

The Mining History Association: Some Thoughts on Future Meetings

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Who are we? What brings the 318 members of the Mining History Association together each year? Among the endless variety of interest groups in America today, I like to think of mining historians as a peculiar breed. We're somewhat akin to old-fashioned prospectors, looking for a historical "strike" among the raw material and artifacts of the past. But not all of us are historians, nor do historians have any special claim on mining's heritage.

Mining history belongs to anyone interested in the past. Our MHA meetings attract a broad representation. We cannot be classified into any single social, ethnic, occupational, or other demographic cohort. We come mostly from the lower forty-eight states, but some of us live overseas. We include a number of industry representatives: active miners and managers; geologists and engineers; technical staff and salesmen. We also have many government representatives: active and retired professionals from the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Mines, the National Park Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy. From the academic world come students, teachers, researchers, and administrators. Then there are those from related fields: museum curators; librarians and archivists; writers, biographers, and genealogists; collectors and dealers. And let's not forget spouses, who make major contributions both to the program and to our general ambience. All of us are looking for gold in one form or another.

What Are Our Interests?

The 2007 membership roster is the latest source of information available about our members' fields of interest. Those fields are multiple, widely diversified, and overlapping. Since most members listed more than one field, let us begin with a rough classification, as follows:

Area history	184
Mining topics, minerals, methods, tools, technology	155
Special topics and related fields	220
No listing	80
Total	639

For a better grasp of member interests we can classify the roughly equal broad categories above into subdivisions with specific areas listed by members (number of members in parentheses):

AREA HISTORY

International (12) – European, British, Cornish, Chilean, Latin American, Mexican, New Zealand and Australia, world

Regions (25) – American West, Rocky Mountain West, Southwest, Pacific Northwest, Tri-State, Lake Superior, Mid-Continent

States (120) – AK, AZ, CA, CO, ID, IL, KS, KY, MI, MN, MO, MT, NM, NV, OR, PA, SD, TX, UT

Counties and districts (10) – Comstock Lode, Red Mountain, Clear Creek, Hinsdale, San Juans)

Active and ghost camps, towns and communities (17) – Butte, Bodie, Tombstone

MINING TOPICS

Exploring and prospecting (9)

Mining methods and types (32) – hard rock, underground, Cornish, placer, dredging, quarrying, trona, brick making, lime making

Base metal mining (27) – industrial miner-

als, copper, lead-zinc-barite, chromite, iron, phosphate

Precious metal mining (17) – gold, silver, platinum

Milling and smelting (16) – coke ovens

Other technology (38) ferro alloys, mining machinery, stamp mills, invention and innovation

Coal mining (14)

Rare minerals (2) – uranium, tungsten

SPECIAL TOPICS and RELATED FIELDS

Historical periods (31) – ancient, westward expansion, gold rush era, Civil War, 19th century, 20th century, post-industrial

Business and industrial history (41) – companies and corporations, mining finance, industrialization and deindustrialization, transportation including railroads, trams

Social history (26) – ethnicity and race, women's history, labor history

Family and personal history (10) – biography, oral history

Related sciences (32) – archaeology, environmental science, geography, geology, metallurgy, mineralogy, surveying and mapping, reclamation

Related social sciences (61) – education; historic preservation of landscapes, artifacts, archives, photos, and ephemera; politics and government; laws and legislation

Related arts (19) – architecture, art, photography, antiques and collecting

Note that the highest listed categories are State Mining (19 percent), and Related Social Sciences (10 percent). Everything else is in single digits. Before discussing the implications of this diversity, an obvious question occurs that relates to the nineteen-year history of the Mining History Association.

Where Have We Been?

Now that we have seen who we are and what our interests are, do those correlate with the places that we have been? If not, can we do a better job of matching people, interests, and meeting places? This is not to suggest or imply anything wrong with what we have done. Indeed, the success of past conferences provides strong evidence that we should not make substantial changes. As the saying goes, "if it ain't broke. . ."

In its nineteen years, the Mining History Association has held annual meetings five times in Colorado (Leadville in 1991 and 2007, Golden in 1994, Ouray in 1999, and Cripple Creek in 2003); twice each in Nevada (Virginia City in 1990 and Tonopah in 2000), Idaho (Boise in 1992 and Wallace in 2002), and Arizona (Bisbee in 1998 and Globe in 2006); and once each in California (Nevada City in 1995), Montana (Butte in 2001), South Dakota (Lead in 1993), and British Columbia (Rossland 1996). The association has also held four meetings outside the West; three times in the Midwest (Houghton, Michigan, in 1997, Farmington, Missouri, in 2004, and Chisholm, Minnesota, in 2007), and once in the East (Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 2005).

Ideally, we might take a utilitarian approach to identifying future locations for MHA conferences. Based on the data above, or perhaps through a more systematic survey of the entire membership, it might be possible to choose sites that would satisfy the greatest number of member interests. But just like picking U.S. presidents, the reality is often different from the ideal.

Pragmatically, we have to meet where we can, meaning places where we have an invitation and a group willing to work with us, and places it is practical for the bulk of our members to reach and to be accommodated. And two other important realities intrude. First, it is obvious that member interests and meeting locations often do not match. Regardless of the location, we must retain a variety of programs to appeal to the diversity of

our membership. Second, many of our members are limited in their ability to travel.

Given our preferences as indicated by past conferences, and considering that the bulk of our members live in the Trans-Mississippi West, our favorite conference locations are in the American West, with a secondary preference for sites elsewhere within the continental United States. We also may occasionally visit southern Canada and northern Mexico. Given the right circumstances, perhaps we could eventually reach into Alaska, central Mexico, and northern Canada. For conferences sponsored solely by the Mining History Association, everywhere else in the mining world clearly seems out of bounds. That does not mean, however, that we could not join with another mining history group someday to co-sponsor an event beyond our normal geographic limits.

Where Are We Going?

This brings us to a final reality. Regardless of where we have been as an organization or want to go in the future, any systematic effort to identify important historic mining sites for future MHA conferences is probably futile. There are too many variables, too many different opinions, and too much history in our collective memory to establish a single list on which all can agree. Everyone, therefore, is free to compile their own wish list of possible meeting places. Mine appears below:

Possibilities for Future MHA Meeting Sites

First Priority: Sites in Lower Forty-eight States not Previously Visited:

Utah: Bingham Canyon, Tintic, Moab, Frisco, Park City, and Camp Floyd.

The Tri-State Lead and Zinc District: southeast Kansas, northeast Oklahoma, and southwest Missouri.

The Upper Mississippi Lead Belt: Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

Western Pennsylvania: the bituminous coal region; the steel industry; the Connellsville coke

region.

The First American Gold Rush: northwest Georgia, northeast Alabama, southwest North Carolina.

Alabama: Birmingham coal and iron.

Montana: Virginia City, Bannack, Helena.

California: the Mother Lode; the Mojave Desert.

Arizona: Prescott, Tombstone, Jerome.

Nevada: Ely and the Carlin Trend.

Colorado: Idaho Springs, Central City, Black Hawk.

Second Priority: Sites beyond the 49th parallel:

Canada: Ontario; Nova Scotia; the Frazier River, British Columbia; Dawson, Yukon Territory.

The Alaskan Peninsula: Juneau, Ketchikan.

Northern and Central Mexico: Zacatecas, San Juan Potosi.

Final Thoughts on Planning MHA Conferences

Work with local historical, benevolent, and promotional organizations. Local groups love to celebrate their local areas. By encouraging co-sponsorships, we can help each other. Sharing resources can increase publicity, encourage greater participation, and boost revenue. Working together also makes possible mutual staffing benefits, including secretarial support, tour guiding, and even meal service.

Schedule MHA programs in conjunction with local historical celebrations or special events.

We should encourage newcomers to see what mining history is all about. Coordinated planning and scheduling with local organizations may help build participation both ways. Adjusting to local time schedules may require widening our own time frame for annual events, but the possibility of broadening our outreach—and of possibly picking up new members—offsets the inconvenience of a schedule change.

Establish a new planning committee. The only way to make real progress in systematic site planning is to organize a new MHA standing committee of members experienced in planning. Its functions would be to identify possible future meeting sites; to identify MHA members, as well as non-member individuals and organizations, that might provide assistance in planning; and to make recommendations to the council and the president. This committee should not itself advance planning beyond the preliminary stages, although a member of the committee might well volunteer to become chair of a conference program or local arrangements committee. This idea needs careful thought before doing anything, but the MHA council will have a plan on the table this year, and I hope will soon adopt it.

Wherever we go, MHA members want reasonable accommodations, historic sites to visit, active mining operations to explore when possible, and diverse and high-quality programs. Considering our mining heritage and spirit of good fellowship, we also need plenty of watering holes. Whether it's blasting caps or beer, remember to "tap 'er light!" ■