a liberal measure of "forcible persuasion."<sup>10</sup>

Eliot Lord, in his landmark study *Comstock Mining and Miners* (1883), protested vehemently against what he labeled the "despotism" of the miners' unions. "The miners' unions on the Comstock Lode," Lord wrote in 1883, "are unworthy champions of the labor cause, for they substitute might for right, and place personal interest in the room of justice. There is no question here of self-preservation, but rather of self-aggrandizement, and it is a disgrace to the Washoe district that such despotism should have existed within its limits for fourteen years without one effective revolt." Writing a history of the Comstock at the request of the United States Geological Survey, Lord challenged the image of amicable labor-management relations. He blasted the absentee mine owners for their inefficient operations and blatant stock-jobbing, but, more important, he roundly condemned any organization that would challenge a fundamental principle of laissez-faire economics and establish an arbitrary minimum wage. Although critical of both the miners' unions and the corporations, Lord singled out the labor organizations as the prime culprits responsible for the Comstock's deepening depression in the early 1880s. The unions' uncompromising position on the four-dollar-a-day minimum wage was leading the once-great "Washoe District" to ruin; he argued that the "partisan guild [who] fix their own wages, brow beat their employers, and exclude other laborers [notably the Chinese] from the district which they control" had far too long overstepped their bounds.<sup>11</sup>

Lord's critical and biting analysis of labor-management relations on the Comstock was unquestionably the most thorough treatment of the topic until the publication of Lingenfelter's *The Hardrock Miners* some ninety years later. Still, despite the fact that most historians of the Comstock generally borrowed liberally from *Comstock Mining and Miners*, they apparently glossed over Lord's harsh criticism of the unions in the chapters entitled "Industrial Conflicts" and "The

Laborers of Washoe." With the exception of Hubert Howe Bancroft's work *Popular Tribunals* (1887), each successive study of the Comstock portrayed the miners' unions in their relations with the owners in a generally positive light, either ignoring the early years of open conflict or attributing little lasting significance to the rocky beginnings of organized mining labor. The histories primarily focused on the unions' most successful years in the late 1860s and 1870s, and emphasized the seemingly peaceful relations between miners and owners without critically examining the delicate balance of power in those years which, on a number of occasions, teetered on the brink of violence.

Hubert Bancroft, writing during the period of the sensational Haymarket bombing and trial in Chicago, considered the Storey County Miners' League a vigilante organization of the lowest order, "which was not always temperate in its counsel nor beneficial to society in its operations." In comparing the Miners' League to vigilante groups, he wrote,

there is a vast difference in the association of the best elements of a community, actuated by no personal ambition and possessing no political aspirations, banding [together] for the support of social morality and good order, for the upholding of law and government in so far as law and government can sustain themselves, but never harboring designs of their overthrow—there is a vast difference I say, between such organizations and the leagues of disaffected laborers, secret political societies, and the coalescing of lawless desperation.

Of considerable importance is the fact that Bancroft justified his caustic assessment of the Miners' League by citing a letter from Governor Nye to John P. Usher, United States secretary of the interior, explaining why he was late in making his report as Nevada superintendent for Indian affairs. The correspondence, dated September 25, 1864, informed the secretary that "for the last five weeks this territory has been in considerable turmoil and commotion, owing to the apprehended raids from avowed disloyalists from California and this territory on the one hand, and the riotous and unlawful proceedings of persons composing what is here called the Miners' League on the other." Nye went on to report that "on two occasions I found it necessary to order out the military from Fort Churchill to the towns of Virginia and Carson to be in readiness to suppress or prevent these anticipated disorders." Ironically, Bancroft appears to have been the only historian aware of Nye's use of the military to suppress the Miners' League. He made no further reference to the "disreputable" Comstock miners' unions in *Popular Tribunals*.<sup>12</sup>

Bancroft's *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming* (1890) devoted three pages of text to the activities of organized mining labor on the Comstock, erroneously claiming that the Miners' Protective Association, organized in 1863, survived to form the basis for the Storey County Miners' League in the following year. The tone of the section is considerably less harsh than the treatment in *Popular Tribunals*. No mention is made of Nye's call for troops to the Comstock or of vigilante groups composed of "disaffected laborers."

## GRAND LABOR-DAY BALL

— GIVEN BY —

# Labor Unions State of Nevada

At National Guard Hall, Virginia City  
Monday Evening, September 5th, 1904

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**TICKETS, (Admitting Gentleman and Ladies) \$1.00**

A ticket to the Labor Day Ball of 1904 in Virginia City. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

The reason is not altogether obvious. Bancroft's assistant, Frances Fuller Victor, writing on her employer's behalf, composed most of the Nevada section of the historical volume. John Walton Caughey's biography of Bancroft pointed out that the acclaimed historian of the West did not write many of the books of history that were published under his name, although *Popular Tribunals* was one of the publications that he actually wrote himself. In Bancroft and Fuller's *History of Nevada*, Fuller wrote that the Miners' League failed because it was undermined by non-union members who "covertly" accepted the mine owners' lower wage, thus "crowding out the four-dollar men, who finally withdrew from some of their least tenable positions, and the league was finally dissolved." Despite the fact that only one sentence and a footnote were devoted to activities of the Comstock unions organized after 1865, the message was clear that after the Storey County Miners' League fiasco the new labor organizations maintained the upper hand in labor-management relations. As Fuller wrote in the late 1880s, "the mine-owners had never been able to establish a uniform price lower than \$4, while the miners formed 'unions' to maintain the rate, in which effort they were never defeated."<sup>13</sup>

In writing his history *The Story of the Mine, as Illustrated by the Great Comstock Lode of Nevada* (1896), Charles Howard Shinn apparently did not consult Bancroft's works, but he did rely heavily on *History of the Big Bonanza* and *Comstock Mining and Miners*. In fact, Shinn called Dan DeQuille "the only real historian of the Comstock," which helps explain why he projected an over-all positive image of labor-management relations in the mining industry. Lord's influence on Shinn's study cannot be downplayed either. While Shinn applauded "the remarkable efficiency of the well-fed, well-clothed, and contented miners of the Com-

stock," he also graphically pointed out that "there was never any united effort to reduce wages, so violent and immediate the revolt against the slightest move in that direction, so strongly were the unions supported by the whole community. . . . The Unions held an impregnable fortress." Despite Shinn's hyperbole, he seemed well aware that labor peace on the Comstock depended on a delicate balance of power between the militant labor unions, with their sizeable community backing, and the absentee-owned mining corporations.<sup>14</sup>

Three publications—Carl B. Glasscock's *The Big Bonanza: The Story of The Comstock Lode* (1931), George D. Lyman's *The Saga of the Comstock Lode* (1934), and Grant H. Smith's *The History of the Comstock Lode, 1850–1920* (1943)—made only passing reference to the relations between owners and unions. Glasscock, citing DeQuille, Angel, Lord, and Shinn in his bibliography, wrote just one sentence relating to collective action on the part of the Comstock miners—a mention of the victorious strike against the mine owners' fifty-cent wage reduction in the summer of 1864. Writing this historical potboiler shortly after the New York stock-market crash of 1929, Glasscock was preoccupied with criticizing the mine owners, including the venerated John W. Mackay, for the effect that their stock manipulations had had upon the Comstock economy.<sup>15</sup>

Lyman's popular history was concerned only with affairs on the Comstock up to and including 1865. No mention is made of the Miners' Protective Association, and a chapter devoted to the Storey County Miners' League centered more on describing the rowdy demonstrations against the 1864 fifty-cent wage reduction than on analysis of this labor-management confrontation and those that followed over the next three months. Much of his documentation for the volatile period depended on the *Reminiscences of Senator William M. Stewart* (1908). The autobiography of this successful Comstock corporate-mining lawyer and long-time United States senator for Nevada, written late in his life, is a questionable source of information given Stewart's penchant for exaggerating his role in historical events. After accepting Stewart's version of the episode, in which he credited himself with personally negotiating a wage settlement, Lyman concluded his chapter entitled "Borrasca" with the formation of the Miners' League and a procession of union miners passing beneath the balcony of the International Hotel in Virginia City; there, "Bill Stewart might have been seen to lean far over the railing, wave his hat, and shout—'Three cheers for the honest miner!' " He never returned to the tale, which effectively culminated in the elimination of the Storey County Miners' League from the Comstock with the assistance of Territorial Governor James Nye.<sup>16</sup>

Grant Smith, who spent much of his youth on the Comstock and later worked for a number of the area's mining corporations as their attorney in San Francisco, devoted the majority of his study to the mining entrepreneurs and companies that developed the mining district's mineral resources and manipulated the stock market. The book, dedicated to John Mackay, the revered "Bonanza King," was the first work to assess critically the borrasca years on the Comstock after 1880.



The Storey County Miner's Union marching in the Virginia City Labor Day parade, September 7, 1908. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

His brief discussion of the underground miners totaled less than three pages out of some three hundred. While the treatment is sympathetic, Smith calling the miners "the lords of labor" and "men among men," most of the narrative is dependent on Lord and Shinn as sources, with only passing reference made to the miners' unions and their activities. In mentioning concessions won by the unions, he stressed that generally "there was no violence or any destruction of property."

It is interesting that Smith, born in 1865 at Sutter Creek, California, briefly worked in the Virginia City mines in his early teens before the family moved to Bodie in 1879. He recalled that there was no ceremony or initiation associated with joining the union. Still, he was too young to have known much personally about the early history of organized labor in the mines. The fact that his father was a professional gambler and not a miner also helps to explain why Smith relied very little on family reminiscences in writing about the miners and their unions.<sup>17</sup>

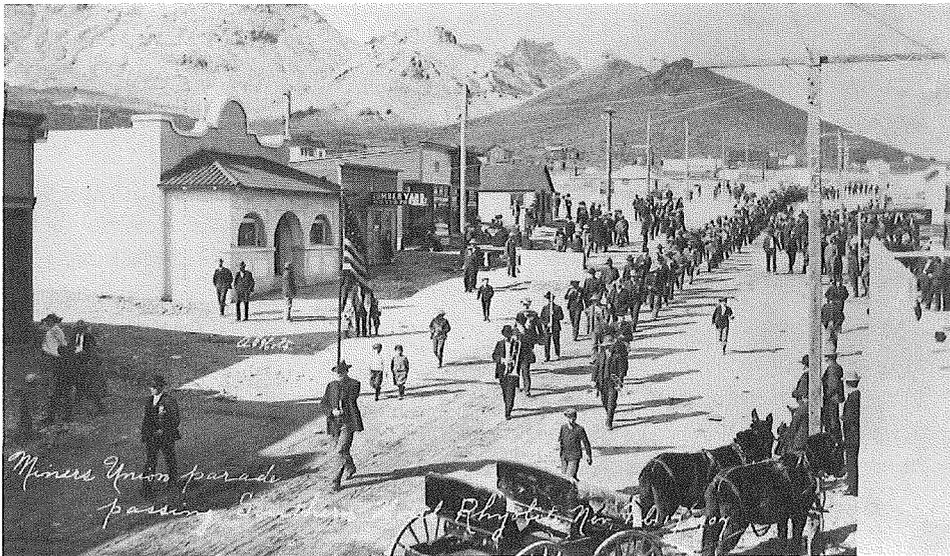
With the publication of *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry up to 1930* (1950), Vernon Jensen, professor of industrial and labor relations at Cornell University, offered an interpretation of labor-management relations in the metal-mining industry that was based upon the assumption that the Comstock era (1859–80) did not contain elements of "belligerence and conflict" between labor and capital in the mines. For Jensen, the roots of the heritage of conflict that continuously plagued the history of the WFM, established in 1893, were to be found in Colorado Governor Frederick W. Pitkin's call for troops and

declaration of martial law following an 1880 miners' strike for increased wages and the eight-hour day. Seemingly unaware of earlier confrontations on Nevada's Comstock Lode, Jensen argued that the events surrounding the Leadville strike would "build up animosities which were to add up to a heritage bequeathed unwittingly to the future."

Jensen's analysis of the Miners' Protective Association, the Storey County Miners' League, and the subsequent successful Comstock miners' unions, while dependent on Eliot Lord's work as a source, does not embrace Lord's sharp criticism of the unions for their "despotism." Instead, citing Grant Smith, Jensen claimed that the Virginia City Miners' Union, and presumably the other successful Comstock miners' unions, "were long a model of vigorous, constructive unionism [and] had a remarkably peaceful life."<sup>18</sup>

Jensen's sympathetic treatment of the Comstock miners' unions reflected his support for the "constructive" industrial unionism practiced by the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW)—after 1916 the successor of the WFM—during the pro-labor years of the Franklin Roosevelt administration. The heritage of conflict in the metal-mining industry of the American West, he argued, had for many years deflected the WFM from the more conservative brand of business unionism practiced by the Comstock unions, forcing it onto a radical path associated, at times, with socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, and the overthrow of the capitalist system. Although the WFM finally abandoned its radical agenda in 1911 when it reaffiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), it took many years for the stigma of the past associations to diminish. "The only basis for good labor relations is humane living, mutual respect, and business-like behavior," Jensen wrote in the final paragraph of his book. "It takes all three in combination to produce the basis upon which to build wholesome labor relations." Jensen presumed that these three essential elements were an inherent part of the collective bargaining process on the Comstock. He failed to discover that the origin of the heritage of conflict in the western metal-mining industry was to be found in Storey County, Nevada Territory, and predated the Leadville, Colorado, strike by sixteen years.<sup>19</sup>

In *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848–1880* (1963), Rodman Paul synthesized the best of DeQuille, Angel, and Lord in assessing the interaction of organized labor and mining capital on the Comstock. Although he relied almost entirely on secondary sources, Paul presented the most balanced analysis of the subject up to the time of his writing. He was mistaken when he stated that the Miners' Protective Association "was expanded into a 'Miners' League of Storey County' a year later." In all likelihood, Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* was the likely origin of the error. In contrast to this, Paul's conclusion that the Miners' League had disintegrated by 1865 "under the twin pressures of blacklisting and of the hard times that so adversely affected employment in 1864–1865" was a reasonable one given his sources. Bancroft's *Popular Tribunals* provided the additional evidence of governmental coercion though the use of the military, which, in effect, had al-



The Western Federation of Miners on parade, passing the Southern Hotel in Rhyolite, February 17, 1907. (Nevada Historical Society)

lowed the mine owners to pursue their anti-union objectives during the Comstock's first sustained economic depression, in the midst of the Civil War.

Paul was also in error when he stated that the first successful Comstock miners' union was the Virginia City Miners' Union, organized on July 4, 1867; in fact, the Gold Hill Miners' Union had been created some seven months earlier, on December 8, 1866. Nonetheless, he openly addressed the issue of coercion as a tactic adopted by the union miners to obtain their demands. Paul, in implying that force, or its threat, was an element in labor-management relations, cited a convincing illustration that occurred shortly after the formation of the Virginia City Miners' Union, when a "'committee' of 300 muscular Miners, 'persuaded' the recalcitrant owners to yield" to a demand of four dollars a day for all underground work. He further pointed out that in 1869 the "competition from Chinese labor was so vigorously opposed" by the two Comstock unions "that there was no further consideration of it." Paul demonstrated that the miners' right to collective bargaining had not been won on the basis of mutual respect between employer and employee but rather after confrontation and coercion on both sides.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to Paul's landmark study, the year 1963 saw publication of a similar survey work, William S. Greever's *The Bonanza West: The Story of the Western Mining Rushes, 1848-1900*. Greever, in his chapter entitled "Life in the Nevada Mines," introduced the reader to the average Comstock miner, but said next to nothing about his unions. Drawing upon the works of DeQuille, Lord, and Smith, he described the stature, age, weight, diet, clothing, and housing of the typical

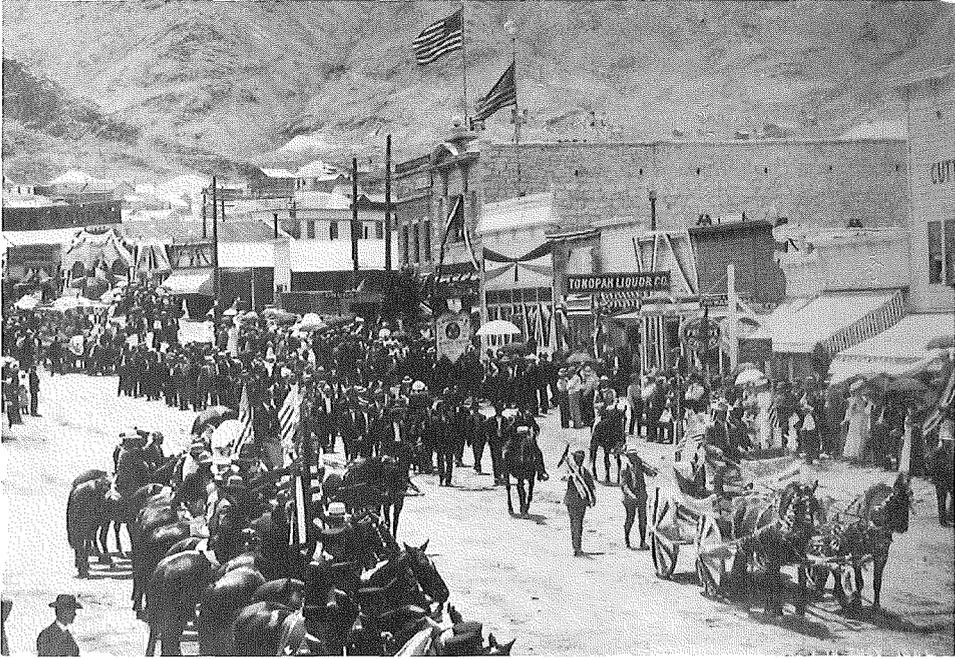
underground miner, as well as the dangerous working conditions he encountered in the mines. Just one paragraph in the book dealt specifically with the miners' unions on the Comstock, and it made reference only to the four-dollar minimum wage being established by 1867, compulsory union membership, and the provision of sick and death benefits by the labor organizations.<sup>21</sup>

Russell R. Elliott provided a short, serviceable overview of the Comstock unions in his college text *History of Nevada*, first published in 1973. Focusing on the labor activity in the 1860s and 1870s, Elliott seems to have relied primarily on DeQuille, Lord, and Paul for source material. He avoided the common error of linking the Miners' Protective Association directly with the founding of the Storey County Miners' League, but, like Rodman Paul, incorrectly claimed in his first edition that "the miners at Virginia City were the first to form a successful labor organization."

In analyzing the events surrounding the demise of the Miners' League, Elliott suggested that the setback for mining unionism on the Comstock was "apparently more the result of hard times than any antilabor sentiment among the owners." He apparently downplayed Lord and Paul's references to the owners' surreptitious blacklisting of league members beginning shortly after the union's creation, and he was obviously unaware of Governor Nye's call for troops as recounted in Bancroft's *Popular Tribunals*. Instead, he argued for a cooperative relationship between the unions and the mining companies, much like Vernon Jensen:

The achievements of the Virginia City and Gold Hill Miners' unions in maintaining wages and controlling the camp without a major labor strike are rather outstanding when one remembers that labor organizations were just getting a foothold on the national level at this time. In trying to explain this success one must consider the richness of the ore, the difficulty of obtaining skilled miners, the need for a stable working force (which high wages guaranteed) to exploit the mines properly, the high living costs when the \$4 wage was first introduced, and the moderation of the miners in their demands. Then, too, it seems apparent that both operators and miners took pride in the fact that the Comstock was the model for western mining. It was the richest mineral area in the United States and it contained the best machinery and the best engineers—why not the best and highest paid miners? The operators saw another advantage of a strong union membership; the union, with some company help, cared for the sick and disabled miners and helped to take care of the family of any miners who met death by accident.<sup>22</sup>

This historiographical overview forms a background for consideration of the most authoritative work on Comstock labor-management relations to date, *The Hardrock Miners*, published in 1974. Richard Lingenfelter, a scientist by vocation and an accomplished historian by avocation, utilized both primary and secondary sources to document the activities of hardrock miners' unions in the American West between 1863 and 1893. Nearly half the book is devoted to activities of the Nevada unions established in Gold Hill, Virginia City, and Silver City, and Lingenfelter has offered considerable evidence of the use of armed force and coercion



Local 121 of the Western Federation of Miners marching in the Independence Day parade in Tonopah, 1906. They are followed by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

by both mining companies and organized labor in their industrial relations. In addition, he alluded to the union miners' influence in the local militia units, fire companies, and law enforcement agencies as an example of how the labor organizations recognized that their survival depended upon controlling or influencing key elements of local government—something the miners had failed to realize, or realized too late, when they organized as the Storey County Miners' League.<sup>23</sup>

Lingenfelter forcefully conveyed that labor-management relations in the Comstock's mining industry, and throughout the mining West, were characteristically adversarial in nature. His treatment of the 1871 Amador War in California's Mother Lode country, when Governor Henry Haight called out the state militia to suppress a strike against a wage cut, demonstrated that Vernon Jensen's heritage-of-conflict theme could be applied much earlier in the industrialization of the western mining industry. If Jensen had consulted Myron Angel's *History of Nevada*, he would have discovered one of the earliest published references to the disruptive Amador War, as well as the role played by the Comstock's union members in organizing the miners at Sutter Creek. Indeed, a former member of the Virginia City Miners' Union, as president and one of the founders of the Amador County Laborers' Association, had called the strike. At the same time, the president of Virginia City's union and a Republican state senator, James

Phelan, stumped the California mining country campaigning against Governor Haight, a Democrat, who subsequently lost his re-election bid. Although Lingenfelter was not aware of Governor Nye's call for troops to the Comstock in 1864, a significant oversight, he did present the historical community with a new image of Comstock labor and its fundamental role in the unfolding of the heritage of conflict in western mining. He concluded:

Indeed, the tradition of militant industrial unionism, fostered by the early miners' unions, reached its fullest expression in the Western Federation of Miners, and ultimately sparked the radical socialism of the Industrial Workers of the World. From the first labor agitation on the Comstock, the miners had rejected "pure and simple" trade unionism to embrace industrial unionism. Vowing to "boldly defy . . . the tyrannical, oppressive power of Capital," the Comstock unions had lead [sic] the way in organizing all underground miners and demanding a uniform minimum wage for all, regardless of their level of skill. This policy was sharply attacked by trade unionists as well as by the mine owners, but it remained a fundamental principle of the western mining labor movement.<sup>24</sup>

Lingenfelter's study, while certainly the most comprehensive treatment of the Comstock miners and their unions, was by no means exhaustive. Two more recent works, Ronald C. Brown's *Hard-Rock Miners: The Intermountain West, 1860–1920* (1979) and Mark Wyman's *Hard Rock Epic: Western Miners and the Industrial Revolution, 1860–1910* (1979), have greatly contributed to the body of knowledge regarding the working and social life of the metal miner. Although Wyman and Brown consulted many of the extant records of the Comstock miners' unions, the broad nature of their studies did not lend itself to treating labor organizations in any detail.

Wyman, more than Brown, did devote some attention to the Comstock unions. He noted in his chapter entitled "The Union Impulse" that the first attempts at unionization in the mines of the trans-Mississippi West actually occurred in Central City, Colorado Territory, one month before the founding of the Miners' Protective Association in May 1863. While neither organization survived, the union impulse continued on the Comstock. Citing Lord and Lingenfelter, Wyman explained that the Storey County Miners' League failed because, having achieved its goal of maintaining the four-dollar-per-day minimum wage, "the new organization lacked a reason for unity; and when employers began favoring non-League men in hiring, it began to disintegrate." Like every historian and writer on the subject except Hubert Bancroft, Wyman had not noted the devastating effect upon the Miners' League of Governor Nye's call for troops. On the other hand, Wyman broke some new ground in mentioning how the Comstock unions fared after the bonanza years and through the turn of the century.<sup>25</sup>

We can now say that the heritage of conflict in the metal-mining industry began with the Comstock as the first large-scale industrial development of mining in the trans-Mississippi American West and western Canada. As a result of the labor conflict and military suppression in 1864, the Comstock miners' search for power

in combating corporate capital produced a balance of power between the competing interests, based not so much on mutual respect as on the use of force, coercion, volunteerism, and political activity. Just the same, while the Comstock unions perceived the mining companies as adversaries in industrial relations, they did not reject capitalism as a viable economic system, as the WFM and IWW would have. As the unions discovered, the key to power in an area dominated by one industry—where the work force comprised a sizeable number of the total population—lay in influencing and controlling key elements of local government, especially in the realm of public safety and the court system; in maintaining the community's general support, including that of the business sector, which was dependent upon the miners' income; in influencing legislation affecting their interests by electing miners and other sympathetic persons to the state and national legislatures; and in wresting basic concessions involving wages, working conditions, and union security from the absentee-owned mining corporations. In effectively pursuing this type of action on behalf of their rank and file, the Comstock miners' unions left a legacy of success and not of violence.<sup>26</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richard E. Lingenfelter, *The Hardrock Miners: A History of the Mining Labor Movement in the American West, 1863–1893* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 37, 40, 42, 48–49, 54–56, 173; James G. Scrugham, *Nevada: A Narrative of the Conquest of a Frontier Land* (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1935), II, 8–9; *Political History of Nevada* (Carson City: State of Nevada, 1990), 126, 196, 254, 256–57; *Territorial Enterprise*, 7 May 1873, p. 2; 9 May 1873, p. 2; Walter van Tilburg Clark, ed., *The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1849–1903* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973), III, 2103; see also Herbert B. Gutman, "The Workers' Search for Power," in *The Gilded Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), 31–53; Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865–1920* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1975), 29–70.

<sup>2</sup>Eliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 377; Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 48–56, 63–64; Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, II, 985–86, 991, 1224–25; III, 1914–15.

<sup>3</sup>Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 58–59, 66, 130–34. With the assistance of the Gold Hill and Virginia City miners' unions, a Mechanics' Union of Storey County was organized on March 7, 1878, which included all surface workers in and around the mines and mills: mechanics, engineers, and carpenters. This industrial union was last listed by the state labor commissioner in 1924, operating with twenty members. "Second Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor; 1917–1918," *Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1919), 28; "Fifth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1923–1924," *Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1925), 17.

<sup>4</sup>Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 130–34, 157, 180–81, 220–24; Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, III, 1846, 1848–49; Eliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 387–88; Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners*, 387–88; Mark Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic: Western Miners and the Industrial Revolution, 1860–1910* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1979), 168.

<sup>5</sup>Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 63; Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic*, p. 63; *Virginia Chronicle*, 5 July 1917, p. 1; *Political History of Nevada*, 143–44; John P. O'Brien, ed., *History of the Bench and Bar of Nevada* (San Francisco: Bench and Bar Publishing Co., 1913), 110; Thomas Wren, ed., *A History of the State of Nevada: Its Resources and People* (New York and Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1904), 663–64.

On November 6, 1901, Storey County Local No. 114 of the Western Labor Union (WLU) was established. The WLU, an appendage of the WFM, was created in 1898 to organize all workers,

excluding miners, into one union as a direct challenge to the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The WFM terminated its brief one-year affiliation with the AFL in 1897, and by 1902 had embraced a socialist agenda. In the same year, the WLU changed its name to the American Labor Union (ALU) in order to organize throughout the country. After the creation of the IWW in July 1905, and the affiliation of the WFM with that organization, the ALU locals became IWW locals. Thus, the IWW had a presence on the Comstock in the form of Storey County Local No. 114. The relationship between the Mechanics' Union of Storey County and IWW Local No. 114 is not known; however, after the WFM broke with the IWW in 1907, the IWW local in Storey County folded shortly after 1908. Vernon H. Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry up to 1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 59–71; John Ervin Brinley, Jr., "The Western Federation of Miners" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1972), 68–173; *Daily Territorial Enterprise*, 17 February 1907, p. 3.

The Comstock miners' unions, allied with the Reno and Carson City craft unions and the railroad brotherhoods, prevailed upon the 1903 state legislature to create an official Labor Day in Nevada. While Reno had the honor of sponsoring the first official Labor Day celebration on September 7, 1903, Virginia City hosted the event on September 5, 1904, September 7, 1908, September 4, 1911, and September 5, 1916. The tradition of rotating the event among Reno, Sparks, Carson City, and Virginia City appears to have passed from the scene after World War I.

The last listing for the Silver City Miners' Union No. 92 (organized March 14, 1874) by the state labor commissioner was in 1922, with five members; Virginia City Miners' Union No. 46 was last listed in 1923 (organized July 4, 1867), and Gold Hill Miners' Union No. 54 was last listed in 1926. When the Comstock Merger Mines Company terminated operations because of the low price of silver, and closed its cyanide mill at American Flat in December 1926, the era of the Comstock miners' unions came to a close, sixty years after the founding of the Gold Hill Miners' Union on December 8, 1866. "Fifth Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1923–24," *Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1925), 15, 17; "Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1925–26," *Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1927), 21; Stanley W. Paher, *Nevada Ghost Towns Mining Camps* (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1970), 30–31; Brinley, "Western Federation of Miners," 220–21.

<sup>6</sup>*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Volume L, Part II, Correspondence (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 982, 986–87; *Gold Hill Daily News*, 8 August (p. 3), 20 September (p. 3), 27 September (p. 3), 28 September 1864 (p. 2); *Virginia Daily Union*, 27 September 1864, p. 3; Jud Samon, "Sagebrush Falstaff—A Biographical Sketch of James Warren Nye" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1979); William D. Rowley, "Colonialism in Nevada Territory," *Journal of the West* (January 1981).

<sup>7</sup>*War of the Rebellion*, 1002, 1004–5; Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 42–65; Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, II, 811, 940, 1061–63.

<sup>8</sup>Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 226–28; Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 1–24; William Wright (Dan De-Quille), *History of the Big Bonanza* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1876), 340.

<sup>9</sup>Wright, *History of the Big Bonanza*, 340–44.

<sup>10</sup>Myron Angel, ed., *History of Nevada* (Oakland, Calif.: Thompson and West, 1881), 261.

<sup>11</sup>John Brinley's doctoral dissertation on the WFM in 1972 referenced Eliot Lord when he claimed, "[t]hese Comstock miners excluded Chinese and Negroes from membership in their unions." However, Lord does not state that Blacks were specifically excluded from joining the unions (p. 357), and, in fact, the Silver City Miners' Union in May 1879 admitted two African-American miners into their growing ranks. According to an article entitled "Are Negroes entitled to Membership in Trade Unions" in the May 3 edition of Silver City's *Lyon County Times*:

Two negroes are employed in the Sutro Tunnel. As they cannot work there without becoming members of the Silver City Miners' Union, and no colored men have ever been initiated, that body is wrestling with the complex question whether to admit them to full membership, or to simply allow them to work on a permit. The decision will be of considerable interest to the laboring community.

Two weeks later, on May 17, the Silver City paper reported:

The negroes working in the Sutro Tunnel have been admitted to full membership in the Silver City Miners' Union. When they leave Sutro for Virginia, Bodie or some other

camp, they will take their working card with them and be entitled to all the privileges heretofore enjoyed by the most favored Miners' Union man.

*Lyon County Times*, 3 May 1879, p. 3, 17 May 1879, p. 3; Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners*, 181–90, 355–88; Brinley, *The WFM*, 14–15.

<sup>12</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, *Popular Tribunals*, I (San Francisco: The History Co., 1890), 611–12; James W. Nye to J. P. Usher, 25 September 1864, *Report of the Superintendent of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 285.

<sup>13</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, 1540–1888* (San Francisco: The History Co., 1890), 130–32; Hubert Howe Bancroft and Frances Victor Fuller, *History of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981 repr.), esp. forward, by James W. Hulse; John Walton Caughey, *Hubert Howe Bancroft: Historian of the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1946), 262–63.

<sup>14</sup>Charles Howard Shinn, *The Story of the Mine, as Illustrated by the Great Comstock Lode of Nevada* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), 239–58.

<sup>15</sup>Carl B. Glasscock, *The Big Bonanza: The Story of the Comstock Lode* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1931), 150.

<sup>16</sup>George D. Lyman, *The Saga of the Comstock Lode* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 307–12; George Rothwell Brown, ed., *Reminiscences of Senator William M. Stewart* (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1908), 164–65; Russell R. Elliott, *Servant of Power: A Political Biography of Senator William M. Stewart* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), 263–64, 168–75.

<sup>17</sup>Grant H. Smith, *The History of the Comstock Lode, 1850–1920* (Reno: State Bureau of Mines, University of Nevada, 1943), xi–xii, 241–44; Grant H. Smith, Jr., "Early Day Families—Storey County," Nevada Centennial Project, Nevada Historical Society, Reno (1964).

<sup>18</sup>Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 1–37.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 465–66

<sup>20</sup>Rodman W. Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848–1880* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1963), 68–71; Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, II, 940, 1061–63.

<sup>21</sup>William S. Greever, *The Bonanza West: The Story of the Western Mining Rushes, 1848–1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 131–33.

<sup>22</sup>Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 141–44.

<sup>23</sup>Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 31–65, 107–17, 157–59, 180–81, 219–28.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 90–103, 226; Angel, *History of Nevada*, 261.

<sup>25</sup>Ronald C. Brown, *Hard-Rock Miners: The Intermountain West, 1860–1920* (College Station and London: Texas A&M Press, 1979), 90, 148–49, 158; Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic*, 28, 59, 124, 151–56, 160, 168, 173, 179–82, 185, 223–24.

Recent survey works such as Patricia Nelson Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York and London: W. W. Norton Company, Inc., 1987), 97–124, and Richard White's "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own," *A History of the American West* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 280, 288–97, cite most of the later works analyzed in this article; however, their treatment of the Comstock miners' unions in the larger context of organized mining labor in the West is, unfortunately, minimal and sometimes misleading.

For example, according to Limerick, "In the early years of Western industrial mining, workers like those in Nevada did organize unions and workmen's associations, but these cooperative groups served most often as mutual aid societies. Rather than seek power through strikes, the early unions tried to compensate for an inappropriate legal code, one that usually held mine injuries and accidents to be the responsibility of the worker" (p. 108).

While certainly concerned with the health and welfare of the underground miner, the Comstock miners' unions were much more than mutual-aid societies. They were powerful industrial unions with a political agenda and were prepared to strike if necessary. Besides securing a minimum wage for underground miners and aiding the injured and the bereaved, the Comstock unions established a closed shop and an eight-hour day, and pursued safety legislation in the late 1860s and 1870s. These unions were clearly the model for virtually all subsequent miners' unions in the gold, silver, and copper mining towns in the western United States and Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>26</sup>Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 227–28.

# “THE CAMP WITHOUT A FAILURE”

## Searchlight, 1903–1909

Bruce Alverson

“The Camp Without a Failure” was the local newspaper’s<sup>1</sup> characterization of Searchlight, Nevada, at the height of its mining boom.<sup>2</sup> Noting in 1905 that forty mines were working without a single failure yet, the editor H. A. Perkins rhetorically asked if there had ever been another gold camp in the world with such a record.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the newspaper proudly referred to itself on its front page masthead as the “organ of the camp without a failure.” Although ultimately not immune to failure, Searchlight was a successful mining district for several years and contributed significantly to the early growth of southern Nevada.

Like Las Vegas, Searchlight was then a relatively new town. G. F. Colton had discovered gold on May 6, 1897, in an outcropping that later became the Duplex Mine.<sup>4</sup> The discovery of additional deposits led miners to form a district on July 20, 1898,<sup>5</sup> and by October a camp complete with a post office emerged in the district three quarters of a mile west of the present townsite. Reports of even more strikes sparked a minor rush into the area that winter.<sup>6</sup>

The famed Quartette Mine was almost a costly failure. In 1897, Colonel C. A. Hopkins happened into a friend’s office in Boston and expressed interest in buying a mining property just north of Needles, California, offered by a promoter named F. W. Dunn. When Hopkins later decided to visit the site, Dunn realized that his option on the property had lapsed, and he began hustling for something else to show Hopkins. Dunn contacted a local prospector, John C. Swickard, and agreed to pay him \$1.00 for each mining claim he located. Swickard began finding numerous deposits of low grade ore until Dunn finally halted the sales. Two of Dunn’s claims, however, constituted the main holdings of the Quartette Mine that Hopkins ultimately bought. Hopkins and associates formed the Quartette Mining Company, which purchased the property in 1899. After sinking an unsuccessful shaft to the 300-foot level, Dunn, then the mine’s resident agent, ordered the foreman to stop drilling because the company did not want to put additional money into it. However, the foreman refused, telling Dunn “politely but firmly” that he took orders only from the superintendent, who was out of town. Dunn

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The headworks at the Quartette Mine in Searchlight. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

wired the superintendent late that night and ordered him to close the mine, but because of transportation problems the superintendent could not get back to town for four days. In the meantime, he wired two words to the mine: “Crosscut South.” By the time the superintendent reached the mine, rich ore had been encountered in the crosscut and the boom was on.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Quartette ultimately became the district’s largest bonanza. Between 1899 and 1911 it accounted for \$2.2 million in ore—almost half of the district’s total production.<sup>8</sup>

Other nearby mines also had interesting origins. The discoverer of the Great Blossom Mine, George Butts, lived in poverty for more than a year in a hut built on the property. Butts tenaciously held out for his \$25,000 asking price; three days after finally getting it, he died. The Cyrus Noble Mine was originally sold for a cigar and named for the brand of whiskey with which it was christened. And in a rare stroke, a prospecting tailor named Miess located the Pompeii Mines and a few months later sold them for \$35,000.<sup>9</sup>

Even the town’s name—Searchlight—boasts interesting roots. One story has it that when Colton first stumbled into the outcroppings, he said to his companion, “If there is any gold in this rock, it would take a searchlight to find it.” Another version claims that when Colton was filling out the location notice and reached the point that required supplying a name, the label on a box of matches caught his eye, and the brand name was selected.<sup>10</sup> Still another variant refers to a man named Lloyd Searchlight.<sup>11</sup>

As mining properties developed, so did the need for a town. In southern Nevada, as elsewhere, the isolation of desert mining camps required a communal support system of housing, transportation, and utilities built at a cost supportable by the value of the unprocessed ore. District promotion was critical to all of these efforts. For this reason, Searchlight unabashedly referred to itself as the “camp without a failure” in an effort to broadcast its prosperity, real or imagined, to the world and secure capital and population. In this it succeeded for more than a decade; this essay examines Searchlight’s flush times and its eventual decline during the period 1903–1909.

Labor was crucial to developing the mines, and union militancy threatened the town’s early survival. A costly strike almost short-circuited Searchlight’s boom only six years into its life. The controversy centered around hours and wages. The turn-of-the-century national movement for an eight-hour day—a goal embraced by the powerful Western Federation of Miners (WFM)—was the culprit behind the Searchlight conflict. In the early 1900s, many states enacted legislation restricting the number of hours worked in certain types of occupations. Nevada followed this trend on February 23, 1903, when its legislature approved an act that limited to an eight-hour day all those who worked in underground mines, smelters, and institutions for the reduction or refining of ores or metals.

This reform met resistance from employees in new boom camps like Searchlight. On June 1, 1903, the Quartette Mining Company posted notice that nine hours of labor would be required of all employees not covered by the recently enacted eight-hour-day statute. Although only three men were affected by this decision, the Searchlight Miners’ Union immediately declared a strike as a matter of principle. The Duplex and Good Hope Mines also closed; although neither had worked employees longer than eight hours, they immediately announced that surface men would start working nine-hour days to keep pace with the Quartette. Wages were a secondary issue, but since money was a continual source of discontent, the union favored arbitration to secure a rate for at least one year. And, in a show of good faith, the union allowed the Quartette to employ four men to work the pumps at the lower levels to avoid flooding and damage.<sup>12</sup> But management was in no mood to bargain.

Once the miners struck, the owners and managers immediately retreated to Los Angeles offices and announced they would not meet with union representatives. The *Bulletin* soundly condemned this response, concluding that it was the companies’ intention to create an issue to discredit the union. The WFM announced that it had ample funds to support the local union for an indefinite period of time. The mine owners countered with a new policy inviting nonunion men to apply for jobs.<sup>13</sup>

Despite initial pledges that the strike would be peaceful, there were rumors of shootings and dynamiting of mine property, soon followed by whispers that respectable miners and their families were leaving the area to seek employment in Arizona. The remaining miners, these propagandists suggested, were the tough

element who always engaged in strikes and disturbances. In response, the *Bulletin* printed a scathing editorial attacking the irresponsibility of those who perpetuated the rumors, insisting not only that the comments were untrue but that the strike was being conducted in a peaceful, orderly manner.<sup>14</sup>

In August, a committee of businessmen met with the Searchlight Miners' Union and requested a conference with the mine owners in "the hope that we, acting as an unbiased third party, might be the means of starting negotiations." The Quartette, speaking for all the companies, announced that it would resume mining operations only if the prestrike hours were retained.<sup>15</sup>

Reinforcing this stand, the Quartette advertised for "non-union miners" in September and, within weeks, had hired enough labor to reopen its property. The union stationed pickets at the surrounding rail terminals and appealed to unions in Los Angeles and San Francisco to keep their workers away from Searchlight until the strike was settled. At one point, the union learned of the arrival of scabs and sent a delegation to intercept them, but the county sheriff and his deputies intervened to ensure the safety of the nonunion workers. By the first week of October, all three of the major mines were in full operation with nonunion men, and the strike had effectively been broken. In fact, the Quartette not only had sufficient labor to keep its ten-stamp mill supplied with ore, but was considering adding a second shift.<sup>16</sup>

The community was taking a different view toward the strike by October as well. The *Bulletin* noted that the community was caught between two forces which were "crushing the life out of the businessmen who had been operating at a loss for the four-month duration of the strike." By month's end, the Quartette announced its intention to open its own store and erect a bunk house and cottages on the mine property to house its workers. Insisting that it did not intend to compete with town merchants, the company stated that the labor troubles had made these changes necessary. The *Bulletin* quickly denounced the move, characterizing it as a boycott against the town's prounion merchants.<sup>17</sup> In effect, the editor reasoned, the mining companies were attempting to monopolize much of the town's retail business for themselves. In an effort to head off this threat, the *Bulletin* in November of 1903 called upon the union to end its strike, thereby encouraging the flow of capital back into the district, which would strengthen both union and town a hundred-fold. But the union remained defiant. Sporadic strike activity continued, frustrating the townspeople and prompting the newspaper to complain that the union had completely lost the good will and sympathy of the businessmen and the community.<sup>18</sup>

The strike finally ended with a management victory, which included implementation of the notorious card system. In January, 1905, the Searchlight Mine Owners' Association published a "Declaration of Principles," requiring all mine workers to secure from the association a card stating that they were of "good character." As in the famous Goldfield strike of 1907, this card system was designed to exclude union activists from working in the Searchlight mines. When it



The mud wagon that made the run from Manvel to Searchlight. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

went into effect on February 15, only twelve men in the district quit in protest, and they were replaced immediately.<sup>19</sup> The Searchlight local was never thereafter a factor in mine operations.

If labor turbulence threatened the town's growth, transportation of freight and passengers posed an even greater problem. The normal evolution of a transportation system for a new mining district usually began with the development of pack trails, followed by larger roads for stage and freight lines. After 1900, a road for automobiles might come before the ultimate goal of securing railroad service. The latter came only if the camp or district were successful enough to justify the investment. Searchlight's isolation presented transportation problems common to many mining communities in the West.

Trails and roads linking the community with the Colorado River and nearby towns developed quickly, but rail connections were another matter. The nearest railhead was Barnwell, California (formerly known as Manvel), constructed in 1893 as a northern extension from the main Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe line between Needles and Los Angeles.<sup>20</sup> During the initial years, Santa Fe's tri-weekly train service at Barnwell provided Searchlight with the best link to the outside world through connecting stage and freight lines. H. C. Bartees established the first stage line into Searchlight in 1898 and actually drove the first wagon himself. At that time, "there were three buildings in town, Rose's Cottage,



An early view of the Searchlight business district. Note the Model T's parked on the right. (*Elbert Edwards Collection, Nevada Historical Society*)

Black's Store and Boarding House, and Lunch and Crawford's Saloon." The Searchlight Stage Line provided service over the rough twenty-three-mile route, which took five hours to traverse.<sup>21</sup>

Thanks to the newly invented automobile, Searchlight soon enjoyed faster access to district railheads than its nineteenth-century predecessors. In September 1903, J. R. "Bob" Perew announced the first automobile service to Barnwell from Searchlight. An eight-passenger car powered by a sixteen-horsepower engine and pulling a two-wheel trailer began "regular" service; by November, it had cut the trip to an hour and fifty minutes. In late 1904, the Searchlight Stage and Freight Line was formed and announced the purchase of an automobile to run between Searchlight and Barnwell. The trial run was not a success, however, because the center of the roadway was too high for the car's undercarriage. But the company vowed it would improve the road to allow regular trips. The company kept its promise, announcing in February 1905 that the first regular run to Barnwell "skimmed lightly, over the ground and took the grades with the greatest of ease"; the elapsed time was less than two and a half hours each way, or nearly twice as fast as the stage. By March, the company was advertising regular trips between Searchlight and Eldorado, between Searchlight and Barnwell, and "to the Salt Lake route when the road is running regularly."<sup>22</sup>

When the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad—The Salt Lake line—

opened its new route between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles, connecting service to Searchlight became available at either Nipton or Leastalk (now Ivanpah). In response, Searchlight Stage and Freight Line inaugurated daily stage service between Searchlight and Nipton in May of 1905, coordinating departure times for the four-hour ride with train arrivals. The *Bulletin* recalled that just a year ago Searchlight had only tri-weekly service from a single railroad, but now enjoyed daily service from both the Salt Lake and Santa Fe lines. Given the transportation improvements, Perkins predicted in the paper that Searchlight would host a population of two thousand by the spring of 1906.<sup>23</sup>

Like all mining communities, Searchlight knew the importance of having its own railroad terminal. Passengers leaving Los Angeles in the evening would reach Barnwell at noon, leave by stage for Searchlight at 1:00 P.M., and finally arrive at 6:30 P.M.—nearly twenty-four hours after their departure. Worse still, wagon freight charges from Searchlight to either Barnwell or Nipton (each approximately twenty-three miles) were as much as the railroad charges from those destinations to Los Angeles.<sup>24</sup>

The Quartette Mine first tried to promote bringing the Santa Fe line into Searchlight from Ibex (ten miles west of Needles) in 1901. The proposed route was surveyed but nothing further came of it. In 1904, reports that a freight house and other railroad buildings were rising at Ibex spurred rumors that the Santa Fe was again considering a direct line into Searchlight. Despite the unlikelihood that the Santa Fe would run a line parallel to its existing Barnwell extension, Searchlight optimistically speculated that the company would protect its market from the Salt Lake line, whose tracks came within sixteen miles of the district. Perhaps in response to rumors that the Salt Lake line would build directly into Searchlight, Santa Fe officials visited to study the possibility of building a line there. The two likely options were to extend the Barnwell branch or to build an entirely new line from Ibex in accordance with the old survey. In March 1905, a Santa Fe official returned to the town, prompting Perkins to predict that Searchlight would be a terminal for a new line called the Needles, Searchlight, and Northern; its route would extend northward to Tonopah and connect with Eldorado, Crescent, and other mining regions. By month's end, rumors had the new railroad formed and the final survey completed, with actual construction to begin in thirty days and be completed within ninety days at an approximate cost of \$500,000<sup>25</sup>—none of which occurred.

By summer 1905, Searchlight's transportation system was almost paralyzed by indecision. The mines and community did business with two competing railroads and two competing stage lines. All freight came over the Santa Fe line through Barnwell because the Nipton wagon road connecting with the Salt Lake line was too rugged for big freight wagons. On the other hand, passengers preferred the Salt Lake line because it was more convenient, although the road made passenger service undependable. Because of the persistent railroad construction rumors, freight companies deferred inaugurating new routes into the district, and the

resultant inadequate freight service delayed delivery of local ore to the railroad. The *Bulletin* attributed the problem to the railroad's indecisiveness and the lack of concerted action by townsmen and teamsters.<sup>26</sup>

In November 1905, a new company announced plans for the construction of a narrow-gauge railroad from Nipton on the Salt Lake line to Searchlight. By January, the newly formed Searchlight and Western Railroad had an engineering and survey crew in the field. At about the same time, the Santa Fe finally decided on construction of a branch line from Barnwell to Searchlight. The Santa Fe's policy was never for the company itself to build short lines, but rather to encourage others to build by granting favorable pricing and traffic arrangements. Santa Fe claimed that investors had been found and were awaiting confirmation of the engineering studies. The *Bulletin* reported that despite the Santa Fe announcement, the Searchlight and Northern (formerly the Searchlight and Western) had not called off its survey parties. Thus the district would have two competing rail lines, a prospect that pleased editor Perkins, who reasoned that one railroad from either of the two lines would not materially improve the freight rates, since one road would simply have a monopoly on all of business.<sup>27</sup>

The Santa Fe later reversed itself and announced it would build the branch road from Barnwell itself and without private investment capital, a significant departure from its previous practice. Perkins speculated that Santa Fe executives were concerned that the Searchlight and Northern would siphon off business unless their line took immediate action. In response, spokesmen for the Searchlight and Northern dismissed the Santa Fe threat and proceeded with their own construction plans. However, they confirmed what many observers had assumed, that the Santa Fe had offered them money to cease construction; they continued surveying, however, because their engineers were only five miles from Searchlight. The estimated cost of the road was \$150,000.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, the mining companies watched all of this jockeying with great interest. Colonel Hopkins, owner of the Quartette Mine, provided an interesting view of the situation. Obviously, the Quartette had wanted a railroad into Searchlight for years regardless of whether it was the Santa Fe or the Salt Lake. In 1905, when negotiations with the Santa Fe fell through, Hopkins had aligned himself with the promoters of the Searchlight and Northern. His initial impression was that the Santa Fe was merely bluffing when it conducted a survey from Barnwell, but eventually he, too, confirmed the legitimacy of the branch line with the president of Santa Fe. Nevertheless, he confidently predicted that if the Santa Fe did not build into Searchlight, the Searchlight and Northern would lay its track into town. To be sure, Hopkins preferred two competing lines. He assured readers that there was enough business for two railroads, which was why the Searchlight and Northern would start grading within a few weeks despite the Santa Fe's intention to build into the district.<sup>29</sup>

In April 1906, the president of Santa Fe confirmed that the company would begin work on the new line—the Barnwell and Searchlight Railroad—as soon as

it received estimates of construction costs. The new company filed its articles of incorporation in Los Angeles and planned to complete the road by August or September of that year. In May 1906, construction began in Barnwell. The *Bulletin* covered the work on a weekly basis, but progress was painstakingly slow. By November, the newspaper attributed the delay mainly to labor shortages. Although the railroad imported thousands of men from southern California to build the line, few remained on the job longer than a week before deserting, lured away by nearby gold deposits. To discourage this attraction, the railroad raised wages, but evidently not high enough. Lack of experience and the appeal of gold depleted the ranks of tracklaying and grading crews. Indeed, the timekeeper estimated that more than 7,000 men had been on the payroll during the course of construction, but "today, there may be 300 to 400 men at the several camps and tomorrow the number may dwindle to 150."<sup>30</sup>

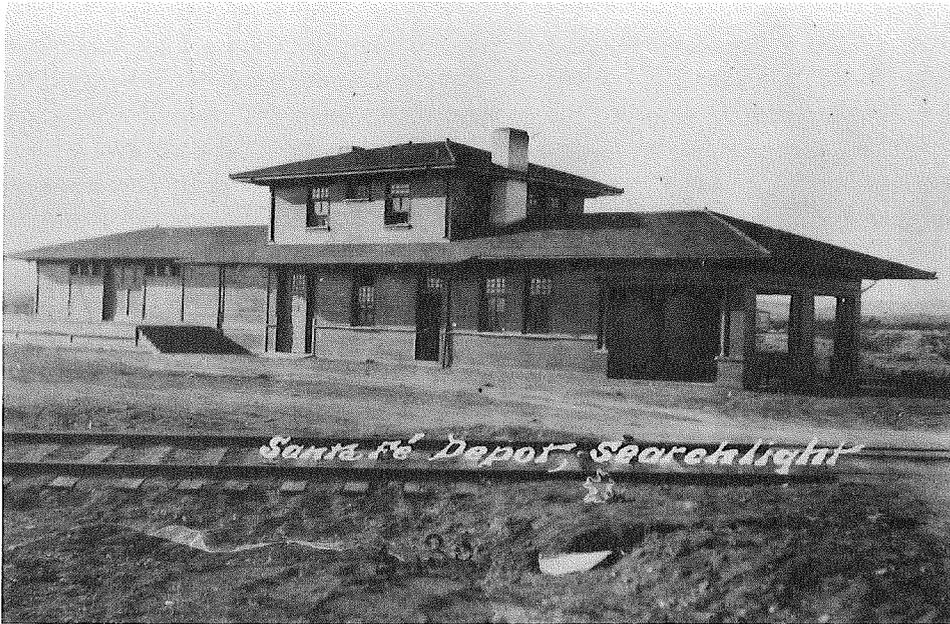
By March 15, 1907, with the track still two miles away from town, the company promised to begin regular passenger service within ten days. Citizens were skeptical. The editor Perkins went out to investigate and returned with a prejudicial view of the Mexican labor force:

When one sees 200 odd Mexicans at work, he understands why faster progress is not made. Wearing peaked sombreros and gaudy sashes, they work in pairs, carrying on their shoulders ties ahead of the track layers. With the ties aboard, they scurry down the line at a lively gait; freed of their burden, they come sauntering back smoking cigarettes and chatting gaily.<sup>31</sup>

The company did make good on its promise, however. A special train consisting of two passenger coaches arrived in Searchlight over the new line on March 31, 1907. The first regular train came the following day and carried eighteen passengers—a mere seven months behind schedule. Searchlight celebrated Railroad Day on April 13 with two days of festivities, highlighted by the arrival of three hundred visitors on a special train that comprised nine coaches and three engines.<sup>32</sup>

Train service brought with it exaggerated predictions of urban growth and importance. For example, in a display of unbridled optimism, the *Bulletin* declared in 1908 that the Santa Fe was considering extending its line north of Searchlight, through Eldorado Canyon, and across the Colorado River to connect with Chloride, Arizona—thus forming a complete circle through the mining region. Four months later, it reported a Santa Fe plan to enter the Salt Lake market by extending the Searchlight branch north. The editor commented that while it was "a little early to talk of Searchlight as being an important part on a transcontinental railroad, stranger things had happened."<sup>33</sup>

Despite the initial delight over getting direct train service at last, the location of the Searchlight rail terminal was extremely controversial and triggered long-lasting feelings of bitterness between the railroad and the residents. On Novem-



The Santa Fe depot in Searchlight. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

ber 2, 1906, the railroad established the location of the terminal depot, freight house, and other buildings in an area one mile down the hill from the town, and secured surface rights for a separate townsite near the terminal. Railroad officials insisted that the depot townsite was an addition to the old town, and not intended to detract from it. However, the following week's newspaper carried a "preliminary announcement" for the Searchlight Terminal Townsite Company; it advertised 1,250 lots, a business district immediately surrounding the depot, a plaza, a park and bandstand, and a hotel to cost between \$7,000 and \$8,000. Within a week, angry Searchlight businessmen had found it necessary to place a notice in the newspaper refuting any suggestion that they would move their present businesses to the terminal townsite. After itemizing investments made in the original townsite, they concluded that it had taken six years and more than three quarters of a million dollars to build the present town of Searchlight, which, they declared, was the best place for the town center. The following week only saw the Searchlight Terminal Townsite Company grow more aggressive: its new ad boasted that "the surveyed railroad of the Salt Lake route also terminates upon the townsite property of this company." The November 30 edition of the *Bulletin* printed competing advertisements from the railroad's real estate subsidiary and from the original townsite owners in which they urged investors to purchase land in their respective tracts. Searchlight businessmen emphasized that their location was in the "heart of the town," reasoning that "there's only one Los Angeles and there's only one Searchlight, all others are imitations."<sup>34</sup>

But the railroad exerted all sorts of pressure to gain momentum. In January 1907, an article appeared in the Los Angeles press indicating that Searchlight residents had accepted the inevitable and were moving to the new terminal townsite. A *Bulletin* column by businessmen representing 90 percent of original-townsite property owners repudiated this charge. Perkins declared that despite the irresponsible acts of a few railroad officials, the Santa Fe was prepared to meet the community's needs, adding, however, that if the railroad continued to compete with the town itself, the ensuing conflicts would cut its potential traffic and profits.<sup>35</sup>

By February, most residents wondered whether "the building of the railroad was part and parcel of the railroad scheme" and, if not, "Why wouldn't the railroad be extended to the town's limit?" The Santa Fe replied that the location of the depot had been based upon the necessity to have sufficient level ground for yard purposes. Neither the railroad nor the officials had any interest in the terminal townsite, and the railroad's sole purpose was to secure commercial business. If, however, most shippers petitioned for a depot nearer the established town, the request would receive prompt attention because the company wanted the terminal to be located where it could be most accessible to its customers. The editorial noted with satisfaction that the Santa Fe, finally realizing the importance of town support, had at long last discovered that their branch line was "short on good will and long on dissatisfaction." The paper called upon residents to arrange for a preliminary survey and secure the rights of way for a terminal point suitable to all.<sup>36</sup>

Four months later, the Santa Fe disappointed everyone by announcing that placing the depot within the town limits would cost an additional \$20,000, and that the present traffic did not warrant the expenditure. The station and yards would therefore be built on the town's periphery at a place referred to as Abbotsville—informally named after the terminal townsite's manager. It is of interest that the railroad continued to use the terminal near the foot of Hobson Street—which was favored locally but condemned by the railroad officials as being an impossible grade—until the permanent two-story depot building was completed on October 2. The new facility opened to the public without fanfare. There was a marked lack of enthusiasm from the public, directly related to the bad feelings engendered by its location.<sup>37</sup>

While good transportation links were crucial to a town's survival, so was the construction of basic utility networks. Early camps might rely on a jerry-built water system, but once a population reached the threshold of a thousand or more, townsmen needed to attract outside capital to build elaborate water, electric, and communications networks. Water was essential to any settlement. Searchlight relied on meager springs until November 13, 1903, when the Searchlight Development Company announced plans to sink a well to supply water for local consumption and fire protection. Within weeks drilling crews hit water at a depth of 220 feet. By early October, the well was producing fifteen barrels a day. The

company then installed a 15,000-gallon reservoir to feed the network of mains completed on February 3, 1905. Customers purchased their own water meters for \$10.40 and made their own connections to a water main located in the middle of the street. A growing population and the railroad's arrival required a more extensive infrastructure, and by December 20, 1906, the company had installed an 85,000-gallon reservoir and 6-inch water mains. Six new fire hydrants and the purchase of a 50-foot hose permitted the expansion of fire protection that the *Bulletin* predicted would ensure lower fire-insurance rates.<sup>38</sup>

On July 5, 1905, the newly constructed ice plant "pulled" its first cake of ice. Though capable of making five tons of ice daily, the plant produced only two because the cold storage required refrigeration equal to the remaining capacity.<sup>39</sup>

By 1900 any modern city needed electricity not just to run its ice plant but also to power its mines and light its buildings and streets. Residents took a giant step in December 1905 when the Searchlight Development Company announced plans to construct an electric light and power system. In the summer of 1906 the company ordered electrical generating equipment even though the total number of subscribers was still fewer than five hundred. It was confident that more subscribers would be attracted once operations began.<sup>40</sup>

However, its hopes were dashed by a remarkable series of accidents that delayed arrival of the generating equipment. Shipped from General Electric in June, the first order of equipment perished in a Midwest train wreck. A second shipment of machinery arrived in Oakland just after the great San Francisco earthquake, and was therefore confiscated and installed in that area for emergency purposes. The third shipment arrived in Los Angeles, but several weeks afterward it disappeared as well. Later found, it was sent on to Searchlight, where crews finally installed it.<sup>41</sup>

Somewhat belatedly, in November 1906, the Searchlight Plant and Power Company lit the town, proclaiming that the system worked "beautifully." Initially, the company provided power only from sundown until midnight, but it planned to operate throughout the entire night provided there was sufficient need to justify it. The plant soon ran twenty-four hours a day.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, communication was another vital service that linked remote towns like Searchlight to the outside world. By the twentieth century, telegraph service was no longer enough; towns needed telephone service to attract population. Thus, in November 1905, the Searchlight Telephone, Telegraph and Electric Company announced its intention to establish both a local exchange and a long-distance connection through Nipton to the outside world. It immediately ordered equipment, arranged to install forty telephones for the community and neighboring lines, and signed contracts with the Northwestern Power and Telephone Company for exclusive long-distance service to Searchlight. It also obtained a contract with Western Union to handle its telegraph business in the district. With these contracts secured, the company proceeded to construct its own facility and began ordering poles and equipment. By March 16, 1906, the company completed



Searchlight, Nevada in its days of prosperity. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

stringing the townsite, and the editor Perkins attested to the quality of service and reasonable fees. Indeed, the rental on residential party lines was \$2.50 a month, which was one half the rate charged to businesses.<sup>43</sup>

As the mines, transportation systems, and utility structures improved, so did the general commercial climate of Searchlight. The Hotel Searchlight (originally to be called the Hotel DeRoulet) opened in July of 1905 on the corner of Hobson and Main streets. A two-story structure, it featured nineteen rooms and two baths on the upper floor, while the bar, kitchen, dining facilities, and offices occupied the lower level. Illumination was provided by a fifty-light carbide plant.<sup>44</sup>

Over a corner office in the hotel hung a sign announcing establishment of the Searchlight Bank and Trust Company, which opened for business on August 12, 1905. Limiting its initial transactions to commercial and exchange business, the bank promised a savings department as soon as demand justified it. Perhaps in an effort to reassure depositors about its commitment to sound financial practice, the bank stated that no mining property or securities would be considered proper collateral for loans. In less than four months of operation, the bank had more than 140 depositors and \$30,000 in deposits. By March 1906, its financial statements reflected "a fine increase of business" in all departments, and deposits had increased nearly \$12,000 during the previous six weeks. Reflective of its success, the bank announced plans two months later to erect a two-story bank-and-office building at a cost of approximately \$10,000.<sup>45</sup>

By summer 1905, the community was also enjoying such amenities as "a water works system with mains running throughout the town and hydrants on every

corner for fire protection; a \$10,000 hotel in process of construction; an ice and cold storage plant; telephone and telegraph lines; a bank; a public school building and all lines of business." The Quartette Mine extended the concept of welfare capitalism by building a "fine" tennis court for its nonunion employees. With railroad service and no strikes, commercial growth continued in Searchlight through 1906. Property values along three blocks of Hobson Street reached \$100 per foot. A public library opened in the spring of 1906 with 120 volumes of reading material. The community's isolation also demanded better local medical care. Recognizing the need for a facility to treat injured miners as well as sick residents, the Mine Operators' Association assumed responsibility for founding and maintaining a community hospital on Broadway Street in the summer of that same year.<sup>46</sup>

Commercial and residential development peaked in Searchlight in 1907. The *Bulletin* published an itemized list of "what Searchlight has," which included:

a city water works, ice manufacturing and cold storage, telephone plant, electric light plant, one bank, one newspaper and job printing, three lumber yards, seven hotels, six restaurants, nine saloons, one wholesale liquor, two barbershops, one bath house, four general stores, one grocery, one meat market, one bakery, one gents' furnishings and clothing, two drugstores, one leather and harness shop, one watchmaker, one dental office, three physicians' offices, one hospital, five lawyers, one district recorder's office, one Justice of the Peace, two deputy U.S. mineral surveyors, ten real estate and mines [*sic*], six mining engineers, two assay offices, one tent factory, two liverys, three laundries, three carpenter shops, three stage and freight lines, one paint house, one blacksmith and wagon shop, one school and church, one miners' hall, one cigar manufacturer, one tin and plumbing shop, one wholesale jobber, two wood dealers, one ranch, six mine contractors, one bowling alley, one post office, one stationery store, and 168 residences. . .

connected with the mines or under construction.<sup>47</sup>

As railroad service increased, mining profits, commercial development, and population growth made Searchlight a significant town in southern Nevada, and residents turned their attention to improving the quality of the government services they received from Lincoln County. Pioche, the county seat, was nearly a 400-mile round trip from Searchlight, making land recording, court appearances, and other activities a hardship. Moreover, the northern towns in the county dominated the Lincoln County Commission. As early as summer 1904, Searchlight had decried the lack of representation for southern communities in Lincoln County. Although the *Bulletin* urged voters to stand united behind a southern candidate regardless of political affiliation, the north still dominated. In 1906, the newspaper again complained that while Searchlight had the most voters and paid the most taxes of any community in Lincoln County, it received nothing in return. Perkins asked the people in the south to elect their own county commissioner, explaining that it was a waste of time and energy to complain to officials in Pioche until the south had its own representative on the Commission.<sup>48</sup>

At about the same time, former United States Senator William Stewart intro-

duced a bill in the state legislature to create a new county in southern Nevada, to be called Bullfrog and having a county seat in the district bearing that same name. The *Bulletin* responded that Las Vegas and Searchlight would not benefit from Stewart's bill because Bullfrog would be too far away to service these towns properly. However, Stewart's action helped raise new questions about whether the sprawling county should be divided or should have its county seat moved from Pioche to Searchlight, Las Vegas, or Caliente.<sup>49</sup>

By June 1908 the question of division or removal was hotly debated. Outside of Pioche, the presumption was that removal was preferred, although Pioche definitely favored division. The excessive Lincoln County debt was a stumbling block to those favoring division. The *Bulletin* proposed to move the county seat to Las Vegas because of its central location, and to "let the question of division rest" until such time as the county discharged its indebtedness or its population increased. Las Vegas overwhelmingly favored securing the county seat under either alternative, and Searchlight was inclined to support that option.<sup>50</sup>

In August 1908, a representative of the Lincoln County Division Club from Las Vegas visited Searchlight. He explained that his city would furnish free quarters for county officials for three years, and proposed to apportion the existing Lincoln County indebtedness between the two counties on the basis of their relative assessed property values. The representative further explained that to remove the county seat required the signatures of three fifths of the qualified voters who were also taxpayers; but because the Salt Lake Railroad owned 60 percent of the taxable property, but was not a qualified taxpayer, securing the signatures of all voters in the county on the petition would still be insufficient for removal purposes. For that legal reason, division, rather than removal, was the only solution. Furthermore, the railroad and its principal owner, William Clark, had given "unqualified support of the matter of county division." In December, the Division Club circulated its petition for division. The *Bulletin* reported that most Searchlight residents were noncommittal; although there was little or no opposition to division, neither was there any noticeable enthusiasm for it.<sup>51</sup>

The County Division Bill was introduced in the state legislature in the 1909 session, and during its pendency, Clark's Salt Lake Railroad announced that Las Vegas would host its repair shops. This was significant for the county divisionists because the repair shops and added population would produce a corresponding increase in real and personal property valuations. These in turn would increase tax revenues to offset the estimated shortfall in the new county's estimated budget. With these advantages adding to the south's momentum, the bill passed both houses. On February 5, 1909, Governor Denver S. Dickerson signed the County Division Bill, and Clark County was created effective July 1, 1909.<sup>52</sup>

Even while campaigning for a new county, Searchlight pursued city status. In summer 1907, a committee of the Searchlight Chamber of Commerce investigated the feasibility of incorporating the community. Perkins believed the movement to incorporate deserved the support of every citizen because the "benefits were

# SEARCHLIGHT BULLETIN

SIXTH YEAR

SEARCHLIGHT, LINCOLN COUNTY, NEVADA, FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 1908

NUMBER 25

## WIDELY SEPARATED STRIKES

### Shoshone Strikes New Ore Drifting to East

Face Now Shows Four Feet Which Will Average \$15 to the Ton. As Distance is Gained Formation Constantly Improves

GEN. D. SMITH and E. R. Bowman report making a good strike on their Shoshone group located near Summit Springs, some four miles east of town. Adjacent properties are those of the New Era, Stanley Forbes, Searchlight-Mutual, Quartzite and others.

As noted several weeks ago, the owners have been at work blocking out ore preparatory to making a run with the New Era mill. To this end work has been in progress on the 50-ft. level of the Nevada shaft. This shaft is down 105 feet, but the best ore was on the upper level. Here, to start with, there was a two-foot pay streak, but in running thirty odd feet this has widened to fully four feet and maintained its value.

In addition to the enlarged ore body, Messrs. Smith and Bowman are particularly pleased over the very notable change in the formation. Heretofore practically all the development done has shown a disturbed condition; there has been considerable faulting and the vein itself has been split and riddled with "horsts" of country rock. Now, as distance is gained towards the east, the formation is becoming solid and the various streaks and stringers are uniting.

"My partner and myself feel that we have made something of a strike," declared Mr. Bowman, "the more so for the reason that we not only have a better showing, but also for the first time we have the vein apparently in place. We are confident of a still greater improvement as the drift advances."

When pressed for the average value of the ore, Mr. Bowman at first stated that it was of milling grade, but finally said that it was good for at least \$15 a ton. A substantial start has been made toward the test mill run, but as only the higher grade will be used it will require some time to secure the desired 100 tons.

### New Strike Lewis' Holes

Rumors of Rich Ore Reach Searchlight

Many Local People Leave for New Discovery, Details of Which are Unobscured

The newest strike is reported to be about nine miles west of town and between Lewis' Holes and the East of Rainbow. Unofficial rumors first reported about two weeks ago. As a result by as early as last week yesterday morning parties of men by wagon and horse track began to quietly work out in that direction. The principal color was given by a rumor that certain prospectors had had thoughts well enough of it to slip in there. Also, yesterday morning a prospector who was in town just long enough to replenish his gun box, exhibited some specimens that were of the order of the Nevada and also have repeatedly come from the region about this spring and those familiar with the ground here, so doubtless that something of large order will develop there—whether this is the expected time or not. Incident to the numerous trifles both at this camp and here, which places are nearly on a line with the "Nevada," there has been an increase of prospecting, and on a more thorough order than formerly, and there is general belief that the following season will eventually be dotted with good diggings.

**MACREADY NAMED RECEIVER OF BANK**

Has Only Qualifies and Will at

### Parallel Shoot Rivals First

New Ore Discovered on the Esther Group

Owners Believe They Have Located a Parallel Vein. Many are After Lease

Gen. & Messrs. have added another string of color to their now famous strike on the Esther group, three miles to the north. This time it strikes approximately at right angles to the strike vein on a parallel. The owners think the likelihood of a parallel vein was found about 100 feet westward of the deposit hole and, as before, just barely covered. The parallel vein was found about 100 feet westward of the deposit hole and, as before, just barely covered. The parallel vein was found about 100 feet westward of the deposit hole and, as before, just barely covered.

The owners think they have been successful in making lease, for which there have been many applicants. As now generally known, there is 100 to 200 feet of good ore, making the most remarkable surface showing that has been found in this section. Plans will be the same and scope of the development is advised with great interest by this community. It is known that they will be able to secure a steep mill that is temporarily idle.

The Fitzburg Searchlight, located a short distance east of town, has reached a depth of 200 feet and requires a satisfactory showing in the shaft.

**KIRKBY IS GIVEN CONTRACT TO SINK**

Foreman Maliciously Injured While

### Source of Blossom Ore Body Located at Depth

Continuation of Shoot Which Produced Over \$300,000 is Believed to Have Been Located North from 75-ft. Level of East Shaft

NOT only has the Blossom a new bunch of ore, but likewise it is thought that the source of the surface ore has been discovered. The new ore lies north of the 90 ft. east shaft and is now being followed in and opened up.

Some months ago Manager F. C. Pusey noted a reddish streak making off into the wall of the shaft at a depth of 75 feet, but it was only during the past week that it was investigated. One man was set to work on the small streak, but with such successful result of hole there has been a change for the better, will now the face shows between four and five feet of solid ore which will run from \$12 to \$15 a ton.

Those familiar with the property will recall that the whole top of Blossom hill was a mass of ore. This was practically all extracted and milled, producing \$311,235.08. The hill was honey-combed and the large main steps extended around the hill and into the east shaft. These this wonderful shoot pinched up and a streak, supposedly its continuation, was followed down over 400 feet, but with no material results. Other work was also done in a vain endeavor to locate the source of the rich surface shoot. Finally, the search was discontinued and activities were transferred to the south shaft, sunk on a separate lead, and from which all the ore for the late mill run has been taken.

It now appears that a false lead had been followed and that the shaft crossed the lead where it had pinched between Jones. Mr. Pusey can be quoted as saying that in his belief the riddle has been solved and that the work now in progress will soon reveal a second lease of ore, the value and size of which, of course, would have to be determined first, which would

The Searchlight Bulletin boosts the town, January 31, 1908. (Nevada Historical Society)

countless while the disadvantages were nil." The only significant group to oppose incorporation was the saloonkeepers, who feared excessive taxation and legislation. Community leaders quickly gathered enough support to achieve their goal, and in October 1907, Searchlight officially became an incorporated city. Its first municipal election occurred on November 26, 1907.<sup>53</sup>

A town's transportation, infrastructure, and government reform can all proceed as long as the town's economy continues to provide a foundation for these urban activities. Promotion was especially crucial to the development of small, relatively unknown towns like Searchlight. The local newspaper was vital to this process, and *The Searchlight Bulletin's* Perkins clearly understood his role. In a 1904 column he boldly credited newspapers with attracting more investment money into a district than all other promotions combined. He then berated those residents who benefited from these investments while in turn ridiculing the idea of supporting a newspaper through subscription or advertising. Such people, he argued, "should be forced, if possible, to live in a newspaperless town until they are sufficiently starved out, which they would be," and then they would be glad to "pay a handsome bonus to get one to come in."<sup>54</sup>

The *Bulletin* was an active promoter of Searchlight, through both its editorials and its support of civic groups. The unwavering principle was to express boundless optimism and never report items detrimental to the community. Consistent with this theme, leading citizens in spring 1904 formed the Searchlight Miners' and Merchants' Association and adopted the slogan, "If you can't boost, don't knock."<sup>55</sup>

Various organizations sponsored promotions throughout Searchlight's brief period of growth. The Searchlight Development Company announced an agreement with the Santa Fe Railroad to bring excursions of a hundred or more people to events in the city to promote real estate growth and widen the community's tax base. In February 1906, mining and businessmen organized the Searchlight Information Bureau to advertise the district's benefits throughout the country. One suggestion involved creation of a Searchlight baseball team to compete in Las Vegas, Bullfrog, Goldfield, and Tonopah. The team's uniform was to contain the logo "Searchlight, The Camp Without a Failure," and boosters accompanying the team would root not only for the players, but for the district as well.<sup>56</sup>

Numerous promotional ideas centered around the railroad. Typically, Railroad Day was one of the biggest celebrations in any mining town. An additional proposed attraction to Searchlight's event was a heavyweight-championship prizefight that would bring a class of men to the community such that Searchlight's Railroad Days would be distinguished above all others. The community hoped to attract between 3,000 and 5,000 visitors to the event with the inducement of a reduced round-trip rate from Los Angeles via the Santa Fe Railroad.<sup>57</sup> Nevada's recent prizefight law and the success of bouts in Goldfield and elsewhere encouraged support for the idea.

The completion and inauguration of first-class rail service to Searchlight caused the editor to predict that "capitalists will flock to Searchlight on account of its ease of access and if for no other reason than to enjoy the novel experience." Noting that thousands of tourists annually stopped at Williams, Arizona, and made the side trip to the Grand Canyon, Perkins wondered, "Then why not to Searchlight?" Continuing, he observed that during the previous summer (1905) the Elks had made a special run to the Grand Canyon; he speculated that "special cars filled with heavyweights" would instead divert to Searchlight if the Santa Fe were to give Searchlight just half of the advertising it awarded the Grand Canyon. To be sure, the editor clearly saw Searchlight as a regional tourist attraction, speculating that "everyone wanted to come to Nevada and see for themselves the mines which were turning out millionaires by the wholesale."<sup>58</sup>

In addition to tourist promotions, Perkins had a more practical suggestion for attracting investors: the establishment of special committees. A committee on sanitation would ensure that the town was kept clean, thereby minimizing fevers and other sickness. The town also needed a committee on fire protection, and especially a committee for transportation so as to secure the most advantageous rates, a project that affected not only the consumer but the businessman as well. Most important of all, Searchlight required a mining committee to investigate ways of informing financial centers about the richness of local ore.<sup>59</sup>

Even in the depths of the panic of 1907, Perkins found an opportunity to promote Searchlight. He observed that although the country was exceedingly prosperous, there seemed not to be enough gold to enable people to pursue plans of investment and improvement. The solution to the country's financial woes lay in Nevada's vast undeveloped gold reserves.<sup>60</sup>

But this was wishful thinking. Nevada's resources were no panacea, as thousands of struggling mining towns soon learned. Just as in 1893, towns across the West declined in 1907, and Searchlight was no exception. The Panic of 1907 ended the town's boom: The depression was devastating because the rich ore bodies had already been worked out, and the remaining low-grade ores required additional capital for development. To stimulate the economy, the *Bulletin* recommended a leasing system for the mines similar to those in Goldfield and Tonopah. But this took time. Finally, in February 1908, the first lease was announced, and by November 1909, the newspaper acknowledged that "a fine start has been made in the leasing era." This view reversed the position of the *Bulletin* during the flush times of 1904, when Perkins correctly observed that leasing camps seldom survived for long because the values needed to be near the surface, where they could be quickly and inexpensively mined. To be sure, leasing portended the bleak future ahead. After 1910, lessors replaced the large mining operations of the Quartette and the Duplex mines.<sup>61</sup>

Slowly, Searchlight's mainstay businesses began to close. The Searchlight Bank and Trust Company was a casualty of the depression, declaring insolvency on December 27, 1907. The Hotel Searchlight closed December 18, 1909, and *The Searchlight Bulletin* suspended operations on January 3, 1913. By 1919, trains were operating over the Barnwell and Searchlight line only on Mondays and Fridays, and when a track washout on September 23, 1923, halted traffic completely, train service was never restored.<sup>62</sup>

The Camp Without a Failure met the ultimate fate of all mining communities that were unable to develop stable economies apart from their ore deposits. While the Searchlight shone brightly for several years, it slowly faded into a roadside hamlet illuminated mainly by tourist traffic to Las Vegas and Lake Mohave. Searchlight's contributions to the early development of southern Nevada, however, were significant and long lasting.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The local newspaper was *The Searchlight* until October 26, 1906, when it changed its name to the *Searchlight Bulletin*. For convenience, the paper will be referred to as the *Bulletin*.

<sup>2</sup>*Bulletin*, 26 May 1905.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 April 1906.

<sup>4</sup>David F. Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California*, Vol. II (Berkeley, 1962), 848.

<sup>5</sup>*Bulletin*, 19 July 1907.

<sup>6</sup>Stanley W. Paher, *Nevada Ghost Towns and Mining Camps* (Berkeley, 1970), 280.

<sup>7</sup>*Bulletin*, 8 February 1907.

<sup>8</sup>Paher, *Nevada Ghost Towns*, 282.

<sup>9</sup>*Bulletin*, 8 February 1907.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

- <sup>11</sup>Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada*, 848.
- <sup>12</sup>*The De Lamar Lode*, 13 June 1903.
- <sup>13</sup>*Bulletin*, 26 June 1903.
- <sup>14</sup>*The De Lamar Lode*, 28 July, 18 August 1903; *Bulletin*, 7 August, 28 August 1903.
- <sup>15</sup>*Bulletin*, 28 August 1903.
- <sup>16</sup>*The De Lamar Lode*, 20 September 1903; *Bulletin*, 20 September, 25 September, 2 October 1903.
- <sup>17</sup>*Bulletin*, 2 October, 30 October, 6 November 1903, *The De Lamar Lode*, 17 November 1903.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup>*Bulletin*, 27 January, 17 February 1905.
- <sup>20</sup>Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada*, 842–43.
- <sup>21</sup>*Bulletin*, 10 July 1903, 25 August 1905.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 September, 2 October, 13 November 1903; 3 February, 24 March 1905.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 April, 12 May, 13 October 1905. The name *Leastalk* is an anagram of *Salt Lake*.
- <sup>24</sup>*Bulletin*, 17 November 1905, 24 July 1908.
- <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 February, 10 June, 16 December 1904; 3 March, 10 March, 31 March 1905.
- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 June, 30 June 1905.
- <sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 November, 8 December 1905; 5 January, 12 January 1906.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 January, 2 February, 16 March 1906.
- <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 March, 23 March 1906.
- <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 April, 13 April, 2 November 1906.
- <sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 15 March 1907.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 April, 19 April 1907.
- <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 December 1908, 16 April 1909.
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 November, 9 November, 16 November, 23 November, 30 November 1906.
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 January 1907.
- <sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 February, 8 March 1907.
- <sup>37</sup>Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada*, 851; *Bulletin*, 19 July, 4 October 1907.
- <sup>38</sup>*Bulletin*, 13 November 1903; 1 January, 30 September 1904; 27 January, 3 February 1905; 2 November, 20 December 1906.
- <sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 April, 7 July 1905.
- <sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 December 1905, 14 September 1906.
- <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 October 1906.
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 23 November 1906.
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 November, 8 December 1905; 9 February, 16 March 1906.
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 April, 23 June 1905.
- <sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 June, 28 July, 13 August 1905; 23 March, 25 May 1906.
- <sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 April, 5 May 1905; 23 March, 10 August 1906.
- <sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 February 1907.
- <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 22 July, 9 August 1904; 15 June, 31 August 1906.
- <sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 August, 24 August, 12 October 1906.
- <sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 June 1908.
- <sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 August, 18 December 1908.
- <sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 February, 12 February 1909.
- <sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 August, 11 October, 22 November 1907.
- <sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 24 June 1904.
- <sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 April 1904.
- <sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 December 1905; 23 February, 13 April 1906.
- <sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 October 1906.
- <sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 December 1906.
- <sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 August 1906.
- <sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 31 May 1907.
- <sup>61</sup>Paher, *Nevada Ghost Towns*, 284; *Bulletin*, 16 September 1904; 17 January, 14 February 1908; 5 November 1909.
- <sup>62</sup>*Bulletin*, 27 December 1907, 17 December 1909; Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada*, 854; Richard Lingenfelter and Karen Rix Gash, *The Newspapers of Nevada: A History and Bibliography, 1854–1979* (Reno, 1984), 225.

# THE CHINESE COMMUNITY OF PIOCHE, 1870–1900

Carolyn Grattan-Aiello

The sweeping statement that “The Chinese and other Asians in the United States were persistently and pervasively discriminated against from the middle of the nineteenth century until well into the civil rights era”<sup>1</sup> is not necessarily supported by specific examples of the Asian experience in the West. Historians of the Chinese experience in the West have concentrated on the large centers of population such as San Francisco; the intolerance there of a relatively large Chinese population has been postulated as a valid paradigm for the Chinese experience throughout the West.<sup>2</sup> Case-by-case investigation of other western communities may suggest that the Chinese minority was tolerated within a more complex framework of reciprocity, mutual benefit, and class distinctions. Pioche, Nevada, provides an example for the examination of this thesis.

Few studies of Chinese populations in small Nevada mining towns exist.<sup>3</sup> In 1870 almost 80 percent of the United States Chinese population lived in California; a minority 5 percent, or 3,152, of the Chinese lived in Nevada.<sup>4</sup> The smaller Chinese population in Nevada may have encountered less overt discrimination than did their California compatriots. One of the largest Chinese populations in Nevada in 1870 was concentrated in Virginia City, where studies by George Blackburn and Sherman Ricards reveal that the Chinese lived in an “atmosphere of relative tolerance.”<sup>5</sup>

The Chinese community of Pioche also benefitted from tolerant white attitudes. Tolerated, supported, and provided with opportunities for economic advancement within a complex societal framework, a tiny Chinese community prospered in the small, isolated mining town of Pioche. The Pioche Chinese, accounting for fewer than 10 percent of the total inhabitants at any time during the late nineteenth century, filled “typical” economic niches.

Boom-and-bust silver mining characterized the history of Pioche. Located in the relatively isolated southeastern county of Lincoln, Pioche was almost 300 miles from the nearest railhead during its first years of mining production. The discov-

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ery of silver in the fall of 1863 marked the beginning of Pioche as a mining district; the town itself was laid out in 1868. The federal census of 1870, taken prior to the population boom in Pioche, recorded just 1,142 souls, a population that by some estimates grew to more than 10,000 after the great bonanza strike of July 1871. Miners recovered more than twenty million dollars in ore during the boom years 1870–77, as Pioche attracted gamblers, prospectors, and fortune seekers. But the bust came within the decade, and the population had dropped to 745 by 1880. Although Pioche never died, it did not return to the population level of the early 1870s, when more than half of the people in Lincoln County (which then included all of present-day Clark County) resided in Pioche.<sup>6</sup>

Sue Fawn Chung argues that the majority population of Pioche was “fairly tolerant” of the Chinese for several reasons: “The Chinese in the Pioche area occupied an important economic niche in the community by performing menial but necessary low-paying jobs. They had a good reputation for reliable hard work, were not fond of liquor as some other minority groups were, and provided needed services such as restaurants, laundries, and entertainment centers.”<sup>7</sup> This description of the Chinese would also have applied in most of the other small mining centers of the West. It is implied that the Chinese were tolerated because they filled the necessary menial-labor niche; however, other considerations related to class may have been more important determinants of acceptance.

In their study of Virginia City laundries, Ronald James, Richard Adkins, and Rachel Hartigan argue that “coexistence resulted from each ethnic group’s adaptation to the economic and social environment of the community.”<sup>8</sup> The adaptation of the Pioche Chinese included fitting into certain economic niches typical of

TABLE 1.  
*Populations of Pioche and Lincoln County, 1870–1920*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pioche total population</i>	<i>Lincoln County total population</i>	<i>Pioche population as percentage of Lincoln County</i>
1870	1,620*	2,985	54.0
1875		2,753**	
1880	745	2,637	28.0
1890	676	2,466	27.0
1900	242	3,284	0.7
1910	585	3,489	17.0
1920	595	2,287	26.0

\*Total reflects addition of foreign-born numbers.

\*\*Nevada State Census: *Nevada State Legislative Journals*, Appendix to the *Journals of the Senate and Assembly*, Eighth Session, 1877, 563–613.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth through Fourteenth Censuses of the United States, 1870–1920, *Population Schedules*, Lincoln County, Nevada.



The main street and mines of Pioche, Nevada in 1873. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

the Chinese experience in the American West, but also included utilization of reciprocity and the development of relationships of mutual benefit with the non-Chinese community. Pioche was a community where Chinese could purchase property, operate businesses with a non-Chinese clientele, and participate in local social events.<sup>9</sup> If racism and discrimination inhibit economic and social interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese, then a measure of tolerance is found in the presence of economic and social ties. Similarly, the absence of organized anti-Chinese activity and the longevity of the Chinese within a given community argue for tolerance of that group by the majority population.

Statistical knowledge of Pioche's Chinese community dates to the 1870 federal census, when 22 of the 1,142 residents were listed as Chinese, 5 of them women. The sex ratio, the number of males for each 100 females, was 340 in Pioche, as compared to 605.26 for Virginia City.<sup>10</sup> Although Blackburn and Ricards state that the high percentage (as compared to national trends) of Chinese females in Virginia City was a "result of the urban setting,"<sup>11</sup> in reality, tiny Pioche, with a more equal distribution of Chinese women to men, suggests greater stability. By contrast, the sex ratio of Pioche's white population in 1870 was 1,248.19, as only 83 white women resided among a population of more than a thousand men.<sup>12</sup>

The peak Chinese population for Lincoln County is reflected in the Nevada state census of 1875. Of the 132 Chinese in Lincoln County, most must be assumed to have lived in Pioche, as the boom mining years fell within this time period, and the Lincoln County tax-assessment records for 1875 show all 19 Chinese property owners as living in Pioche. The sex ratio for Lincoln County Chinese in 1875 was 230, again significantly lower than that of the more populous Virginia City.<sup>13</sup>

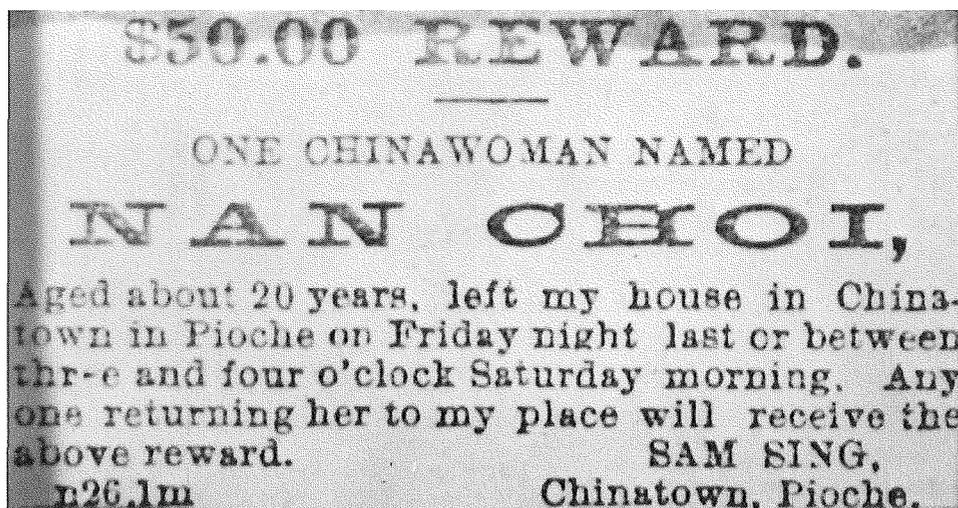
Tax-assessment lists for Lincoln County give a basis for the comparison of wealth as reflected in Chinese holdings of both real and personal property. Asians made up 8 percent of the total tax assessment, with only eleven owners in 1871, the first year to record Chinese property holders. In 1875, almost 15 percent of the total Chinese population was assessed for personal and/or property taxes, as compared to 31 percent of the total non-Chinese population. In contrast, only 5 percent of Virginia City's 536 Asians, and 4 percent of the Chinese in rural Owyhee County, Idaho, reported real or personal property in 1870. These percentages are statistically significant and suggest that Pioche was a city where Chinese could more easily acquire property than Virginia City.<sup>14</sup>

In 1871 Chinese businessman Sam Sing, who was assessed for houses, lots, and a "China Store" on Pioche's Main Street in "Chinatown," also profited from a reciprocal agreement with a non-Chinese resident. Sam Sing owned a wash house and lot next to Johnston's Lodging House in an area of Pioche outside of Chinatown. His agreement to do laundry for the lodging house helped Sing, according to the assessment, become one of the "wealthiest" Chinese in 1871. His name also appeared, with a lower assessment, on the 1888 tax roll. During the inter-

TABLE 2.  
*Occupations of Chinese Males, 1870 and 1875, in total Chinese population  
by Percentage*

<i>Virginia City, 1870</i>	<i>Lincoln County, 1875</i>	
	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Total</i>
18 cooks	26.0	34 laundry
20 laborers	25.0	33 cooks
21 laundering/washing jobs	23.0	30 —
	5.0	6 merchants
	4.0	5 servants
	3.0	4 gamblers
	0.2	2 chophouse
	0.1	1 butcher

SOURCES: George M. Blackburn and Sherman L. Ricards, "The Chinese of Virginia City, Nevada, 1870," *Amerasia*, 7:1 (1980), 51-71; Nevada State Census; *Nevada State Legislative Journals*, Appendix to the *Journals* of the Senate and Assembly, Eighth Session, 1877, 563-613.



An announcement placed by Sam Sing in the *Pioche Record*. (Author's collection)

vening years, Sing had sold a store and wash house to Fang Yuen [*sic*], and also offered a \$50 reward in the local paper for the return of a runaway girl, Nan Choi.<sup>15</sup>

That a comparatively stable Chinese population resided in Pioche is reflected in the age statistics. The 1875 Nevada state census for Lincoln County portrays a young, yet aging Chinese population. The median age for women was 29, for men 27.5. These figures are in sharp contrast to those for Virginia City, where in 1870 the median age of Chinese women was 22.68 and 29.2 for men. Blackburn and Ricards found median ages in Owyhee County, Idaho, to be 31.9 for men and 24.8 for women in 1870.<sup>16</sup> Both the 1870 and 1880 federal censuses for Pioche reflect a statistically small Chinese population from which to draw conclusions about median age.

Historians have contended that a broad age disparity among Chinese in the West favored much younger Chinese women because of their employment in prostitution.<sup>17</sup> Benson Tong's belief that 63 percent of San Francisco's 1870 Chinese female population worked in prostitution is based on the federal census occupation information. Tong states that federal census takers had been admonished to reflect occupations correctly for the first time in the 1870 census.<sup>18</sup> No federal census (1870–1920) for Pioche lists prostitution as an occupation for a Chinese woman, although the 1875 state census identifies seventeen of the thirty-nine Chinese women of Lincoln County as prostitutes; this 1875 estimate that 43 percent of Chinese women were prostitutes is significantly less than Tong's figure for San Francisco.<sup>19</sup>

The federal census taker listed all of the 1870 Chinese women of Pioche as laundry workers, and all of the 1880 Chinese women as married, occupation

TABLE 3.  
*Age Statistics, Chinese Population, Lincoln County, 1875*

Mean age	26.18
Median age	25.00
Standard deviation P.	6.86
Male median age	27.50
Female median age	29.00

SOURCES: George M. Blackburn and Sherman L. Ricards, "The Chinese of Virginia City, Nevada; 1870," *Amerasia*, 7:1 (1980), 51-71; Nevada State Census; *Nevada State Legislative Journals*, Appendix to the *Journals* of the Senate and Assembly, Eighth Session, 1877, 563-613.

TABLE 4.  
*Caucasian and Chinese Populations, Pioche, by Census Year*

	White population	Chinese population	Chinese as percentage of total population
1870	1,119	22	2.0
1875 (county)	2,600	132	5.0
1880	689	56	8.0
1890	676*		
1900	202	13	6.0
1910	576	9	1.5
1920	581	14	0.2

\*Total population; no breakdown is available.

Note: Some numbers may reflect Pioche precinct rather than Pioche city.

SOURCES: Nevada State Census; *Nevada State Legislative Journals*, Appendix to the *Journals* of the Senate and Assembly, Eighth Session, 1877, 563-613; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth through Fourteenth Censuses of the United States, 1870-1920, *Population Schedules*, Lincoln County, Nevada.

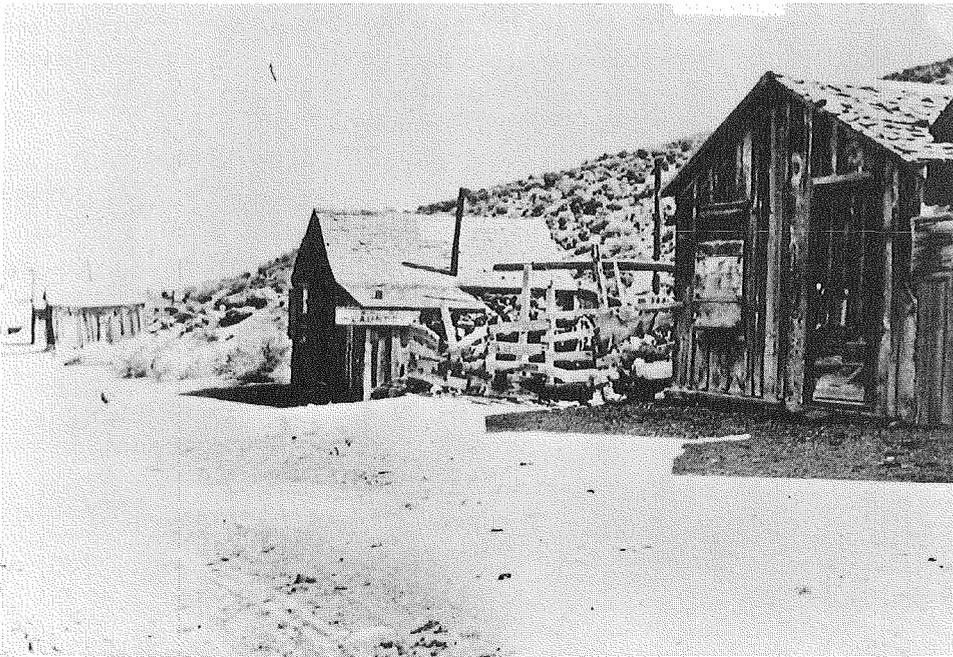
"Keeping House," although these classifications do not exclude the possibility that the women were also employed as prostitutes, or were misrepresented by the census taker. The census taker, probably aware of prostitution in the town, recorded some of the white women of Pioche as hurdy dancer, a euphemism for prostitute.<sup>20</sup>

The Pioche Chinese fell into occupational categories typical of other western areas; laundry workers, restaurant workers, and laborers predominate. Although the Chinese were excluded from work in the Pioche silver mines, some small diversity in occupations is represented in the 1880 census, which includes one Chinese teamster and one barber. The 1875 state census for Lincoln County lists eleven discrete occupations for the Chinese, although several of them are grouped

TABLE 5.  
Chinese Occupations, Pioche, 1880

<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Males</i>	
23 Cooks	45
16 Laundry	31
6 Laborers	12
3 Merchants	6
1 Restaurant keeper	1
1 Barber	1
1 Teamster	1
<i>Females</i>	
5 Keeping House	
Total 56	100

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, *Population Schedules*, Lincoln County, Nevada.



Two Chinese laundries in Pioche in 1907: The one on the left was owned by Wah Song, the one on the right by Wing Hi. (*Lincoln County Museum*)

under laundry work. More than half of the 1875 occupations were related to either laundry or cooking. The 1875 census also lists "gambler" and "butcher" as occupations for Chinese men, two categories not mentioned in the federal census for the Pioche Chinese.<sup>21</sup>

Statistical examination of the tax-assessment rolls provides information on the Chinese population relative to the white community. Table 7 shows the 1888 tax-assessment list, with a larger variance and larger mean for the non-Chinese data set. The highest non-Chinese assessment was more than \$5,000, while the highest Chinese assessment was \$1,520. Both groups show a large person-to-person variance. The T-test reflects statistical differences between the means for the two data sets. The means are not equivalent statistically when the sample size is taken into consideration. Similarly, the Chi Square test of significance on the medians is high, providing for the rejection of the null hypothesis. In a comparison of median data, forty-six non-Chinese are below the median and fifty-five non-Chinese are above. In contrast, only three Chinese are above the median, while ten are below. The non-Chinese group had greater access to individual wealth.

If the 1888 tax assessment for Ong Chong, at \$1,520 the highest in the Chinese group, is removed, the variance drops; but it is still a statistically high variance. When the assessment for Fang Yuen [*sic*], the next highest assessment, is removed, the variance drops again. From other sources it is known that Ong Chong owned a store and Fang Yuen owned a wash house. It is not clear from the assessment list whether the assessment is on the businesses or on houses and personal property.<sup>22</sup> With the removal of these two examples from the tax list the median drops to \$52.50 and the confidence level to 23.86, with a standard deviation of 38, a much more homogeneous population.

The 1892 Chinese tax-assessment roll for Pioche is a more dependable data set, with less person-to-person variance than the 1888 list. Ong Chong is still the wealthiest of the thirteen Chinese property owners in 1892. Both the 1888 and 1892 tax information indicate a much lower value of real estate and personal property for the Chinese community than the 1888 tax list shows for the non-

TABLE 6.  
*Chinese Age Statistics, Pioche, 1880*

<i>Percentage of Chinese population</i>		<i>Mean age</i>	<i>Median age</i>
Males	91	32.17	30
Females	9	17.60	18
		Sex ratio 1,111.0	

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, *Population Schedules*, Lincoln County, Nevada.

TABLE 7.  
Tax Assessments, Pioche, 1888

	Chinese (N = 13)	Non-Chinese (N = 101)
Total assessments	\$3,025.00	\$46,089.00
Mean	\$232.69	\$456.30
Standard deviation	\$408.66	\$716.90
Median	\$80.00	\$150.00
Percentage of population at median assessment	34	33
Variance	180919	519112
T-Test: 0.12		
Confidence level: 95% with two-tailed test		
T-Value: 2.18 df12		
T-Value: 1.96 df100		
F-test: 0.045		
Median test: Chi Square test of significance: 4.6 df1		

SOURCE: *Pioche Weekly Record*, 29 September 1888.

Chinese population. The 1892 total assessed value for the Chinese was \$2,555, only 0.4 percent of the total Lincoln County assessment.<sup>23</sup>

The 1892 tax-assessment lists for Lincoln and Storey counties allow us to obtain a comparative picture of the Pioche and Virginia City Chinese populations. It is important to note that by 1892 the Chinese population of Storey County had dropped to seventeen property owners (the majority residing in Virginia City) in comparison to thirteen in Pioche, although the maximum number of Chinese in Virginia City during the boom years was more than four times the figure for Pioche. This suggests a more stable Chinese community in Pioche.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, there was a more equitable distribution of property among the Chinese in Pioche as compared to those in Storey County, where one person with several properties held 28 percent of the Chinese total. In Pioche, the largest individual holding of real and personal property represented only 17 percent of the Chinese total. Comparisons of the percentages of wealth as reflected in the tax-assessment rolls show that there is a greater probability that statistically the percentages show greater disparity than comparisons of absolute totals. The T-test reflects a statistically significant difference between the means for the two data sets. Both data sets verify that a large amount of the Chinese real and personal property was concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, but the "wealth" was more equally distributed among the Chinese in Pioche.

The median test is a more reliable comparison of the two data sets for 1892. Even though the two means were both affected by extremes of property held by few people, the Chi Square test of significance does not reject the null hypothesis for the statistical difference in medians of the two populations. The median as-



A view of Pioche, looking to the north, in the spring of 1872. The "million dollar courthouse" is in the center of the image. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

assessments of the two groups were not statistically different. The implication therefore is that in both areas of Nevada the conditions for the Chinese to be assessed for real and personal property were similar. A large disparity in "wealth" existed for both Chinese and non-Chinese in Pioche, as compared to a much smaller disparity among the two Chinese groups in different locations.

Comparing tax assessment lists for the Pioche Chinese community for the years 1871, 1888, and 1892 reveals that the relative prosperity of the Chinese community was tied to the over-all cycle of the mining community's boom-and-bust periods. In 1871, the year of the big bonanza discovery, but still prior to the population boom in Pioche, the mean assessment per Chinese was \$209. This figure rose in 1888, fell off during the 1892 depression year, and was affected by extremes in property held by a few individuals. The total number of Chinese property owners increased between 1871 and 1888 while the total Pioche population decreased. The standard deviation and the confidence levels give the greatest confidence for consistency in the 1871 data set.

By 1900 the Pioche Chinese community had shrunk to one woman and twelve men, all seemingly long-term residents, their ages ranging from thirty-eight to seventy-five years.<sup>25</sup> As the wealth of the Pioche Chinese had been tied to the boom-and-bust economy, the longevity of the Chinese residents argues for their over-all acceptance and prosperity within the community. When Hong Bock died

TABLE 8.  
Chinese Tax Assessments, Lincoln and Storey Counties, 1892

	Real estate	Improvements	Personal property	Total
<i>Lincoln County (N = 13)</i>				
Total	265.00	1,290.00	1,000.00	2,555.00
Mean	20.38	99.23	76.92	196.54
Median	10.00	80.00	20.00	120.00
Standard deviation P.	15.61	70.88	105.88	160.76
<i>Storey County (N = 17)</i>				
Total	2,120.00	2,855.00	—	5,170.00
Mean	124.71	285.50	—	304.12
Median	100.00	172.50	—	170.00
Standard deviation P.	156.12	302.81	—	356.40
T-test	0.014	0.086		0.279
Confidence level: 95% with two-tailed test				
Median test: Chi Square test of significance: 0.27 df1				

\*Not recorded in Storey County for the population under consideration.

SOURCES: Storey County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1892, Nevada State Archives, Carson City; Lincoln County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1892, *Lincoln County Tax Assessment Books*, Lincoln County Treasurer's Office, Lincoln County Courthouse; Nevada State Archives, Carson City.

TABLE 9.  
Chinese Tax Assessment Values, Pioche, 1871-1892

	1871 (N = 11)	1888 (N = 13)	1892 (N = 13)
Total Value	2,300.00	2,875.00	2,555.00
Mean	209.09	243.75	196.54
Median	200.00	67.50	120.00
Standard deviation P.	85.46	423.47	154.45
Confidence	48.35	230.19	83.95
F-Test for 1871 and 1888: 1.95			
F-Test for 1888 and 1892: 0.001			
T-test for 1871 and 1888: 0.801			
T-test for 1888 and 1892: 0.721			

SOURCES: Lincoln County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1871, 1892, *Lincoln County Tax Assessment Books*, Lincoln County Treasurer's Office, Lincoln County Courthouse; Nevada State Archives, Carson City; *Pioche Weekly Record*, 29 September 1888.



Two examples of Chinese pottery used in Pioche. (*Author's collection*)

in 1904 his estate in mining interests alone totaled more than \$1,900 although his real property in Pioche was assessed at only \$50 in 1892. A long-time resident, Hong Bock was listed in the census as a laundryman.<sup>26</sup>

Sue Fawn Chung has credited the atmosphere of tolerance in Pioche and Lincoln County as being a factor in the long-term residence of some of the Chinese. China Charlie, for example, lived in Pioche from 1881 until his death in 1931, and China Ed lived in Lincoln County from the 1870s until at least the early 1920s, operating restaurants and working as a cook.<sup>27</sup> Tolerance, opportunity, and complex societal relationships seem to be factors in the prosperity of the Pioche Chinese.

Shih-Shan Henry Tsai has found that it was the Chinese merchant class who became the leaders of the Chinese community in America.<sup>28</sup> Newspaper accounts support this contention, which also suggests that the tolerance extended to the Chinese community of Pioche was related to issues of class as well as race.

The higher-status Chinese merchant class in Pioche developed ties to the white community, at times at the expense of members of their own race. In 1877 "one of Pioche's most prominent Chinese merchants," "Charley Beene," [*sic*] married a young Chinese woman in the home of a prominent white businessman. "Mr. Goodspeed was the first to secure a taste of the honey on the cherry lips of the charming young bride, whose example was followed by the honorable Justice [justice of the peace who had married the couple, ed.], your humble servant, and the rest of the boys."<sup>29</sup>

But a week after his elaborate wedding, Charley swore that his life had been threatened by another Chinese man distraught over the marriage of Mrs. Beene. Charley had the man arrested, and the Pioche justice of the peace committed him to jail for six months when he couldn't produce bail.<sup>30</sup> Charley Beene's ties to the justice court in Pioche apparently remained strong: When Jake Decker had Charley arrested for selling opium in 1878, the case was dismissed for want of testimony.<sup>31</sup> The 1880 federal census lists E. Bean as a Chinese laundryman living with his wife and three male Chinese "servants," also listed as laundrymen.<sup>32</sup>

The white community of Pioche demonstrated genuine concern and solicitude on behalf of Wo Ling, manager of the Ong Chung Lung [*sic*] store, who was detained in San Francisco after passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Wo Ling mistakenly took out a "laborer's certificate" prior to taking a trip to China, not knowing that holders of that certificate would be denied re-entry into the United States. The Lincoln County officers, non-Chinese businessmen, forwarded an affidavit of support for Wo Ling as a merchant to the San Francisco officials.<sup>33</sup> The affidavit was helpful, as Wo Ling's return to Pioche was recorded on January 12, 1889, after an absence of more than a year.<sup>34</sup> His obituary mentions that the white community came to his rescue on more than one occasion when he was excluded from the country because of his race.<sup>35</sup>

Although not of a statistical nature, the examples from the Pioche newspaper attest to some level of tolerance for the town's Chinese minority. Class similarities and compatible relations with non-Chinese in Pioche are expressed in the longevity of the Chinese community, the relative opportunity for business relationships of mutual benefit, and in the Asian immigrant's tendency to own property.

Comparisons with Virginia City reveal that Pioche had the more stable Chinese population. Sex ratios favored a more equitable distribution of women to men in Pioche, although the figures are not representative of a normal population. Pioche showed a smaller percentage of Chinese women engaged in prostitution as compared to larger population centers. Chinese wealth, as indicated by tax assessments, was concentrated in the hands of a few individuals who in some cases can be tied to the non-Chinese in varying and complex societal relationships that were dependent upon reciprocity and mutual benefit. The average Chinese in 1888 possessed roughly half as much property, as reflected by tax assessments, as the average non-Chinese. In 1875, Pioche's Chinese held property in roughly half the percentage that non-Chinese did, although the figure was much greater than that for Virginia City's Chinese. Statistical tests show that the differences in the means of the tax assessments for both Chinese groups, and in comparisons of Chinese to non-Chinese, demonstrate significance. Statistically, the median tests are more reliable and show a significant difference between Chinese and non-Chinese populations in Pioche, but no statistical difference in the median assessment between Pioche and Storey County Chinese. This study of the Pioche Chinese supports the contention that the Chinese experience in America was largely one

of "opportunity rather than exploitation,"<sup>36</sup> and that "opportunity" may have been greater in smaller population centers than in larger ones.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Roger Daniels, "Ah Sin and His Lawyers" *Reviews in American History*, 23 (September 1995), 472. See also John R. Wunder, "Anti-Chinese Violence in the American West, 1850-1910" in *Law for the Elephant, Law for the Beaver: Essays in the Legal History of the American West*, John McLaven, Hamar Foster, Chet Orloff, eds. (Pasadena, Calif., 1992).

<sup>2</sup>See Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup>See Loren Chan, "The Chinese in Nevada: An Historical Survey, 1856-1970," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 25 (Winter 1982), 266-314; Gary P. BeDunnah, "The History of the Chinese in Nevada: 1855-1904," M.A. thesis, University of Nevada Reno, 1966; Sue Fawn Chung, "The Chinese Experience in Nevada: Success Despite Discrimination," *Nevada Public Affairs Review*, no.2 (1987), 43-51.

<sup>4</sup>George M. Blackburn and Sherman L. Ricards, "The Chinese of Virginia City, Nevada, 1870," *Amerasia*, 7:1 (1980), 52. See also Russell M. Magnaghi, "Virginia City's Chinese Community, 1860-1880," *Nevada Historical Quarterly*, 24 (Summer 1981), 130-57.

<sup>5</sup>Blackburn and Ricards define tolerance in part as the absence of organized anti-Chinese violence. One anti-Chinese organization operated in Virginia City and one violent incident was reported. They believe that "a relatively small minority group poses less of a perceived threat to a dominant population than does a large minority group." There is no evidence of organized anti-Chinese violence in Pioche, nor any anti-Chinese groups or organizations. The newspapers of Virginia City reported on incidents involving Chinese in "an amused, patronizing tolerance." Blackburn and Ricards, "Chinese of Virginia City," 51, 60, 66, 68. The Pioche newspaper also reported on the Chinese, Mormons (prior to the 1880s), and women in general, in much the same "amused, patronizing" way.

<sup>6</sup>Pioche Commercial Club, *The Heritage of the Desert* (Private publishing, Pioche Commercial Club, 1924); Resource Concepts, Inc., *Pioche: A Tour of Pioche*, brochure (Carson City: Nevada State Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, n.d.). For a general history of Pioche, see James W. Abbott, "The Story of Pioche," *The Arrowhead: A Monthly Magazine of Western Travel and Development* (Los Angeles: San Pedro, Los Angeles, Salt Lake Railroad, 1907).

<sup>7</sup>Sue Fawn Chung, "Gue Gin Wah: Pioneering Chinese American Woman of Nevada," in *History and Humanities*, Francis X. Hartigan, ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1989), 57. The novelty of the Chinese culture made their celebrations an entertaining diversion for the majority Pioche population. As noted in the newspaper, a new joss house completed in 1883 was the site of a frantic Chinese New Year celebration in 1887. The newspaper reported that "many of our beaux and belles" joined the Chinese festivities, which were marked by the antics of a Chinese woman, Fong Chop, the "belle of the occasion. She wore a pair of dark blue pants, cut rather full in the leg; her nose was unabridged, her lips were carmined, and a bunch of brass keys hung pendant from her girdle. One ear was missing but she had a big gold ring in the other one." *Pioche Weekly Record*, 6 January 1883, 29 January 1887.

<sup>8</sup>Ronald James, Richard D. Adkins, Rachel J. Hartigan, "Competition and Coexistence in the Laundry: A View of the Comstock," *Western Historical Quarterly* (Summer 1994), 182.

<sup>9</sup>See also Paul Ong, "An Ethnic Trade: The Chinese Laundries in Early California," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 8:4 (Winter 1981), 95-113. Ong found that "racism limited the range of social interaction between White and Chinese, and in doing so, limited the range of economic interactions" (p. 108).

<sup>10</sup>Blackburn and Ricards, "Chinese of Virginia City," 53.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census of the United States (1870), *Population Schedules*, Lincoln County, Nevada (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service), Reel E1. See also David Beesley, "From Chinese to Chinese American: Chinese Women and Families in a Sierra Nevada Town," *California History* (September 1988), 168-79, who argues that relative stability and "traditional" families were found in the outlying areas of California, particularly after 1880.

<sup>13</sup>Nevada State Legislature, *Nevada State Legislative Journals*, Appendix to the *Journals of the Senate and Assembly*, Eighth Session 1877 (Carson City: John Hall, State Printer, 1877), 563–613; Lincoln County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1875, *Lincoln County Tax Assessment Books*, Lincoln County Treasurer's Office, Lincoln County Courthouse.

<sup>14</sup>Lincoln County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1871, 1875; Blackburn and Ricards, "Chinese of Virginia City," 65.

<sup>15</sup>Lincoln County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1871; *Pioche Weekly Record*, 12 September 1876, 26 November 1876.

<sup>16</sup>Blackburn and Ricards, "Chinese of Virginia City," 53, 57, 67; *Nevada State Legislative Journals*. The median age of the Chinese women in Pioche in 1870 was 23.2, as compared to the median age of 22.38 for Chinese men, with a sample of only twenty-two cases.

<sup>17</sup>Blackburn and Ricards, "Chinese of Virginia City," 53.

<sup>18</sup>Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 97.

<sup>19</sup>*Nevada State Legislative Journals*, 563–613.

<sup>20</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth (1870) and Tenth (1880) Censuses of the United States, *Population Schedules*, Lincoln County, Nevada, Reel £1.

<sup>21</sup>*Nevada State Legislative Journals*, 563–613.

<sup>22</sup>"Ong Chong" was the name of the store owned by the merchant of the same name. The tax listing does not specify whether the tax refers to the private real estate of Ong Chong, merchant, or to his business. All other business information was removed from the non-Chinese data set in an attempt to compare real-property values of individuals.

<sup>23</sup>Lincoln County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1892.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*; Storey County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1892, Nevada State Archives, Carson City. The Virginia City Chinese population in 1870 was 536, less than 2 percent of the total population. Blackburn and Ricards, "Chinese of Virginia City," 66.

<sup>25</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States (1900), *Population Schedules*, Lincoln County, Nevada, Reel £2.

<sup>26</sup>Hong Bock Probate Record, Lincoln County Recorder's Office, Lincoln County Courthouse; Lincoln County Tax Assessment Rolls, 1892.

<sup>27</sup>Chung, "Gue Gin Wah," 55–58.

<sup>28</sup>Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, "Chinese Immigration, 1848–1882," in *Peoples of Color in the American West*, Sucheng Chan, Douglas Henry Daniels, et al., eds. (Lexington, Mass, D.C. Heath's Company, 1994), 114.

<sup>29</sup>*Pioche Weekly Record*, 1 December 1877.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 December 1877.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 March 1878.

<sup>32</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census of the United States (1880).

<sup>33</sup>*Pioche Weekly Record*, 1 December 1888.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 January 1889.

<sup>35</sup>Chung, "Chinese Experience in Nevada," 47.

<sup>36</sup>Tsai, "Chinese Immigration," 112.

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS  
DEEP ENOUGH  
Pitfalls and Perils of Deep Mining  
on the Comstock

Robert E. Kendall

When the first placer miners slowly worked their way up the modestly paying gravel beds of Gold Canyon and Six Mile Canyon in western Utah Territory, they cursed the scarcity of water that prevented them from working their gold pans and rockers. When at last in the spring of 1859 they came to the source of the placer gold on the slopes of Gold Canyon and at Ophir Ravine to the north, they had scarcely enough water to wash the partly decomposed rock that turned out to be the outcrop of the great Comstock Lode.

Once the word had spread to California, one of the first parties of mother-lode placer miners to reach the new diggings were four men who left Nevada City, California, on horseback on May 1, 1859, knowing only that the find was somewhere east of the Washoe valley, in Utah Territory. When they came upon the discovery diggings in Ophir Ravine, they saw Pat McLaughlin, Peter O'Riley, and two other men working a shallow pit. One of the visitors, W. H. Campbell, relates:

We all rode up to the pit and stayed on our animals watching the work which was a new kind of mining for us. The dirt being worked in the rockers was decomposed gossan, the hard lumps being piled to one side. None of us had ever seen such a mine. We expected to see gravel with free gold in it, as in California. One of our boys had the hardihood to ask where the mine was, not taking any stock in that stuff. They were getting quite a lot of material which seemed to us looked like lead. It seemed to have some kind of mineral in it but no one seemed to know what it was worth per ounce. Late in the afternoon our party started for the Carson River. We had not got out of sight of all there was of Virginia City when we met a man with an axe on his shoulders. His clothing was in rags and he was about as tough looking an individual as I ever ran across. The man proved to be H. T. P. Comstock, and he was very talkative. . . .

Robert E. Kendall is a retired mining engineer, a graduate of the Mackoy School of Mines. He grew up in Virginia City, where he was a student at the Fourth Ward School and, during the 1940s, worked underground at the Consolidated Virginia and the New York mines.

. . . He made us a proposition to the effect that if we furnished the grub and tools, to run an adit to tap the lode at 50 feet below the surface of the pit, he would give us 50 feet on the ledge. . . . Our party was so impatient to get away from the place that they could hardly hear him through, and we all rode away disgusted with the whole country.<sup>1</sup>

The mineral that looked like lead turned out to be high-grade silver sulfides liberally mixed with gold, and the four California miners who rode away in disgust were not the last men to be fooled by the peculiarities of the Comstock Lode, which became in a few years the richest mining camp in the country, with the deepest shafts and the hottest and wettest ground in the world.

By December 1860, the Ophir incline shaft, sunk on the site of O'Riley and McGlaughlin's discovery pit, was 100 feet deep, and lack of water was no longer a problem. The young mine was already wet, and the little steam engine at the head of the shaft—the first steam engine on the Comstock—did double duty, alternately hoisting rock and bailing water. This was the first of a long line of steam-powered hoisting engines and pumps that evolved over the next twenty years to become some of the largest mining machinery in the world, climaxed by the great steam-driven Cornish pumps in the deep fourth-line shafts of the 1880s.

The real magnitude of the water problem on the Comstock was not appreciated at first, and the early, shallow workings were easily dewatered to a depth of 200 to 300 feet by bailing water from the shafts and driving the drainage tunnels down slope. What happened at the Savage mine is typical. The Savage, situated in the center of Virginia City, was a big producer in the 1860s from its upper levels. The first shafts were sunk on the outcropping of the vein down to 100 or 200 feet. The second shaft, located to the east of the outcrop, served to a depth of 400 feet, but was not properly positioned for deeper exploration. In 1865 sinking commenced on the new E Street shaft, a third-line shaft 1,000 feet east of the outcropping of the easterly dipping vein. The shaft was equipped with three horizontal steam hoisting engines, one for each hoisting compartment. One of the three engines did double duty by driving the Cornish pumps in the fourth compartment.

Soon after, the Savage ordered a new and much larger pumping engine from a San Francisco iron foundry to be used exclusively for driving the pumps. The company's 1866 annual report states,

The E Street shaft, with four compartments 5 feet by 6 feet each, has been sunk to 470 feet. At this shaft there are three engines. A Corliss beam engine, twenty six inch cylinder, is on its way over the mountains. This last engine is not needed at this time, nor should the expense of building it have been incurred at the time it was. The three engines possess all the power to do all the work the mine will demand for a long time to come. However, as this engine was built, and the cost, which was a heavy burden on the company, had to be provided for, it became necessary to make disposition of it. An effort was made to sell it, but not meeting the opportunity except at great loss, it was considered best to send it to the mine. With this engine, and the three before mentioned we will have the facilities to sink and explore our mining ground for many years.<sup>2</sup>

In a few years the unneeded engine was pumping water day and night, and when the shaft reached 1,800 feet in 1877 it could no longer handle the load and was replaced by a much larger and more modern engine, as described in this account:

The best of the old pumping engines, that of the Savage mine, a fine beam engine of two hundred horsepower driving a line of plunger pumps to a depth of 1,800 feet is at present being removed to give place to a compound differential direct acting engine. The old engine, which is still a fine specimen, is to be re-erected to drive the machinery of a quartz mill.<sup>3</sup>

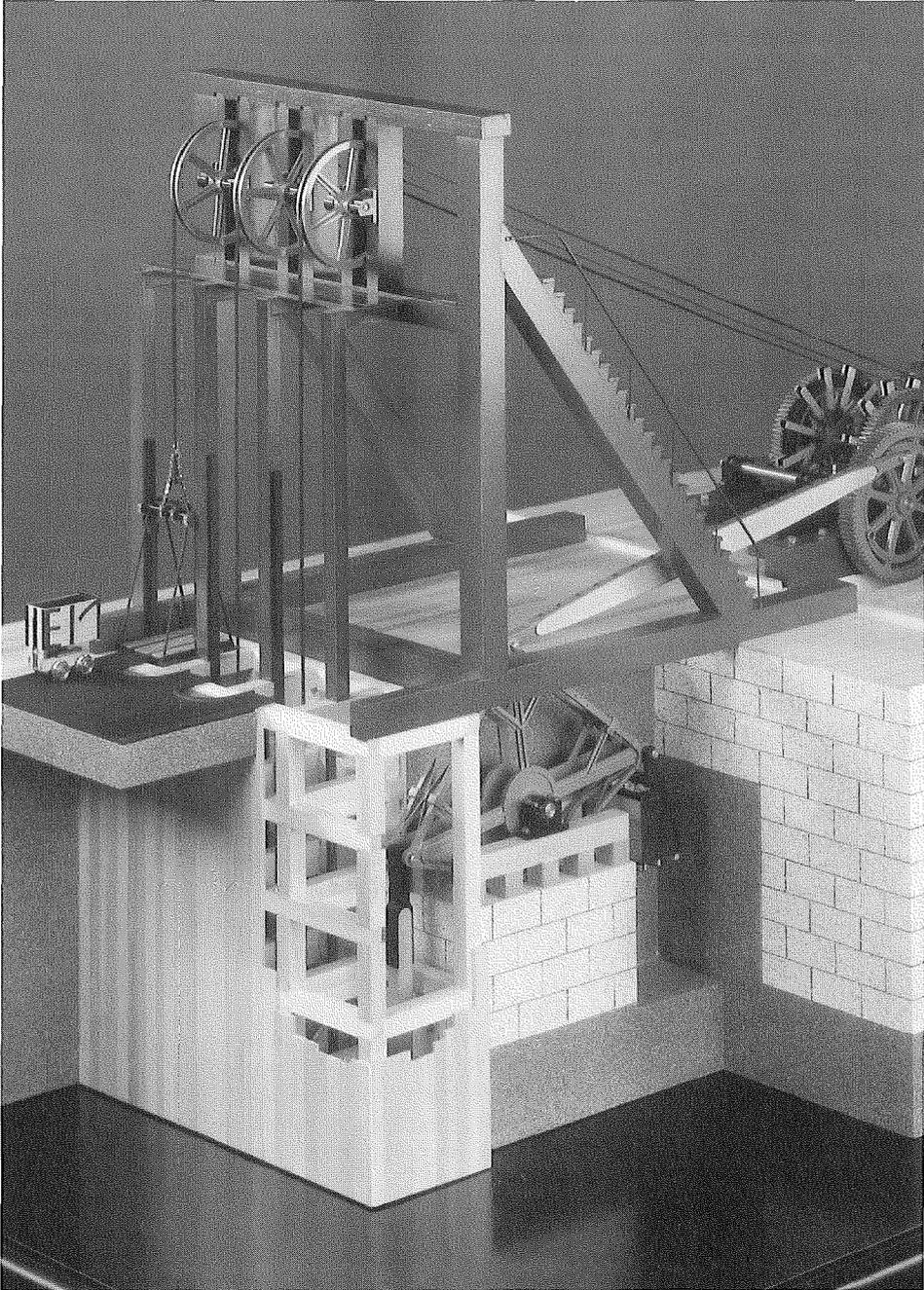
As it turned out, the Savage became one of the wettest and hottest mines on the lode, and floods of water repeatedly overwhelmed the pumps, causing the lower levels to be abandoned several times. Even though the Sutro tunnel, completed in 1879, lowered the water level 1,500 feet and the great fourth-line Combination shaft of the Chollar, Hale and Norcross, and Savage mines were down 2,000 feet in the same year and equipped with the largest pumps available, all shared in the work of pumping. But work on the lower levels became almost impossible because of the heat and water.

The Savage struck a flow of hot water in 1876 on the 2,200-foot level that flooded the Hale and Norcross to the 1,800-foot level. Both mines remained flooded for three years, despite continual pumping, until a connection was made with the Combination shaft in 1879. Assessments commenced in 1870 and never ceased. They averaged \$400,000 a year while the Combination shaft was in operation. Floods of hot water prevented connection with the Combination below the 2,400-foot level. The levels below that had to be bulkheaded.<sup>4</sup>

The year 1877 was a time of decision on the Comstock. After the bust year of 1870, when no new ore was found anywhere and gloom about the future was pervasive, the seven years that followed saw unprecedented prosperity and optimism. In rapid succession two great bonanzas were discovered: the Crown Point and Belcher in Gold Hill in 1871, and the Big Bonanza of the Consolidated Virginia on the north end in 1873. From 1871 through 1875 the Crown Point and Belcher yielded \$50,000,000 and paid almost half of this out in dividends. However, it was the Big Bonanza that created excitement worldwide and had the most profound effect on the subsequent history of the lode. Discovered by accident while driving an exploration drift on the 1,167-foot level of the Bonner shaft to the south into Consolidated Virginia ground, it was completely isolated from the main lode structure and stood vertically in the hanging wall of the vein. In the six years through 1878 it produced \$98,000,000 in bullion and paid \$71,000,000 in dividends.

These two bonanzas brought the Comstock to the peak of its prosperity, but there were clouds on the horizon. The Crown Point and Belcher bonanza terminated at the 1,500-foot level and the Big Bonanza at 1,700 feet.

In the late 1870s a fierce debate arose over the future of the Comstock. Informed observers were aware that the end was near for the Big Bonanza and that little



A scale model of the Savage shaft headframe and pump bob. The horizontal pitman rod connects the engine to the pump bob. The wooden pump rod is hanging vertically in the shaft. (Author's collection)

paying ore was in sight anywhere else. In 1877 only the California and the Consolidated Virginia were paying dividends, and 130 mines were levying assessments.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the men who controlled the mines and mills, the San Francisco stockbrokers, and the local press all preached optimism and praised current plans to explore the lode below the 2,000-foot level with a new line of deep shafts.

By far the most influential of the optimists was John W. Mackay, the lead partner in the Bonanza firm and the most highly respected man on the lode. His influence cannot be underestimated. In his own time he was a hero revered by the press and idolized by the local population. His reputation was not undeserved, since in comparison with other Comstock millionaires he was open handed and honest, and was one of the few who stayed on and reinvested his own money in deep exploration after the boom ended. Such was his persona that in 1880 Virginia City's most influential newspaper said of him:

Of all the men whom the Comstock has enriched, and their names would figure up in the hundreds if enumerated, but one has ever shown any gratitude toward that marvelous vein, which has given up countless millions to mankind, and has made so many men wealthy. Let it be said to John Mackay's honor and credit that he is the only one who has ever cared to solve the problem on the future of the Comstock, as to whether orebodies existed below a certain depth, and whether they could be worked to profitable advantage if found.<sup>6</sup>

Not everyone was sanguine about the Comstock's future however: On May 10, 1879, the authoritative and highly respected *Mining and Scientific Press*, published in San Francisco, declared:

The Comstock mines, have in times past, yielded a large amount of bullion. A few of them have been worked with great profit, paying for a short time liberal dividends. But the ore from which this product was made lay at much less depths than the new finds on which these mines must depend for a renewal of their prosperity. . . . The cost of ore extraction increases in a sort of geometrical ratio with depth. This is not so much on account of the greater trouble of raising the ore and water, as of the increased heat and difficulty of ventilation, already so formidable that the work of exploration on the present levels proceeds very slowly. With the depth of a few more hundred feet attained there is danger that the downward operations will be arrested altogether. The temperature in the lower levels ranges from 130° to 140°, the water standing at 154° Fahrenheit. At the rate of increase observed the air at a depth of 3,000 feet will reach a temperature of 160° to 170°, an atmosphere in which men cannot even live, much less work, and which would therefore force the abandonment of the mines.

The article concludes with a warning:

The further prospecting of the Comstock Lode should be left to men with abundant means, and who can afford to take many chances of failure when coupled with one large success. They can pay out without feeling it an amount of assessments that would greatly distress a poor man.

While the debate was in progress, John Mackay and his associates in the Firm, as the Bonanza group was called, had committed themselves to the deep exploration of the lode. In addition to the Consolidated Virginia and California, the Firm acquired control of the Yellow Jacket in Gold Hill to the south in 1877, and in 1878 took over the Ophir, Mexican, Union, and Sierra Nevada mines at the extreme north end of the lode. They then commenced the sinking of two great shafts, the Yellow Jacket and the Union.

In June 1879, John A. Church, a mining engineer and prolific writer on Comstock geology, gave an address before the Bullion Club in San Francisco in support of the decision to explore the lode at greater depth with a fourth line of shafts. His views represent the prevailing opinion of those who were willing to take the plunge on the chance that other bonanzas lay hidden in the hot, water-saturated depths of the Comstock. He outlines the history of the lode, acknowledging the depressed condition of the mines, and continues:

It is under these circumstances that the management of the mines have prepared for exploring the lode at depths which approach the limit that have been considered predictable of working in the earth's crust. . . . I will begin with the announcement that I consider these chances as good as they ever were at shallower depths. . . . The earliest workings were upon the outcroppings of quartz; and as successive depths have been reached, a series of hoisting shafts has been sunk, each one placed east of its predecessor. Four lines of these have been sunk—one at the outcrop, one reaching a depth of 500 or 600 feet, and one attaining a depth of 1,000 to 1,200 feet. This is the line which has been in use for the last ten years. Finally, in the fourth line are placed those deep shafts of which none have reached the lode, and the future prospects of which form the subject of my remarks.

They are six in number. These are advanced from 2,500 feet to 4,400 feet east of the present line, and they are expected to reach the lode at depths varying from 2,500 feet to 3,000 feet. . . . The northern or Virginia end will have four and the southern or Gold Hill end will have two deep shafts. . . . In every respect, the appointments of these shafts are suited to the great work expected of them. The hoisting and pumping machinery is of the most powerful construction, and the work of sinking is prosecuted with great vigor.

Turning now to the immediate object of our inquiry, it is not to be denied that the long continued barrenness of 18,000 foot of ground has awakened serious doubts of the permanent character of Comstock mining. I found that no orebody on this lode has been discovered from the workings of another orebody. . . . I have learned to look upon such groups of orebodies as mere parts of one great bonanza. . . . They are not connected by stringers of ore, nor do they overlap in any way that makes it possible to feel for one from the known position of another. Entirely disconnected, they are entirely surrounded on every side by barren ground, and this often reaches upward and downward on both sides for hundreds of feet.

Church then goes on to justify his conviction that deep exploration is warranted and concludes with a ringing statement:

It has been my effort to show you that the prospects are good, though they were begun after a continuance of disappointment quite unprecedented on the Comstock and an expenditure of assessments quite unexampled in the history of mining. Their fortunes de-

pend on three factors: the finding of ore, the control of drainage, and the probability of work in the increasing heat of the rocks. I think a careful examination of the lode and the mining upon it would discern encouragement in all these respects. The lode in depth bids fair to be precisely what it was near the surface, and the unknown quantity is really the exact depth at which the great barren zone will end.<sup>7</sup>

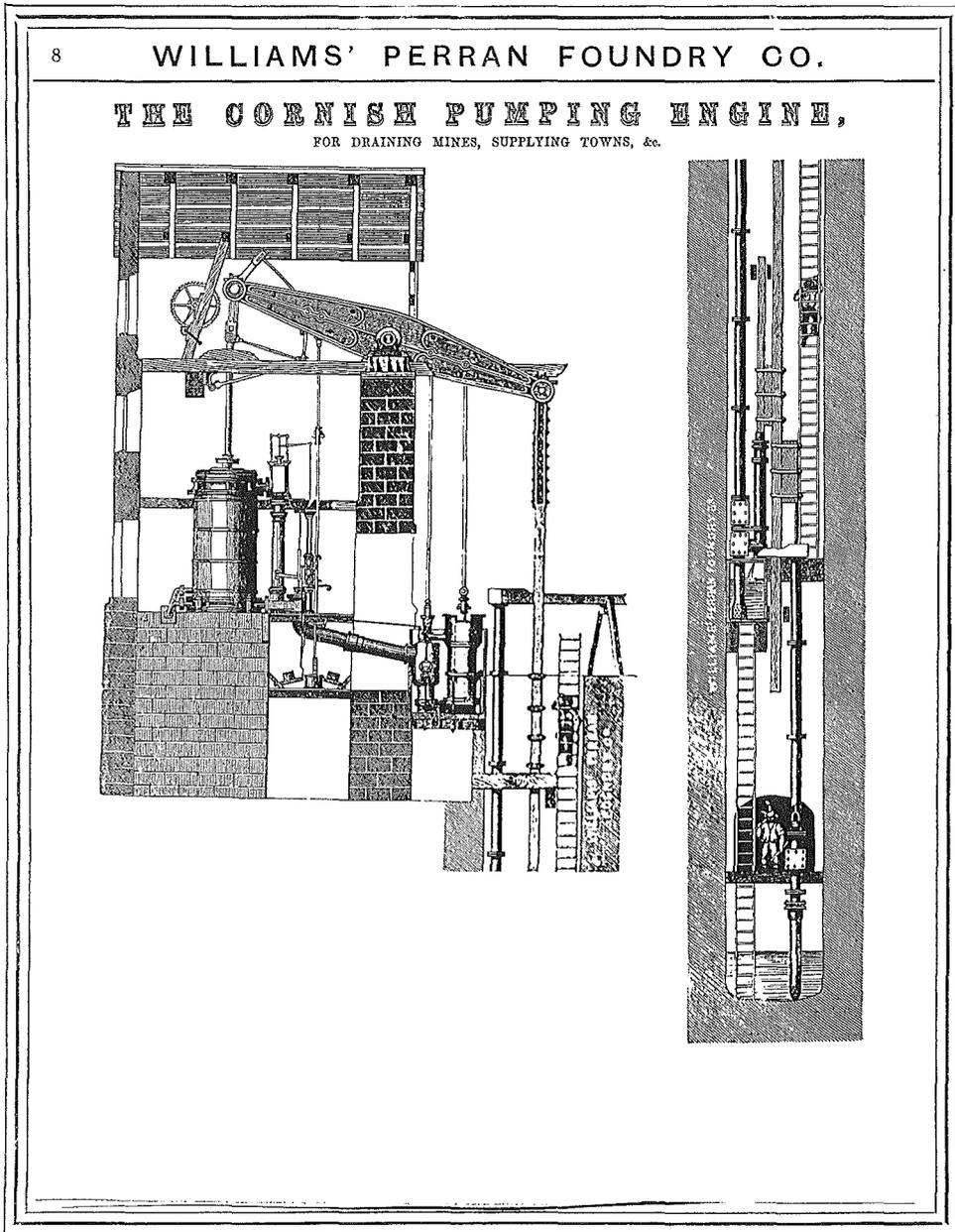
Church's description of the character of the Comstock bonanzas is correct. They were in fact isolated from each other and not in any way connected by geological clues or guidelines that would lead a miner from one orebody to another. It is difficult to understand his optimism in the face of his own description of the character of the Comstock Lode. In fact the drive to go deeper turned out to be a huge gamble that did not pay off. The Comstock miners gridironed three miles along the line of the lode with drifts, crosscuts, raises, and winzes, usually at 100-foot vertical intervals, sinking deeper and deeper with no assurance that they would find ore which in fact they did not, except for a few small and largely unprofitable pockets.

The public optimism displayed by John Mackay, Church, and other supporters of deep mining was not entirely altruistic. The immense expense of the deep shafts and the explorations radiating from them was financed entirely by periodic assessments upon the stockholders of the mining companies, and it was absolutely essential for the management of the companies to maintain the optimism of the stockholding public so that they would continue to pay the assessments rather than forfeit their stock. In fact, when the public had finally had enough of paying out assessments without getting anything in return, deep mining ceased, in 1886.

\* \* \*

Notwithstanding the failure to find more bonanzas, the shafts and mechanical works that accompanied them were important engineering achievements. These great pumping and hoisting works represented the climax of the age of steam. The most interesting and important of these machines were the steam engines at the surface that drove the Cornish pumps in the shafts. They were the direct descendants of the first practical steam engine, built in 1712 by Thomas Newcomen and installed to pump water from an English coal mine. This engine, and the many thousands that it spawned, ushered in and powered the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It was no accident that the first truly practical steam engine was used to pump water out of a mine. Newcomen's engine had no gears, no crankshaft, and no flywheel, but the simple reciprocating action of its piston, working up and down in a vertically mounted cylinder, provided the right kind of motion to work the pumps in a mine shaft. This was accomplished by means of an oscillating beam, or bob, pivoted at the center, with one end connected to the engine, and the other end attached to the wooden pump rod hanging vertically down the shaft. The pump rods in turn were connected to a suction pump at the bottom of the shaft



The classic Cornish pump illustrated in a manufacturer's catalog of c. 1880. (*Author's collection*)

that lifted the water either to the surface or, if the shaft was too deep for a single lift, to an underground station above, where it emptied into a tank and then into piston-driven force pumps that were also actuated by the motion of the pump rod. As the shaft deepened, more pump stations were added at intervals corre-

sponding to the lifting capability of the pumps. Since the very substantial weight of the pump rods increased in proportion to the depth, balance bobs were installed at intervals to counterbalance this excess weight.

This basic arrangement, originating in crude form in 1712, remained essentially unchanged for the next 175 years until it was replaced by electrically powered pumps at the end of the nineteenth century. They were called Cornish pumps because their evolution into efficient pumping machines occurred primarily in the copper and tin mines of Cornwall, England. The Comstock pumps were the direct descendants of the Cornish pump, and in fact the "pitwork"—that part of the system from the pump rod at the surface to the bottom of the shaft—was identical to the Cornish design and practice. There were, however, significant differences in the construction of the driving engines.

The Cornish beam engine had evolved in size and efficiency over a hundred-year period, but did not change its basic design. Its huge single vertical cylinder pulled the inboard end of the overhead beam downward on the engine's power stroke, which raised the pump rod on the outboard end of the beam. On completion of the up-stroke, the pump rod then descended of its own weight, driving the pumps and lifting the column of water.

The Cornish beam engine was never popular in the western mines. By the mid-1800s the most efficient and least costly steam engines were rotative, geared engines, relatively small in size and easier to transport to the mines over rough mountain wagon roads. A typical example is the Savage engine of 1866, described earlier. Its advantages were lighter weight, portability, and relatively low cost. Its primary disadvantage as a pumping engine was that this type of engine runs best on a uniform cycle, and this characteristic does not match well with the nonuniform cycle required by the massive pitworks.

As the mine shafts deepened, many factors made the seemingly simple operation of pumping quite complicated and difficult. In a 2,700-foot-deep shaft such as the Union, the pump rod was a hanging column of Oregon pine 18 by 18 inches in cross section, the individual pieces of rod 50 to 70 feet long, strapped together with heavy iron plate bolted on all four sides, and weighing 525,000 pounds. The rest of the moving mass, including engine parts, balance bobs, counter weights, pumps, and water brought the total weight in motion to 1,600,000 pounds. A substantial part of the mass had to be started in motion, stopped, and reversed on every stroke of the pumps. The enormous strains on the pump rod, engine, and supporting works required the most massive kind of construction and, because of the great inertia of the weight in motion, the pumping cycle had to be very slow, most commonly between four and six strokes per minute.<sup>8</sup>

The mismatch between the engines, which wanted to run at a uniform cycle, and the pitworks, whose natural rhythm was nonuniform, caused many broken pump rods and damaged engines. Over the years many different designs were tried, and there was never any standardization of pumping engines on the Comstock. Virtually all were custom built to the specifications of the mines' consulting

engineers by two large iron works in San Francisco: The Union Iron Works, owned by Prescott, Scott, and Company, and the Risdon Iron Works, superintended by Joseph Moore.

The most thorough and rigorous analysis of the technical problems of raising water from the great depths of the Comstock Lode came in the form of a privately printed treatise published in 1877 by the Risdon Iron Works and written by Joseph Moore and George Dickie. It was aimed at the owners, managers, and engineers of the Comstock mines, and presentation copies were given to all the leading figures in the industry.

The work sounded alarm bells about the continuing application of the Cornish pump at depths below 2,000 feet. It must have taken considerable courage for a company, whose customers seemed committed to installing ever larger Cornish pumps, to declare that these pumps were unworkable and impractical at the depths contemplated, but that is just what Moore and Dickie did. The preface states:

That part of the work which endeavors to point out what should be the future practice in this important branch of engineering, we know to be directly opposed to the expressed opinion of some of the leading engineers on the Comstock.

After a review of existing practice and possible improvements to that practice, the authors pose the question:

To those who have watched the progress made within the past two or three years, in developing our deep mines the question must have often presented itself: "How deep is it possible to work these mines, and how far is it possible to work pumps through spear rods [pump rods of the Cornish type]?" The last question is one which interests us just at present, and after a careful study of the subject in all its bearings, we have been forced to the conclusion that much of what has been done lately in pumping work has been wrong, and in some cases the question was, "Is it advisable to use spear rods to work the pumps?" when the question should have been, "Is it possible to use spear rods, and by them accomplish the object sought to be attained?"

Pumping works have been designed and built recently in some of our deepest mines with such reckless disregard for natural laws, that failure of the most discouraging nature must inevitably be the result, as soon as such plant may be called upon to do the work for which it was designed. Engines have been built to take a certain number of strokes per minute, when no possible amount of forcing can take half as many strokes. The fundamental fact appears to have been lost sight of, that with the weight of the pit work to be put in motion and again brought to rest, every stroke that the engine makes fixes between very narrow limits the possible number of strokes the engine can make.<sup>9</sup>

Moore and Dickie were correct in their analysis of the deficiencies of Cornish pumps when working at great depths, as subsequent events proved, but they were too late in their warning. By then all the deep shafts under construction had been committed to the use of ever bigger and heavier Cornish pumps.

It was hoped that the Sutro tunnel, put into service in 1879 and intersecting and

draining the mines from the surface down to the 1,700-foot level, would solve the drainage problem. Although the water no longer had to be pumped to the surface, the change produced unexpected strains on the pumps that only added to the problems enumerated by Moore and Dickie. As described in this article in the *Mining and Scientific Press* in 1909,

The completion of the Sutro Tunnel . . . changed nearly the whole system of pumping as originally designed. The costly and massive pumping engines were left on the surface, while all the intervening pumps were removed to below the tunnel, where they were doubled up, two being placed at each tank station. This change left at least 1,700 feet of heavy pump rods between the surface engine and the first set of pumps. Double the work was being done at the lower end of the rods than was originally intended, and the fibers of the rods became fatigued and over-strained. The effect of the elasticity and the great length of the rods, produced accelerations and consequent strains that many times exceeded the direct strains due to pumping alone. . . . The cause for the constant need of renewing pump rods, broken balance bobs, pins and strapping plates that was almost a weekly occurrence was thus made apparent. As for the remedy, there was none for that class of pump and machinery, necessarily placed at such a great distance from the water to be pumped.<sup>10</sup>

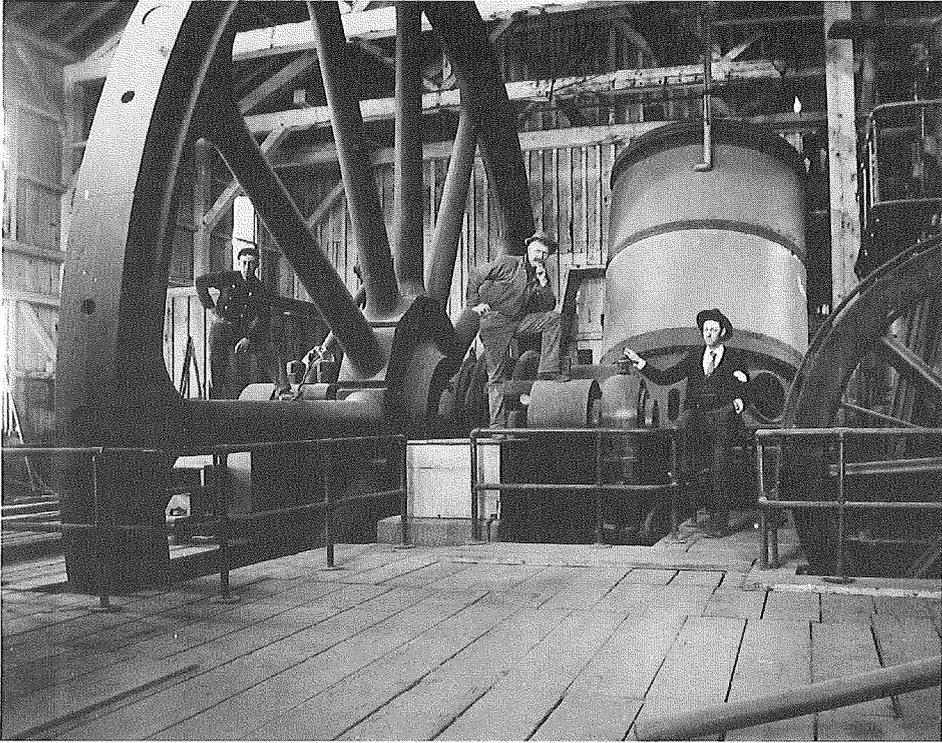
In the late 1870s the pumping engines for the deepest mines, planned for depths of 3,000 to 4,000 feet, were all nongearred, direct-acting compound engines. That is, each had a high-and-low-pressure steam cylinder which was coupled to the pump bob or beam without any intervening gearing.

The Yellow Jacket pumping engine, built in 1877, was a coupled, compound horizontal engine. The two cylinders, with bores of 31 and 62 inches and a 12-foot stroke, were mounted horizontally and connected by crank shafts to two 30-foot-diameter flywheels. The engine weighed 1,200 tons and raised 800 gallons per minute 1,500 feet vertically to the level of the Sutro tunnel. Massive as it was, this engine suffered terrible damage on November 11, 1880:

When the Yellow Jacket pump rod broke suddenly, the engine made a very quick up-stroke which broke both flywheels and the upper and lower straps of the pitman [the connecting rod between the engine and the pump bob], making a perfect wreck. Fragments of the cast iron wheels were thrown in all directions—some through the roof of the building. The water rose in one day from the 3,000 foot to the 2,828 foot level and pumping was not resumed for six months.<sup>11</sup>

The most powerful pumping engine on the Comstock was completed at the Union shaft two years later. The massive 65- and 100-inch-diameter cylinders were mounted vertically over the pump bob and coupled directly to it without any intervening gearing, as well as to a gigantic flywheel 37.5 feet in diameter and weighing 110 tons. This engine and pumps could raise 1,400 gallons per minute from the bottom of the shaft at a depth of 2,700 feet to the Sutro tunnel, an 1,100-foot lift.

The specifications for both the Yellow Jacket and the Union engines were laid



The Cornish pumping engine of the Union shaft, built in 1880. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

out by W. H. Patton, John Mackay's superintendent and engineer. The lack of standardization is probably an example of Patton's attempt to alleviate the frequent pump-rod failures by trying out different engine designs.

Interest in construction of the big pumping and hoisting engines at the Union, Osbiston, Combination, Yellow Jacket, and Forman shafts in the late 1870s was intense. The *Territorial Enterprise* and the *Gold Hill News* on the Comstock, and the *Mining and Scientific Press* in San Francisco, followed construction progress closely and, as was the fashion of the time, extolled the huge size and complexity of the engines and pumping works.<sup>12</sup> Although it was thought that such massively built engines would operate without problems, Moore and Dickie's predictions came true with the Union pump, and also, as we have seen, with the Yellow Jacket pump. The *Territorial Enterprise* of April 2, 1880, reports:

A PROVOKING ACCIDENT, BUT ONE WHICH WILL CAUSE VERY LITTLE DELAY. About 5:00 o'clock last evening the nose piece of the upper balance bob at the Union shaft was broken. The accident will stop the pumps for but a few hours. The management expect to have it running again this morning. . . . Such an accident at this time is very provoking. The loss is trifling and the delay will amount to little, but the accident will be used to demoralize the stock market. . . . Doubtless all manner of wild off-hand stories will be set

afloat this morning in San Francisco. After these have ceased to produce any effect the bears will settle down to their work and get up something a little more solid. One set of them will say: "It is just as I expected: these pumps will never work. There will be a smashup at the Union every week or two," while another set will assert that they have no ore in the lower levels and have broken the pump bob on purpose to cause delay and give them time in which to dispose of the stock.

It was bad enough on April 1, but a couple of days later it got worse:

A REGULAR SMASHUP. Night before last a serious and most provoking accident occurred at the Union shaft, resulting in the breaking of all the balance bobs from the pump rod. This accident will cause a delay of at least two weeks in the pumping operations of the shaft. . . . Superintendent Patton himself had control of the engine when the accident occurred. He was moving the engine with the greatest care and had taken every precaution to guard against an accident.

Strangely enough, the *Enterprise* refrained from speculating on the reaction of the San Francisco bears to this much more serious accident.

If the machines were strained to the limit, so were the men who worked underground. George Becker wrote in 1882:

The ground has been in great part very bad, the size of the ore-bodies requiring a new system of timbering, and floods have burst into the mines which it took years to drain; but by far the greatest obstacle has been the heat, which increases 3° Fahrenheit for each additional hundred feet sunk, and which seems likely to put an end to further sinking. . . . There are few spots where the miners can work more than each alternate hour during the eight hour's shift, so that double gangs to relieve each other are practically always necessary, and at many points the conditions are still more disadvantageous. Besides every alleviation which artificial ventilation can afford, the men must also be supplied with unlimited quantities of ice water for both drinking and washing. With all these unheard of easements, many men have died from overheating, and some from contact with scalding water.<sup>13</sup>

Newspaper accounts tell the miners' story far more graphically; from the *Territorial Enterprise* of July 26, 1879, we learn of

AN UNDERGROUND GEYSER. At the Julia mine, last Wednesday, a powerful stream of hot water was struck in the crosscut on the 2,000 foot level. The Burleigh drill was set to drill a hole in the face of the crosscut about two feet from the bottom. When the drill had advanced about two feet into the rock, there occurred a tremendous burst of hot water from the hole. The stream of water was equal to 24 miner's inches [220 gallons per minute], and it was scalding hot. It was spouted to the distance of several feet diagonally across the drift, spreading as it flew until all the open space was filled with scalding spray and steam.

The steam also filled the crosscut where stood the man who had been running the drill. He was held a close prisoner, as he could not pass out through the jets of boiling water, and even in his prison was in danger of being suffocated and cooked by the steam and heat. He probably would not have escaped alive but for the drill. He opened the exhaust valve and allowed the whole head of compressed air to reach out in a full and steady stream, and this

not only furnished him pure air to breathe, but also cooled and protected his head and the whole upper part of his body.

His fellow workmen were soon aware of his perilous position—for the roar and rush of the water could be heard a great distance—but they could no more pass in than he could pass out.

Altogether it was a peculiar affair, and one which might have ended seriously but for the supply of pure air furnished by the pipe leading to the drill. As it was, the miner had his legs pretty badly scalded. The water is still pouring in, and at last accounts was slowly gaining on the pumps.

Just seven weeks later, on September 16, 1879, the *Enterprise* adds:

DEATH IN THE LOWER LEVELS. Last Saturday morning Thomas O'Toole, a Savage miner who was on his way down the incline to oil the pumps, found the dead body of a man lying face down on the pump column. The remains proved to be those of William Beckernberg, a Sutro tunnel miner.

Last Saturday afternoon a machinist and three miners were sent from the Sutro tunnel into the Savage incline and shaft for the purpose of testing a pipe. . . . The men were all acquainted with the area except one, William Beckernberg. When the 1300 level was reached, Beckernberg was sent back to the tunnel to close a valve. He missed his way in the incline and went down to the 2000 level where miners were at work. He inquired of them where he was. They told him, and requested him to cool off before starting for the 1640 level, and advised him of all the cooling-off places along the way. He then started up, and when between the 1700 and 1800 levels, he became exhausted from foul gas, and fell under a pump rod, where he died. . . .

. . . The Coroner's jury found that the deceased, William Beckernberg, was 45 years old, a native of Cornwall, England, and that he came to his death by being overheated in the Savage mine, also, that no blame should be attached to anyone.

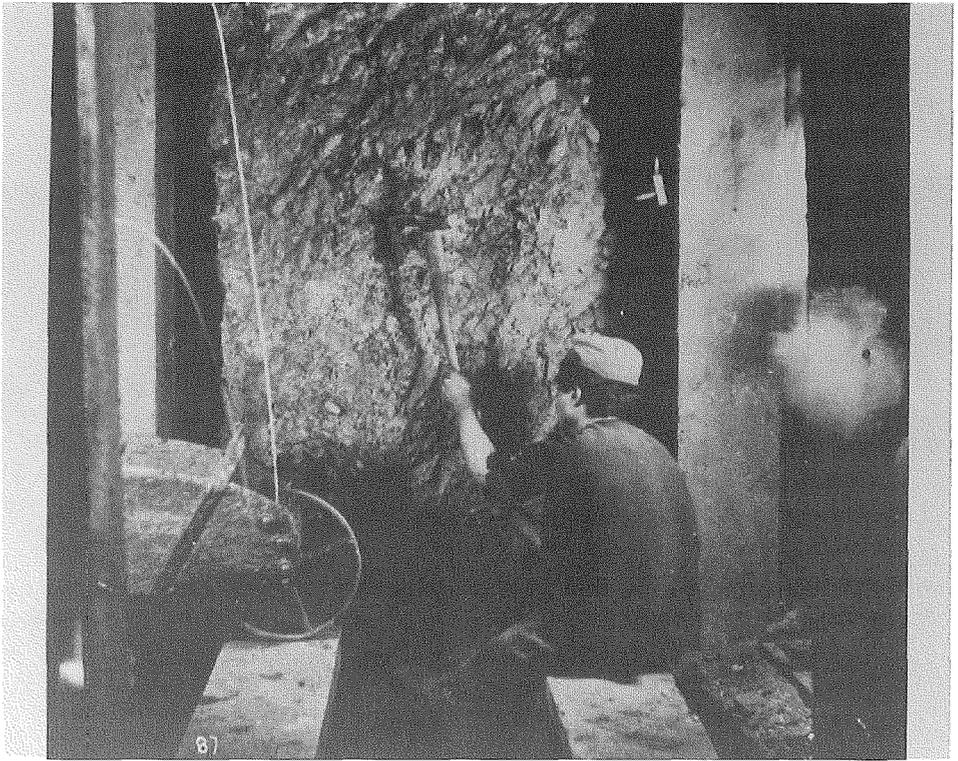
The tremendous expense and difficulty of exploring at depth and the failure to find paying ore bodies finally took its toll, and the great shafts shut down their deep operations one by one. The story of these closures is told by Grant Smith:

\$40,000,000 had been expended in ten years that did not pay a dollar in dividends. The prices of stocks had declined until quotations meant little or nothing, and many stockholders were allowing their shares to be sold for the amount of an assessment.

Deep mining ceased first in the Gold Hill section in March, 1882, when the New Yellow Jacket was shut down after Mackay had failed to induce the adjoining and connecting mines to bear a share of the pumping expense. . . . He may have thought the mine had not been fully explored on the 3,000 foot level and those above. To sink the shaft deeper, with water spouting from the drill holes at 170° would have been next to impossible.

The North End mines (Con. Virginia, California, Ophir, Mexican, Union, and Sierra Nevada) were the next to stop pumping—at the end of 1884. After the lode proved barren to the 2,500 foot level of that group, all development work was done in the shattered hanging-wall country. . . . All of that eastern hanging-wall country was gridironed with workings from the 2,500 to the 3,100 foot levels without finding a ton of payable ore.

Only the middle mines then continued pumping. . . . The great Combination shaft intersected the Comstock Lode at the depth of 3,000 feet and entered a body of low-grade quartz on the 3,200-foot level which proved to be of no value. The shaft was then sunk to



“The Honest Miner” by Timothy O’Sullivan, 1870. A miner working in a square set stope of the Savage Mine. (Courtesy, The Bancroft Library)

the 3,250 foot point. The double line of Cornish pumps was unable to handle the water when the shaft began to make connections with the adjoining mines, and Superintendent Requa installed a hydraulic pump to assist, using water furnished by the Water Company as a plunger. Later, two additional hydraulic pumps were installed. The pumps were then lifting 5,200,000 gallons every 24 hours, or 3,600 gallons per minute. On October 16, 1886, the Combination pumps ceased to operate . . . and within 36 hours the water had risen to the 2,400 foot level, flooding the entire workings of the Chollar Potosi, Hale & Norcross, and Savage mines.<sup>14</sup>

Thus ended the most dramatic period of the Comstock’s history. Great things had been accomplished, and great and expensive failures had followed. The bonanza millionaires who had backed the deep-mining ventures vacated the scene and invested their money elsewhere. People left Virginia City and Gold Hill in droves, and the camp settled down, a shadow of its former self, to the reworking of lower-grade ores that lay nearer the surface and had been bypassed by the old-timers in their frantic search for the next bonanza.

And yet, even after all work in the depths had ceased, there were reminders of what once had been. Years later, on cold clear winter mornings, clouds of steam

could be seen pluming upward from the up-cast Combination and Ophir shafts, a reminder that miles of workings were still miraculously open, but devoid of life, except for the spirits of the men who had toiled there.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. H. Campbell, letter to the editor on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Comstock Lode, *Mining and Scientific Press*, 16 October 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Savage Mining Company, Annual Report, July 1886.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Moore and George W. Dickie, *Pumping and Hoisting Works for Gold and Silver Mines* (private printing, Risdon Iron Works, July 1877), 10.

<sup>4</sup>Grant H. Smith, *The History of the Comstock Lode 1850–1920*, University of Nevada Geology and Mines, Series, no. 37 (July 1, 1943), 87.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>6</sup>*Territorial Enterprise*, 31 January 1880.

<sup>7</sup>*Mining and Scientific Press*, 9 August 1879.

<sup>8</sup>Leon M. Hall, "Comstock Drainage Problems," *Mining and Scientific Press*, 3 July 1909, p. 28; Moore and Dickie, *Pumping and Hoisting Works*, 42–43.

<sup>9</sup>Moore and Dickie, *Pumping and Hoisting Works*, 41–42.

<sup>10</sup>Hall, "Comstock Drainage Problems," p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, *History*, 281.

<sup>12</sup>For detailed descriptions of the Yellow Jacket and Union pumping and hoisting works see *Mining and Scientific Press*, 2 March 1878, 13 September 1879, 17 July 1880; *Territorial Enterprise*, 3 January, 27 February, 28 July, 16 December 1879.

<sup>13</sup>George F. Becker, *Geology of the Comstock Lode*, Washington, D.C.: U. S. Geological Survey, 1882, 3.

<sup>14</sup>Smith, *History*, 270–75.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Nevada Politics and Government: Conservatism in an Open Society.* By Don W. Driggs and Leonard E. Goodall. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. xxviii + 236 pp., index, notes, tables, and maps, suggestions for further reading, series introduction, authors' preface.)

*The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics.* By Michael W. Bowers. (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1996. x + 229 pp., index, appendix, notes, selected bibliography, preface.)

By coincidence two major books that study the structure of Nevada government and politics have recently been published. Don W. Driggs and Leonard E. Goodall wrote their book *Nevada Politics and Government: Conservatism in an Open Society* as part of a series, "Politics and Governments of the American States." This series, published by the University of Nebraska Press, will cover all fifty states. Driggs taught in the Political Science Department of the University of Nevada, Reno, and, in his words, after "thirty-nine years of observing, teaching, and participating in Nevada Politics" (p. xxvii), put many of his observations down on paper. His co-author, Leonard Goodall, a former president of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, adds perspective from the standpoint of southern Nevada. The other recent book is by Michael Bowers: *The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics*. Bowers is professor of political science and associate dean of the College of Arts and Letters at University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Ostensibly the two books do much the same thing. They both discuss, briefly, the history of Nevada; both have informative chapters on the legislature, the executive branch of government, and the judiciary. Both deal with taxation and finance, local government, political parties, elections, and lobbying. Although both attempt a type of comprehensiveness, the Driggs-Goodall volume is more sweeping in its coverage. It simply provides more information, and the tables are particularly valuable. Its authors have the material well in hand, and they *know* the system. By contrast, the Bowers book reproduces the Nevada Constitution, which will be particularly useful for University classes that, for example, help meet the legislative requirement that graduates of all public and private universities in the state pass a test on the Nevada Constitution.

The crucial distinction between the two books, however, lies more in how they

interpret the same material, and in the differences in their respective viewpoints and interpretations. The authors have quite dissimilar things to say about the Nevada experience, about where the state has been and where it appears to be going.

Driggs and Goodall follow an interpretive construct suggested by Daniel J. Elazar, political scientist and editor of the series. Elazar argues, in his introduction, that Nevada is representative of an individualistic political culture, where government "is instituted for strictly utilitarian reasons," and where political culture "is based on a system of mutual obligations rooted in personal relationships." Nevada, in his words, "is an individualistic state par excellence" (pp. xxi–xxii, xxv). The chief thesis of the Driggs-Goodall volume is that this "highly individualistic political culture of Nevada has produced a conservative political philosophy in an open society" (p. 195)—a theme reiterated constantly throughout the book and reflected in its subtitle. The authors are not, in the main, critical of this aspect of the state government. They begin with a fundamental love for Nevada, a state which "contains some of the most spectacular scenery and man-made wonders in the world—from beautiful Lake Tahoe and the snow-capped Sierra Nevada and Ruby Mountains in the north to the brilliant red sandstone of the Valley of Fire, Hoover Dam, and Lake Mead in the south" (p. 3). Both Driggs and Goodall had extensive enough experience with the workings of Nevada government that they can write from the perspective of political insiders: knowledgeable, and generally supportive of whatever it is they discuss.

When it comes to particulars, Driggs-Goodall tend to downplay the importance of gaming to the running of the state, but do point out that Nevada's regulation of gambling "is looked upon as a model by other states." Especially commended are such leading Nevada figures as the late state Senator Jim Gibson, praised for his "valuable leadership"; Assembly Speaker Joe Dini—"the most respected speaker in the state's history"; John Mueller, "respected for his integrity"; and lobbyist Jim Joyce—an individual of the highest "integrity and . . . concerned with the best interests of the state as a whole." Tied in with their thesis that Nevada is an open, "friendly" society are picturesque stories of Governor Bob Miller participating in charity basketball games and former Governor Mike O'Callaghan insisting on throwing out the first ball in Little League baseball games (p. 91). The Driggs-Goodall volume ends with a powerful argument against passage of term limits for Nevada's legislators, as this would end the major, positive contribution that senior legislators can provide to the state. They seem to be suggesting that Nevada's political structure and system are open and beneficent, and if citizens will act according to their civic responsibility and get involved in the process, mistakes will be remedied.

Bowers is by no means as sanguine about where the state has been, and the direction in which it is going. His historical examples tend to be much more negative. In writing of the years 1860 to 1900, for example, dominated as they were by mining and railroad interests, he cannot resist observing that the period

was characterized by "greed, avarice, and unbridled entrepreneurship" (p. 107). Much more recently, his concern is whether, in light of the proven skimming and linkage of major hotels with organized crime until well into the 1980s, the state's much-vaunted regulatory mechanism for gambling has always worked. In his view, gaming is clearly "the biggest winner" in legislative lobbying, and it has an "influence beyond that of other groups" (p. 55). For the future, in Bower's view, Nevada must come to terms with the crisis in its prison system, the "lamentable" state of its social services, and outsiders, attempts at colonization and exploitation. And he adds, rather heretically, "we must ask ourselves if a gaming-based economy is what we truly want" (p. 120), an important question, although arguably rather futile.

The two visions of Nevada are quite different. One problem with the Driggs-Goodall portrayal is that it seems to operate a bit in a time warp—the open, friendly approach to politics certainly explains a lot about the state when it had only 110,000 people, as recently as 1940. But now, with a population of 1,500,000 and growing rapidly, with giant national corporations dominating its chief industry, and with its chief financial institutions controlled from outside, the openness of Nevada's society might be more appearance than reality, or at least might not explain as much as Driggs-Goodall would like it to. Perhaps Elazar's construct is less meaningful for today than it was for the past. Bowers is less informative about Nevada's government, but his intent is more hortatory in nature, and he does zero in on many important issues that the state faces in its future.

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*David J. Brewer: The Life of a Supreme Court Justice, 1837–1910.* By Michael J. Brodhead. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994. 278 pp., introduction, appendix, notes, bibliography, index.)

In *The Iron Horse and the Constitution*, his landmark work on railroad litigation and substantive due process, University of Arizona political scientist and constitutional scholar Richard C. Cortner described David J. Brewer as "a staunch conservative activist, deeply imbued with laissez-faire convictions regarding the proper relationship between government and economic affairs" (p. 61). Yale law professor Owen Fiss, in his biography of Brewer in Kermit L. Hall's *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*, characterized the justice as one whose "overriding purpose was to affirm the idea of limited state interference with the economy" (p. 89).

The United States Supreme Court under Chief Justice Melville F. Fuller, on

which Brewer served, has most commonly been described in similar terms as an activist one that ignored precedent and frequently went out of its way to strike down government-imposed labor and industrial regulation in order to enact as constitutional law its own laissez-faire and social Darwinist theories. This characterization of the Fuller Court, often referred to as the Holmesian paradigm, is recurrently illustrated by the case of *Lochner v. New York* (1905), in which the Court declared unconstitutional a state statute regulating the working hours of bakers in New York, a case in which Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., dissented, accusing his colleagues of ignoring the Constitution in order to impose their own economic and social theories upon the nation.

In recent years, however, the Holmesian paradigm has come under attack from revisionist historians, political scientists, and legal scholars. These scholars, including Howard Gillman (*The Constitution Besieged: The Rise and Demise of Lochner Era Police Powers Jurisprudence* (1993)), James W. Ely, Jr. (*The Chief Justiceship of Melville W. Fuller, 1888–1910* (1995)), and Owen Fiss (*History of the Supreme Court of the United States: Troubled Beginnings of the Modern State, 1888–1910* (1993)) have argued that the decisions of the Fuller Court were merely continuations of constitutional precedent established by the Supreme Court as early as the 1820s and 1830s, rather than a new jurisprudence based solely on the justices' prejudices and favoritism toward capital.

It is into this roiling fray that Michael J. Brodhead (emeritus professor of history at the University of Nevada, Reno) jumps with his biography of Justice David J. Brewer. That the work has been published at this point in the historical debate makes it extremely timely; that it is so thoroughly documented and well written makes it a must read for any scholar or layperson interested in Brewer, the Fuller Court, or the Supreme Court in general. Oddly, it is the first full-length biography of a man described by many as one of the intellectual leaders of the Court during this period.

Relying on extensive primary and secondary sources, Brodhead devotes the first half of this volume to the early life of Brewer and the various forces that shaped him. Among those forces, the most important seem to be his father, a New England missionary to Asia, from whom he got his compassion for the down-trodden and for Asian immigrants and his opposition to slavery; his mother, the sister of Stephen J. Field, who himself sat on the Supreme Court with Brewer; and his life in Kansas, where he served as county probate judge, school superintendent, state district court judge, district attorney, state supreme court justice, and judge on the United States Eighth Circuit Court. These influences created in Brewer a unique personality that led him to support universal education, endorse hard work and industry, work for many charitable causes, and mete out the harshest of punishments to lawbreakers.

In his various judicial positions and many off-the-bench speeches, Brewer exhibited the same traits for which he would come to be known during his time on the United States Supreme Court, from 1890 until his death in 1910. Although he

opposed slavery, Brewer was no modern-day liberal; he held in favor of segregated railroad cars and schools, and upheld the right of the state bar to exclude women. Yet, in late nineteenth-century terms, he was enlightened enough to rule in favor of the rights of Asian immigrants, the property rights of American Indians, the right of a woman to hold office even though she could not legally vote, and the right of a Kansas man to vote in spite of the fact that he was one-quarter black and the state allowed only whites the right of suffrage.

It is, of course, in the area of industrial-labor issues that Brewer and the Fuller Court have come under the most attack. In general, it can be said that Brewer was opposed to unions and to laws that helped working people, such as maximum-hours and minimum-wage legislation, and he favored the rights of corporations. To the extent that this was so, Brodhead argues it was merely a strand in Brewer's over-all philosophy, a philosophy that feared centralized governmental power and reveled in individual liberty. The rights of property owners, to Brewer, were the quintessence of that liberty, and he sought to protect those rights at every turn. Even here, however, the record is mixed. Brewer often held against railroads in favor of government regulation, and he wrote the majority opinion in *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), which upheld a maximum-hours law for women. And his antipathy to centralized power included not only big labor and big government: In his public speeches he often warned of the irresponsibility of big business.

In short, Brodhead presents us with a man who, far from the black-and-white portrait we have been led to see, was, in fact an individual of many colors and complexities. For that, we should all be grateful to the author. To the extent that this reviewer has any criticisms, they are minor. First, the work would have been improved had the publisher included pictures of Brewer, his family, and the Kansas towns in which he was shaped. And, second, the use of *orientals* rather than the more modern *Asians* to describe Japanese and Chinese immigrants seems outdated. Nonetheless, this is a pathbreaking work that should be read by those interested in the current debate over the Fuller Court.

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*Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840–1849.* Edited and compiled by Kenneth L. Holmes, with an introduction by Anne M. Butler. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books Edition, 1995. 280 pp., index.)

Despite hands "so numb I can scarcely write," Elizabeth Dixon Smith completed her daily diary entry on November 8, 1847, while "lying at anchor" on a

raft on the Columbia River with her husband and eight children "waiting for the wind to fall" (p. 141). The determination of Smith and others to record their overland experiences for the benefit of family and friends resulted in a valuable but long-neglected resource for understanding the changes occurring in the West in the decade of the 1840s.

In 1983, when the Arthur H. Clark Company first published this volume of *Covered Wagon Women*, historians of the West were only belatedly acknowledging the presence and role of women in the region. This collection, the first in a projected eleven-volume series, was welcomed as a contribution to the efforts to encourage a reconsideration of the single-gender image of the American West.

For this book, editor Kenneth L. Holmes selected thirteen "unpublished manuscripts or rare printed journals" that recorded experiences of Anglo-European women on the overland trails (p. 12). The accounts were transcribed as faithfully as possible either from the original or from the most reliable extant version; distracting brackets are deliberately rare. Notes offer helpful explanatory material, and Holmes's thoroughly researched introductions to the selections provide documentation relating to each woman's life before and after the trail.

The women whose writings are included were a relatively homogeneous group: All were Anglo-European, and all but two were wives or widows and mothers. They ranged in age from thirteen to sixty-six years. The majority—seven—travelled to Oregon; five were California-bound; and one set out for Utah. With the obvious exceptions of Tamsen Donner and Virginia Reed, their travel experiences were more similar than dissimilar, and the struggle along the trail was succeeded by the struggle to prosper in a new environment. The diary selections powerfully present the hardships of travel, while the letters and reminiscences, written after intervals of several months or more, gloss over the difficulties of the trail and focus hopefully if not optimistically on the new life. Wrote Rachel Fisher, who lost both her husband and her only surviving child on the trail, "I cannot say much whether I like [Oregon] or not . . . perhaps when I see more of it I will be better pleased" (p. 108).

Historians of the West have begun of late to develop a more inclusive version of western history, one that is not only gendered, but multicultural as well. Is there any value, then, in a collection of the writings of this largely homogeneous group of women? In an introduction to this edition, which summarizes the recent scholarship and provides historical context for the selections, Anne M. Butler argues in the affirmative: "These few women enlarge the layered context of a history that seeks to encompass the many aspects of race, class, and gender in the American West" (p. 7). Each account reveals different aspects of the female emigration experience. The experiences of teenagers Sallie Hester and Virginia Reed differ as greatly from each other as from those of sixty-six-year-old Tabitha Brown. Despite their superficial sameness, these women form a part of the diversity of the West without which our vision is necessarily incomplete. Each faced unique challenges, and each fashioned her own response. Reluctant or resigned

travellers though they might have been, all were “fully engaged participants in the shaping of American history” (p. 7).

The editors of Bison Books have added the map and volume index, lacking in the first edition, and Butler’s excellent introduction answers the earlier criticism that the book lacked historical context and the perspective of current scholarship. Other criticisms of the reliability of the transcripts and choice of material remain valid but should not be permitted to detract from the value of making widely available in paperback these accounts that illuminate one aspect of the female experience in the West.

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*The Mountainous West—Explorations in Historical Geography*. Edited by William K. Wyckoff and Larry M. Dilsaver. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. vii+ 420 pp., illustrations, maps, photographs.)

Every historian of the American West, whether aficionado or academic, has read Bernard DeVoto, and more than a few reckon it is the sage from Salt Lake who stands as the intellectual progenitor of many of the historians of the New West—Patricia Limerick, Bill Cronon, Richard White, Donald Worster. DeVoto was an historian’s historian, a past master of narrative technique and developer of an impassioned authorial voice long before the present postmodern turn to invest “narrative” with transcendent meaning. Not only did DeVoto tutor Wallace Stegner—the patron saint of modern-day thinking environmentalism—Bernard DeVoto became the West’s ultimate public intellectual (his vessel was “The Easy Chair” column in *Harper’s*). DeVoto brought to the scene the like of Tom Watkins (later editor of *The American West and Wilderness*), and inspired clever historian-jurist-professor-activist-authors like Charles Wilkinson, of the University of Colorado, Boulder. Finally, though, it was Bernard DeVoto’s capacious (and on occasion explosively eloquent) resistance to the West’s manifold despoilers—active and aspiring—which proved that fighting greed could pay off. His was populism with both personality and a regional message.

Not surprising, DeVoto has been no less beloved to historical geographers, who lavish a kind of fervent praise on his surpassing sense of the West as a place with regional and thematic distinctiveness born of its polyglot occupiers, its singular cultural enclaves, its past and present as a site of resource exploitation, and a characteristically citified life. A few will cavil about calling the West a region; there is afoot an unusual degree of self-immolation among some of the West’s current crop of historians, with their questioning of what DeVoto knew to be fact:

The West might be one piece of the United States fabric, a slight glimmer in the global whole, but the West has its own realities—arid environments, bold mountains, dry-land farming, irrigated fields, extensive ranching, seasonal sheep drives, huge corporate mining, company timber towns, great oasis cities, treacherous topography and torrid tourism, federal land control, distinctive ethnic diversity, and persistence of each through to the present. These are among the familiar quotidian realities that geographers and historians alike are pretty likely to point to when they outline the West as a region for a survey class. The “rest of the story,” as Paul Harvey would say, lies in explaining just how these phenomena came to be, what they mean, and what they portend for the future. Here we earn our keep.

Bernard DeVoto's work, like that of few other authors, bridges the geography and history of the American West. Now, in *The Mountainous West*, he has company. It's a special treat to have a new book that collects arguments from diverse scholars—mostly geographers with extensive experience in the American West—and binds them together with an especially effective and tenacious glue. DeVoto would relish the spicy flavor, look, and texture; maybe it's most like tuna sushi, wrapped in a cone of toasted seaweed with rice, sporting a kamikazi-hot sauce buried in the interstices. This is a volume as exciting for the eyes and imagination as it is for its prose. A sizable degree of praise is owed, in this case, to the two editors, who have obviously done a great deal of sculpting and created an unusual degree of synthesis to bring these fourteen essays into a consistent and tight focus. As a text, this is maybe not the perfect book to use as a sole source for a western history course—but it is just the book to use along with a more standard text (Richard White's *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own* comes readily to mind). *The Mountainous West* will yield endless discussion. For that matter, this is hardly something to be reserved for a class; what editors Wyckoff and Dilsaver have produced is a delectably cogent treatment of the West—as region, as problematic, as a place to study process, as a mappable entity, for its collection of singularities and similarities to other parts of the national scene, all of which makes the West our shiniest mirror for self-examination. *The Mountainous West* may lack the visionary range and epic sweep of Donald Meinig's *Shaping of America* series, and not quite match up to some of the wonderfully geographical treatises on western affairs by the like of Terry Jordan, Wesley Calef, Pete Shortridge, Will Graf, and John B. Wright, or even for that matter some of the books penned earlier by contributors to this volume, but this is a well-collected body of work that resonates with authority, readability, and thoughtfulness.

When not so many years ago I was a callow graduate student at Berkeley interested in the notable geography of the American West, I remember wondering time and again why it was that there was no single volume that tied together the West as a place (aside from some soppy literary collections). The familiar histories (with a couple of memorable exceptions) were so . . . monographic, and that was not necessarily a compliment; there was definitely no tour-de-force collection

designed to spur thought, and despite a few efforts launched and sunk, I'd probably have to argue that there has really been none to date. So into this breach has stepped an accomplished pair of historical geographers committing an act of bravado by piecing together, as editors, a top-flight collection of new essays on the American West.

What certainly inspires me, and ought to any reader, is the usability and broad-scale applicability of *The Mountainous West*. A case in point is Figure 1.7, a map crafted by the editors showing "A Settlement Model of the American West" and itself worth the price of this book. That schematic map, thrown onto a screen, would provide the catalyst for a perfect Ph.D. orals question; it casts into relief features of the West and a progression of changes that have eluded the understanding of doctoral students for decades.

The nearly sixty-page introduction by Wyckoff and Dilsaver sets the terms and challenges. There is, then, a following essay by John L. Allen, "Maps and the Mountain Men," a firmest kind of reminder of what the trappers knew, how they learned it from American Indians, and how real geographical knowledge born of cartographic field surveys came to replace folkloric speculation and specious anecdotal history. Historical biogeographer Tom Vale writes of "Mountains and Moisture in the West," which is not about water, but about what water means in the American West (two very different themes). For resources, there is Randall Rohe on mining, Victor Conrad on the homestead, the superlative Michael Williams (of *Americans and Their Forests*) on "The Last Lumber Frontier?" Richard H. Jackson treats federal lands, but then Larry Dilsaver writes of "Resource Conflicts in the High Sierra."

Most of the authors in this collection have several books to their credit and bring that depth of understanding to their chapters. Within *The Mountainous West* are discrete, complete, effective, and evocative chapters that speak to each author's specialties without droning on—quite the opposite, actually. Some of these chapters could count as the sublime encapsulations readers happen upon occasionally, in which a generally much longer argument is reasoned and defended tautly and truly in the smaller space at hand. These are chapters that rarely drag. In fact, one main entertainment while reading is in setting the book down and trying to come up with contrafactual arguments to some of the statements that are advanced, or producing different locales where conclusions might break down. There are not a lot to be had.

The central fact in this book is the mountains of the West—not valleys, or lowlands, but the places of relief. There are moments when this seems to promise an historical geography that might take on some of the physiographic trappings of Frederick Merk's posthumous *History of the American West*, but at no point does *The Mountainous West* stumble into mechanistic explanations, or the trappings of technological or environmental determinisms. What the book shares with Merk's work is a precise sensitivity to the physical facts of the West—the disjunct patterns of travel, the isolated patches of people, ecological crises, the possibilities of

diversity and how those have made the West no monolithic place but a *compagne* of colluding and conflicting communities. And for the editors and many of the other contributing authors, the West of mountains contrasts handsomely with "the dust bowls, irrigation canals; and parched cattle skulls of the other [the Arid] American West" (p. 1). So Mountain and Arid West are distinguished, one from the other, but with complementarity.

Five basic themes are picked out, and most of the chapters are fitted into the matrix. The themes analyze the montane West as a place of barriers, islands of moisture, zones of concentrated resources, areas of government control, and, since the arrival of Euro-Americans, as a place that has served as a restorative sanctuary. "We agree that the West is indeed an aggregate of distinctive subregions, and we further submit that that Mountainous West is precisely one of those different kinds of places that, through a combination of environment and history, emerges as something clearly unique. As the five themes of the mountainous west suggest, whenever those characteristics converge, there is a common story to be told. Disparate western localities share the complexities of the Mountainous West" (p. 7).

Four final case studies look at the interactions between mountains and the valleys below, and these essays on the Owens Valley, Lake Tahoe, the San Luis Valley of Colorado, and the mountains of Mormon Utah are apt enough, although none has the snap and vigor of the earlier chapters. Further, here the writing quality varies considerably. Perhaps being drawn into geography as a high school student by reading John McPhee's just-published *Basin and Range*, with its perfect mantra "Basin and range, basin and range, a mile of height between basin and range," led me to anticipate greater verve in writing about the West's worlds. It is, somewhat odd in a geographical volume, the thematic chapters and not the regional essays that are the most moving and meaningful. Plus, there are some real laughers; in Jeanne Kay's chapter on "Mormons and Mountains," photograph 14.3 purports to show "Sheep Shearing Camp in the Mountains, 1876," with a caption that editorializes, "Note the extensive evidence of overgrazing." The problem is, what's shown isn't a grazing ground, it is a sheep bed-ground, and in the background of the photograph are sheep-shearers sitting on stacked woolsacks. Decrying overgrazing in a sacrifice area like a mountain shearing ground is intellectually on a par with abominating a parking lot in Las Vegas because it lacks a nice sward of rye grass growing on it; the fact is, it's just not supposed to be there. Some of the authors are clearly more comfortable with their material than others.

Finally, a word from the heart. This is the sort of volume I would immediately hand a scholar from a foreign land who wanted a clear, concise, and yet wide-ranging study of the American West's lands and problems and possibilities. There's no shirking of responsibility: The age old debates of Pinchot versus Muir, of federal versus state control of land, of ecological despoliation versus the never-again-to-be-attained "pristine," of the Indian West versus the West that was taken

in a massive imperial occupation, of the urban West as opposed to the rural West, are all here. But the oppositions are never left as simple binaries. Always, the authors are careful to point out the gradations that make the problems and contradictions of the West so noisome even to those of us who love the idea of the place. Each chapter offers sights, delights, and challenges. Nevadans would do well to notice—this is a book that goes a long way toward explaining what we hath wrought, although it cannot always say why.

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