
Bodie's Bones

Many of the early mining camps, built of wood, had their great fires: Virginia City in 1875, Deadwood in 1879, Tombstone in 1882, Cripple Creek in 1896, and Victor, Dawson, and Jerome in 1899, a bad year for fires. After they had been burned out once or twice, town elders usually mandated reconstruction of central business districts in brick. While that increased a town's prospects of survival, it obscured its architectural origins.

Bodie, California, however, never had its all-consuming fire, thus much of its original built en-

vironment survives. Located at 8,397 feet on the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada, ten miles north of Mono Lake and eight miles west of the California-Nevada state line, the district was named for William S. Bodey, one of a party of prospectors that discovered gold in the area in 1859. Development languished until 1876, when the Standard Gold Mining Company discovered significant gold and silver ore at its Bunker Hill Mine.

With that, Bodie's brief boom began. Boosters claimed as many as ten thousand residents in Bodie at its peak in 1879. The U.S. census of 1880



Bodie from its Masonic cemetery, which lies west-southwest of the town. The Standard Mill complex sits in the center of the photograph, about a half a mile away, with numerous mine dumps and structures visible on the hills above it to the east. Bodie's Methodist Church is to the left and its brick Dechambeau Hotel to the right.



The second Standard Mill, a twenty-stamp California mill completed in 1899 to replace a similar plant destroyed by fire the previous year. These Standard mills were unusual in two respects: they were electrically powered and included a cyanide circuit housed in a separate building to the left (since destroyed) to reprocess the company's tailings.

recorded 2,712. The town's population continued to decline thereafter, with a Sanborn Map of November 1890 indicating only 450 residents. The cyanide milling process introduced in the 1890s produced a small revival, with the U.S. census of 1900 showing 965 people in Bodie.

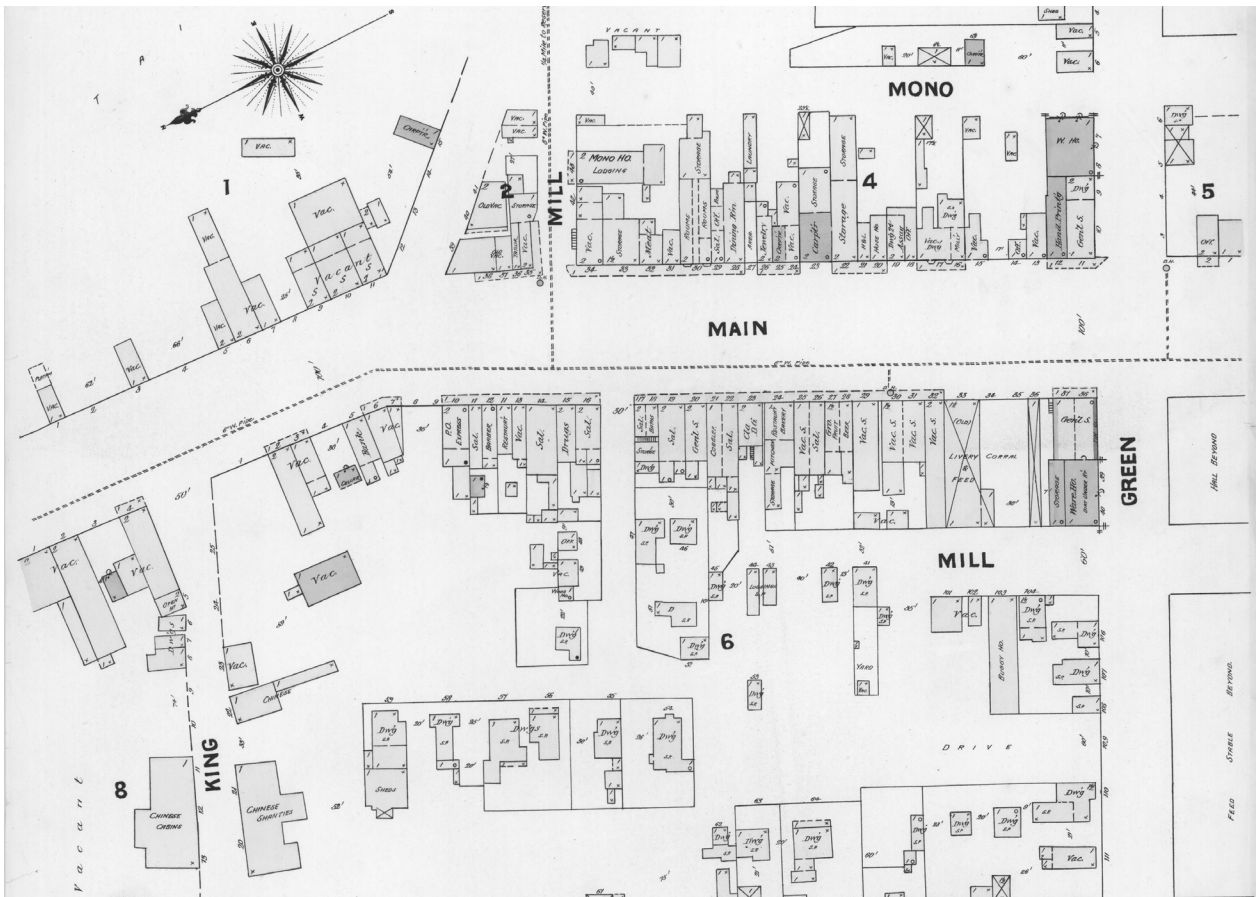
Bodie's dominant feature extant, the 50 TPD Standard Mill is in most respects a typical California mill. Ore was introduced at the upper level, sized over grizzlies and through a Blake jaw crusher, crushed by twenty stamps arrayed in four batteries, with amalgamating tables and vanners used to recover free gold and concentrates, respectively. With fuel and water expensive and scarce in treeless, arid Bodie, in 1893 the company converted the first mill from steam power by constructing a hydroelectric plant on Green Creek a dozen miles away, undertaking perhaps the earliest industrial application of electricity in California.

In 1894 Standard erected a 100 TPD cyanide mill to reprocess tailings previously stored in settling ponds. In 1904 the company installed four Frenier pumps in the stamp mill to lift sixty tons of pulp a day sixty-three feet to a flume that carried it directly to the cyanide plant, eliminating the need for further storage. Three other companies also operated cyanide plants in the district in the 1890s.

With its mine and stored tailings exhausted, the Standard company ceased operating in 1913 after producing \$16 million in gold and silver. In 1915 the company sold its Bodie properties, which were worked fitfully by others for the next generation. Bodie's population of 698 in 1910 dwindled to 110 in 1920. There, roughly, it remained until the War Production Board's Order L-208 suspended gold mining nationally in 1942, with Bodie abandoned shortly thereafter. The dis-



Left: Freemason William Hick, buried many miles from his native Cornwall, was also a member of the Ancient Order of United Workmen, one of the earliest of the fraternal insurance societies that flourished in the era before corporate or government benefits systems. Right: One of the pieces of mining debris scattered about Bodie, this flywheel is approximately ten feet in diameter.



Detail from a Sanborn Map of 1890 showing Bodie's business district. All but eleven of these buildings were made of wood and a fire would consume many of those along Main Street in July 1892. With the boom by then a decade past, many buildings are marked as vacant on the map. The remnant of Bodie's once-substantial Chinese quarter lies along King Street at the lower left.



Businesses along Main Street included, at left, the Dechambeau Hotel, one of the few masonry structures ever built in the town, and, two buildings to the right, the braced former miners' union hall that now doubles as the park's gift shop.

trict's total output from 1876 to 1941 is estimated as \$70 million.

Main Street suffered serious fires in 1892 and 1932 and the Standard's cyanide plant burned down in 1954, but the district's isolation and harsh climate helped protect the rest of Bodie's bones from the souvenir hunters who dismembered many former mining towns during the twentieth century. In 1961 the U.S. secretary of the interior designated Bodie a National Historic Landmark District. The following year the State of California acquired Bodie and established it as a California State Historic Park. The district's 110 remaining buildings (of about 250) are maintained and interpreted in a state of arrested decay.

Fredric L. Quivik, "Gold and Tailings: The Standard Mill at Bodie, California," *Journal of the Society for Industrial Archaeology* 29, no. 2 (2003): 5-27.

Sanborn map from the Library of Congress; editor's photos.

U.S. Census, 1880, Population by Civil Division less than County, California, 111; 1910, Population by Minor Civil Division, California, 147; 1940, Population by Minor Civil Division, California, 124.

U.S. National Park Service, "Bodie Historic District," [nps.gov/places/bodie-historic-district.htm].